Buddhism, Cultural Studies, A Profession of Faith

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

It is not without trepidation that I submit this thesis as 'a profession of faith', since 'faith' is not conventionally adopted as a mode of address or subject (rather than object) of study within the research and pedagogical programmes of the modern secular academy. But as I endeavour to recall and reaffirm in the chapters to follow, how does one find a voice to speak as an 'I' to address 'you', how does one enter into conversation or communion, cultivate spiritual or scholarly friendship or any other relations of reciprocity, if you and I—*we*—are not already given over to and held by one another in (good) faith?

This PhD project could not have been completed without the animating breath of faith, the ebb and flow of which, perhaps, is impossible to pin down in any determinate manner, inasmuch as it invokes the spectral traces of a past haunting the present which arrives by way of a future that we cannot master. It is precisely because the question of faith bespeaks a movement that can only ever be open-ended and ceaseless, that I may responsibly give witness to its solicitation by the voices and faces of un/known others, by their un/expressed pleas for trust, graciousness and acceptance, without whom one would not be able to say 'I'.

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To you, dear friends and lovers of impossible passions, within or outside academia, I dedicate this thesis as an offering of gratitude, and perhaps even something *like* a prayer. Thank you for your patience, understanding, encouragement, intellectual stimulation, spontaneous laughter and fun. Here's to more that may arrive with the unknowable future to come.

As I was writing the final words of this PhD project *here* in these opening pages of the thesis—giving witness at the 'beginning' to the arrival of an 'ending'—there was a fleeting moment when it felt as if I had stepped out of a dense fog, as if I had chanced upon a sudden clearing opening out to the freshness of the morning air: like a deep breath upon awakening. But I cannot pretend that the completion of this thesis isn't also tinged with a hue of melancholy. An air of mourning pervades this profession; and in truth, I cannot honestly say if there was ever a moment during the course of this PhD project, or if there will ever come in the future, of a moment, 'now', that would be unaccompanied by this impenetrable, deep, solemn but affirmative silence, which appears to have always and already arrived at all beginnings to await the arrival of every ending. This unseeable silence is impossible not to notice in its glaring absence; it is impossible not to feel it as a spectral presence haunting the present—like a spirit in passing or the whispering of a ghostly breath caressing the nape of the neck. This noble silence, this mournful, hopeful silence, ever hopeful in its mournfulness, resounds most loudly today in the pronouncement, 'death', embracing this very life as a seeming void or emptiness immanent to every re/birthing-dying action of body, thought, and speech.

On 29 September 2013, founder and head-teacher of the Vipassana movement S.N. Goenka passed away at the age of 90. Whilst I never got to meet you in person, nor have I followed exclusively the parameters you set for meditation practice, the three ten-day courses I attended and the other shorter/partial ones I volunteered at or sat in under your tele-mediated guidance, have had a profound and lasting impact on me. You were my first formal teacher of the Dhamma and it was at my first Vipassana course that the topic of meditation/spirituality for this thesis bubbled to the surface

of consciousness. I am eternally grateful for your lifelong devotion to sharing the Dhamma. In your memory, I open this thesis with two pieces of advice recorded and relayed at Vipassana courses, by your non-present-yet-immediate baritone voice, to students as they gather daily in the meditation hall in silent communion. I hope I have been able to honour your advice by breathing them into, not so much this thesis's arguments or propositions, but its declarative pledge of commitment that promises as it professes, a profession of faith in the names of 'Buddhism' and 'cultural studies'.

'*Aniccā vata sankhāra*'

(Impermanent are all conditioned phenomena)

'Start again'

Abstract

This thesis explores the micropolitics of Buddhist spirituality with the question: 'How might meditation practice enhance the ethical and political capacities of a Buddhist art of living?' It elucidates the ways in which the vissicitudes and mutualising dynamics of embodied sensibilities, ethical adjustments in conduct, and performative faith may breathe life into the hopes and aspirations of a person's existential orientation, irrespective of whether it tends towards immanence or transcendence. As a tactical move to redress unacknowledged secularist, intellectual conceits that may have dismissed questions about religion, spirituality, and faith as irrelevant to cultural studies research, the thesis partially experiments with autoethnographic analyses of the authoring-I's experience as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, an aspiring academic who is investigating the politics of spirituality with the coterminous pursuits of Buddhism and cultural research.

The case for 'spiritually engaged' research will be developed from the basis of a deconstructive ethical impulse that already pulsates through cultural studies' critico-political commitments. A methodological framework drawn from an emergent discourse called Buddhist critical-constructive reflection will organise the thesis's cross-readings of Buddhist sacred understandings and poststructuralist-inflected cultural theory. This sacred-scholarly project argues for the importance of *intellectual hospitality*, and the productiveness of a neglected subtextual 'religious question' in the Foucauldian corpus. With a Derridean-Foucauldian analysis of the ethico-political possibilities of Buddhist spirituality, the thesis stages a conversation between an

emergent Buddhist social theory and current thinking on an ontology of becoming, engaging with selected discourses that fall under the rubric of 'affect studies', to explore micropolitical strategies that may harness the force relations acting on and through the visceral registers of experience to countervail the prevailing regimes of power and normative modes of subjectivity securing neoliberal governmentality.

This thesis thus offers a unique twofold contribution to scholarship via *a profession of faith*. Firstly, by critically examining the authoring-I's sacred-scholarly *profession*, it sheds light on relations of knowledge-power governing academia, and also elucidates the role of faith in supporting the open-ended praxis-ideal of unconditionality, shared by Buddhism and the Derridean and Foucauldian ethico-political itineraries. Secondly, it develops a hypothesis that faith be investigated as an affective response (embodied as a sense of trust, conviction, or anticipatory confidence) that is elicited by the incoming of time, the trace movement of temporality and finitude; and by the originary address of the other or promissory, quasi-transcdental condition of trustworthiness anterior to every speech-act. The thesis proposes that faith supports the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers' alike, including those *professing* in the language of academia, the *profession* of the university.

List of publications and note on Buddhist terminology

Early iterations of key arguments in Chapters One, Two, Three, Five, and Seven are presented in the following papers developed during the course of my candidature. I thank everyone who have read or listened to or offered feedback on these writings of a profession-in-the-making. Your intellectual hospitality, good faith, and generosity have enriched this thesis.

Journal articles

Ng, E and Watson, J 2013 (forthcoming), 'A Foucauldian and Deleuzian Reading of Autopoietic Bisexual Lives', *Writing From Below,* available at < http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/wfb/index>.

Ng, E 2012, 'The Autoethnographic Genre and Buddhist Studies: Reflections of a Postcolonial "Western Buddhist" convert', *Australian Religion Studies Review*, vol. 25, no. 2, pp. 163-184.

Ng, E 2012a, 'Buddhism, Poststructuralist Thought, Cultural Studies: A Profession of Faith', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 109-128.

Ng, E 2011, 'Cultural Studies and Matters of Faith: The Case of DhammaWheel.com', *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 247-269.

Ng, E, 2010. The (Zen) Buddhist Heart of I ♥ Huckabees. Journal of Religion and Film, 14 (1), available at <http://www.unomaha.edu/jrf/Vol14no1/huckabees.html>.

Conference papers

3 July 2012, 'Buddhism and deconstruction: a hospitable encounter between ancient and contemporary wisdom', Crossroads in Cultural Studies 2012, Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris.

24 November 2011, 'Buddhism, poststructuralist thought, cultural studies: a profession of faith', Cultural ReOrientations and Comparative Colonialities, International Centre for Muslim and non-Muslim Understanding, University of South Australia.

20 September 2010, 'Cultural studies and matters of faith: the case of DhammaWheel.com', The Next Generation of Cultural Research, Institute for Culture and Society, University of Western Sydney.

26 November 2009, 'The cybersangha and its place in contemporary Buddhist scholarship', Religious Communication Conference, Monash University.

Buddhist terminology

The Buddhist terminology used in this thesis follows the spelling conventions of the Pali language of the canonical discourses upheld in the Theravada tradition, which orientates this authoring-I's formal Buddhist practice. Where it is relevant, I will indicate the Sanskrit renditions of well-known terms, like *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāna*) or *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*). I acknowledge that when Buddhist concepts are rendered in Sanskrit (as they are in the archives of the Mahayana tradition), they may be inflected with subtle nuances in meaning that differ from received interpretations in the Theravada. I have not studied Pali or Sanskrit; my understanding of Buddhist terminology is informed by English translations of Buddhist discourses, and by anecdotal accounts or expositions shared by Buddhist teachers and co-practitioners. I accept full responsibility for whatever mistakes or inaccuracies there may be in my lay interpretations of the etymology of Buddhist terms and my experimental, extrapolative reading of doctrinal concepts.

INTRODUCTION

Is There a 'Postsecular' Horizon of Cultural Studies?

This thesis explores the micropolitics of Buddhist spirituality. It asks the question, 'How might meditation practice enhance the ethical and political capacities of a Buddhist art of living?', in order to investigate how the vissicitudes and mutualising dynamics of embodied sensibilities, ethical decisions, and performative faith, may breathe life into the hopes and aspirations of a person's existential orientation. This question arises out of renewed scholarly and political debates about religion, secularism, and the function of 'spirituality' in contemporary life; this is especially pressing for an emergent 'Western Buddhism' that needs to negotiate the neoliberal governmental logics and capitalist imperatives that target 'spirituality' as both object and objective in the exercise of power. My theoretical and methodological experimentations with *both* sacred and scholarly knowledge-practices perform an epistemic intervention to challenge the criticism that the Buddhist meditative stance encourages a retreat into an Inner Self, and might thus be complicit with individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality in reinforcing regimes of normativity. I develop these questions by staging dialogical exchanges between Buddhist understandings and cultural theory, to elucidate how training in non-grasping awareness and the contemplation of bodily sensation may undercut habitual tendencies of the body-mind and expose it to limit-experiences that may precipitate transformative processes of *un-becoming*—and hence, the potential for defusing congealed relations of power and normative modes of subjectivity.

My research expands on existing scholarship on the affinities between Buddhism and deconstruction, with a re-evaluation of a neglected subtextual 'religious question' in Foucault's itinerary. By identifying a praxis-ideal which I call 'unconditional unconditionality unconditionally' as the nexus between Buddhist teachings, Derridean deconstruction, and Foucauldian critique, the thesis contends that Buddhist meditation functions as a technology of the self for the cultivation of an art of living, a practice of desubjectification for the ongoing, autopoietic work of always becoming otherwise than before—or, unbecoming. This micropolitical analysis of meditation establishes new channels of dialogue between humanities and social sciences research on the affective, visceral registers of experience, and an emergent Buddhist social theory seeking to usher social change from the standpoint of ethics and spiritual self-cultivation.

The importance of this thesis's engagement with Buddhism is in redressing the field of cultural studies and what will be argued are its neglect of questions about religion, spirituality, and faith. My study makes the case for a spiritually-engaged cultural studies that would foster sympathetic relations of mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning with Buddhism (and potentially other sacred constituencies), working together to investigate the productive possibilities of sacred ideals and spirituality, and related questions of ethics, affect, corporality, (inter)subjectivity, and faith. The thesis draws the ethos of engagement pervading many forms of cultural studies into an alliance with a mode of Buddhist discourse called Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, which aims to develop new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society. Like cultural studies discourses where academics work reflexively with their own passionate participation in the entertainment or

subcultural formations they adopt as objects of study, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection's cross-fertilising of Buddhist sacred teachings with scholarly research is predicated on a commitment not to efface or subordinate the Buddhist faith of the practitioner-scholar under the will to knowledge-power of academia.

This thesis thus adopts the authoring-I's coterminous practice of Buddhism with cultural research as the object of study. This partly autoethnographic exercise will reflect on the relations of knowledge-power circumscribing my experience as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert who is pursuing a sacred-scholarly profession. The thesis thus offers a unique twofold contribution to the development of spiritually-engaged cultural studies via *a profession of faith*. Firstly, by critically examining the authoring-I's sacred-scholarly *profession*, it sheds light on the role of faith in supporting the open-ended praxis-ideal of unconditionality that, I will argue, is shared by Buddhist spirituality and the Derridean and Foucauldian ethico-political itineraries. Secondly, it develops a hypothesis that faith be investigated as an affective response that supports the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers' alike, including those *professing* in the language of academia (cultural studies, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection or otherwise), the *profession* of the university.

'Postsecular' explorations

John Frow (1998: 207) has argued that an axiomatic reliance on a fallacious secularisation thesis has resulted in 'the failure of cultural studies—with rare exceptions—to come to terms with, to theorize in any adequate way, what is perhaps the most important set of popular cultural systems in the contemporary world, religion in both its organized and disorganized forms.' I read in Frow's provocation

the question: 'Is there a "postsecular" horizon of cultural studies?' Within current debates on the totalising operations and conceits of the political doctrine of secularism, amongst those who evoke the 'postsecular' are Jürgen Habermas (2008), John D. Caputo (2001), and Hent de Vries (with Sullivan 2006; see also Gorski *et al.* 2012). Others like Charles Taylor (2007, 2011), Talal Asad (1993, 2003), and William Connolly (1999, 2005, 2008, 2011) address the same set of challenges without employing the term. This thesis will therefore take 'postsecular' as a *provisional designation* to connote not a 'leaving behind' of secularity but the problematisation of the totalising effects of disembodied reason and the attendant normative subjectivity of the resolutely rational individual, working as these scholars do, with the recognition of the impossibility of securing a unified political project without negating difference. Taylor's and Connolly's work, and especially the so-called 'religious turn' in Derrida's writings, provide the main coordinates for my sacred-scholarly exploration of the micropolitics of Buddhist meditation and the role of faith in cultural studies.

Received accounts of secularisation typically conceive of the secular as the residuum left over when the human estate has been purged of so-called religious illusion. With different inflections, the works of Durkheim, Freud, Marx, and Weber gave impetus to this 'subtraction' narrative, later developed by sociologists of religion into a secularisation thesis of inexorable religious decline (Berger 1967; Wilson 1969); though some of its leading proponents like Peter Berger (1999: 2) have now recanted their views (see also Hadden 1987). The 'subtraction' narrative of secularisation, however, continues to circulate in the contemporary mediasphere via the so-called 'new atheism' of, for example, Richard Dawkins. Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2008) criticises

the ways in which 'subtraction' accounts efface the extent to which the reorganisation (rather than the inexorable decline) of religious functions facilitated the secularising trend.[1] He narrates an alternative account of the 'move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace' (2008: 3).

By focussing on 'conditions of belief', Taylor refutes the 'epistemological' approach, which in reducing belief to conscious assent to doctrines/truth propositions, overlooks how rational-propositional assertions of un/belief are necessarily conditioned by our embeddedness in language and culture, but more importantly, by dimensions of tacit knowledge we do not typically recognise, since they serve as the background against which conscious reflection is formed. Our secular age is experienced within an 'immanent frame', a natural order without necessary reference to anything outside itself. Religion and exclusive humanism are two possible existential orientations amongst others for the pursuit of the good life; Taylor regards the former as 'open' to transcendence, the latter 'closed'. Within the immanent frame 'believers' and 'non-believers', 'theists' and 'non-theists', share a basic existential dilemma: that 'going one way or another requires what is often called "a leap of faith"', because even if we can articulate the considerations motivating our existential

[1] For example, Taylor traces an antecedent to the purification of thought of the Enlightenment in the Reform effort by both the Catholics and Protestants to 'cleanse' Christianity of inherited pagan customs, and instil in parishioners standards of piety and orthodoxy previously maintained only by elites. This developed in reciprocity with the rise of a new morality of self-discipline that also ushered in an understanding of an impersonal natural order that could be adopted as the object of a purely natural science. These processes precipitated a shift from 'porous selves', which were receptive to the forces of magic, demons, or God, to 'buffered selves', which were able to act instrumentally on the external world and on one's own body.

stance, 'our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it... we might better speak here of "anticipatory confidence"' (Taylor 2007: 550-1).

Like Taylor, Connolly also repudiates 'subtraction' accounts of secularisation. In *Why I Am Not A Secularist* (1999), he rejects the dead-end debates between hardline secularists and theists, coming down hard on 'secularist conceits' despite being unreservedly committed to the promise of secularity over any sociopolitical arrangement by theological/doctrinal sanction. The position of the hubristic secularist, he claims, is 'insufficiently alert to the layered density of political thinking' and harbours 'unacknowledged elements of immodesty in itself' (Connolly 1999: 4). Inasmuch as secular conceits presume to provide 'a single, authoritative basis of public reason and/or public ethics that governs all reasonable citizens regardless of "personal" or "private" faith', they effectively discard 'a set of nontheistic orientations to reverence, ethics, and public life that deserve to be heard' (1994: 5). Connolly envisions a yet-to-be-actualised 'deep' multidimensional pluralism that would be hospitable to non-secular conceptions of the good life. A key challenge is how we might become more mindful of the 'visceral registers' of experience devalued by modern secularism's overdetermination of the rational and aseptic. Mindfulness of the visceral registers is important not only because they prime conscious intellectual activity, but also because they may 'be drawn upon to thicken an inter-subjective ethos of generous engagement between diverse constituencies or to harden strife between participants' (Connolly 1999: 3).

Connolly elaborates on the ethico-political significance of the visceral registers of experience in *A World of Becoming* (2011), cross-fertilising continental philosophy, cultural theory, neuroscience, complexity theory, and theoretical biology to explore a micropolitics of affect/perception that might actualise a deep pluralism. This open-ended work of (un)becoming requires sensitivity towards the contemporary function of spirituality, which is defined operationally as the embodied sensibilities by which one's existential orientation or belonging-in-the-world is cultivated with varying degrees of hospitality/hostility towards immanence and/or transcendence. Connolly too regards faith as an elementary force sustaining any given existential orientation, explaining that his faith in 'radical immanence':

> [...] touches but does not correspond completely to some transcendent readings of it. Faith to us means a contestable element in belief that extends beyond indubitable experience or rational necessity but permeates your engagement with the world... These deposits of faith can shift as new evidence, inspiration, and experience surge forth to put pressure on them (Connolly 2011: 30-40).

Taylor and Connolly, whilst diverging in their appraisals of the relative merits of immanence/transcendence, both underscore the constitutive role of tacit knowledge and the visceral registers of experience. My analysis of Buddhist meditation will explore how it may sharpen sensitivity towards such embodied, non-conscious dimensions of perception-selfhood (Chapters Five and Six). Taylor and Connolly also do not conflate faith with a reductive and ideologically-laden, Euro-Christocentric definition of belief-as-conscious-assent (see Lopez 1998a), nor regard faith as inimical

to rationality. In drawing attention to the circuits of feedback and interferences between milieu and experience, and the folds of materiality and conceptuality, corporality and rationality by which un-belief is de/sedimented, their work disrupts the conventional understanding of faith as synonymous with creedal commitment. They effectively join Derrida in rethinking the relation between revelation and reason, faith and knowledge—that is, in decentring the binary opposition between rationalism and fideism.

Derrida's most detailed treatment of religion is in 'Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of Religion at the Limits of Reason Alone' (2002), which examines the autoimmune relation between religion and (techno)science. Identifying two 'sources' of religion—one is the promise of redemption, salvation, and so forth; the other is the *testimonial act* of promising that must be thought *before* the object of promise (salvation, etc.), since the act of promising recalls an originary *turn toward* or *address of* the other—Derrida claims that the latter is shared with (techno)science. That is, a shared elementary 'bare' faith, the promissory, quasi-transcendental condition of trustworthiness anterior to every speech-act, constative or performative (see also Naas 2012). This faith suffuses the fundamental condition of temporal experience Derrida calls the messianic, one of the many iterations of *différance*. The messianic bears witness to the incoming of time that arrives at once as the condition of possibility and impossibility for the movement of life, since it also recalls and announces finitude. Also described as 'messianicity without messianism', it refers to 'the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration [...] At issue there is "a general structure of experience"' (Derrida 2002: 56). This messianicity is

irreducible to the determinate messianism(s) of the Abrahamic tradition(s), even as it acknowledges and reaffirms this heritage by tracing and exposing within it the exclusions/otherness it cannot do without. Along with other aporetic leitmotifs of *undecidability* like justice, forgiveness, hospitality, democracy to come, and the gift (Derrida 1992a, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2001b), the messianic recalls the movement of trace, affirming the incalculable alterity or absence, contamination and supplementarity, that haunt every act of communication, translation, identity, and indeed, life itself.

The so-called 'religious turn' of Derrida's itinerary disrupts the dualism of the religious/secular, exposing 'religion without religion' (Caputo 1997a) and a 'secular to come' (Cauchi 2009) to/as a permanent *opening to a future*. Hence, in *The Other Heading* (1992b) and *The Gift of Death* (1995) Derrida affirms a structure of ir/responsibilisation: responsibility (to the wholly other) as always not yet responsible (enough). On his account, in order for (the worldwide legacy of) a secular modern Europe to be true to its promise it has to remain open to otherness, including a commitment to 'tolerating and respecting all that is not placed under the authority of reason', which amongst other challenges 'may have to do with faith' or 'different forms of faith' (Derrida 1992: 77-78). In his reading of Kierkegaard's interpretation of Abraham's ir/responsible sacrifice of Isaac, Derrida traces a movement of faith so unconditionally committed to the wholly other that it cannot be contained within Judeo-Christian identity. Inasmuch as this faith is elicited by the trace of temporality that makes any decision im-possible—*undecidability*—it may be found even in non-religious contexts, with language being the most general domain of faith (Derrida 1995). For Derrida, there can be no sociality without this elementary faith:

> Each time I open my mouth, I am promising something. When I speak to you, I am telling you that I promise to tell you something, to tell you the truth. Even if I lie, the condition of my lie is that I promise to tell you the truth. So the promise is not just one speech act among others; every speech act is fundamentally a promise. This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation of the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice—this is what I call the messianic structure (quoted in Caputo 1997b: 22-23).

John D. Caputo (2001) reads in Derrida's claims a 'religious sense of life' demanding nothing less than faith, love, and hope. Perhaps it is meant as a provocation against secularist hubris, but by 'the religious' Caputo does not refer exclusively to organised religion. Rather, as per Derrida's rendering of messianicity, 'the religious' constitutes 'a basic structure of our lives [...] that should be placed alongside very basic things, like having an artistic sense or political sense' (Caputo 2001: 8-9). Martin Hägglund (2008), however, opposes such theologically inspired readings with the counterclaim that deconstruction professes a radical atheism. Resolutely committed to a non-religious stance of immanence, radical atheism is nevertheless gracious in accepting the call of and for faith as it affirms the time of life: 'We can never know for sure what will happen because experience is predicated on the unpredictable coming of time. Whatever we do, we place faith in a future that may shatter our hopes and lay to waste what we desire' (Hägglund 2008: 126).

The ethics of cultural studies and perhaps, faith?

These 'postsecular' re-evaluations of a faith that is not coextensive with religion—faith as a necessary performative response to an open futurity; and for Derrida, as that which necessarily suffuses ethical aporias like hospitality, forgiveness, and responsibility—these will be tested with my Foucauldian analysis of Buddhist meditation. Inasmuch as cultural studies is committed to being mindful of the otherness that constitutes it, my aim is to show that a movement of faith is already astir in the ethics of cultural studies for the welcoming of a 'postsecular' horizon. This argument derives from a deconstructive reading that locates the cultural studies impulse at the interstitial spaces of binary oppositions: personal/social, conceptuality/corporality, faith/knowledge, etc. Cultural studies, as Gary Hall (2002) observes, investigates these interrelationships outside the comfort of systematic philosophy and disciplinary conventions in order to unleash new vectors of understanding, action, and becoming. Hence, 'knowledge of what [cultural studies] might be is already displaced, deconstructed, as if by itself, without deconstruction, since [...] cultural studies is "in deconstruction" as the condition of its very possibility (and of course impossibility)' (Hall 2002: 3).

In *The Ethics of Cultural Studies*, Joanna Zylinska likewise adopts a deconstructive strategy to argue that 'an ethical framework of cultural studies is not to be imposed from the outside, but rather that ethical normativity *is always already present* in numerous cultural studies articulations, projects, and interventions' (2005: 3). 'Normativity' here does not refer to a set of preconceived rules but a 'foundation-less normativity', the sense of obligation or response-ability by which the political horizon of cultural studies is organised. Zylinska refuses the opposition between description

and normativity, conceiving the ethics of cultural studies in terms of *performativity* (Austin 1962; Derrida 1988; Butler 1997b). Deconstruction recognises that 'the force of the performative is derived precisely from its decontextualization, from its break with a prior context and its capacity to assume new contexts', thereby attempting 'to think performativity in relation to transformation, to the break with prior contexts, with the possibility of inaugurating contexts yet to come' (Butler 1997b: 147; 151-152). Accordingly, there are two crucial dimensions to cultural studies' ethical engagement. Firstly, recalling Levinas's influence on Derrida's idea of ir-responsibilisation, it is *already ethical* and *not yet ethical enough*, and thus necessarily ceaseless, so that the otherness of those who become an object of knowledge would not be neutralised. Secondly, recalling Levinas's characterisation of an ethical relation as 'teaching' [*enseignement*], it develops as a wider pedagogy of the transmission and transformation of knowledge, exploring not only what it can teach or gift unto others but also what it can learn or receive from the otherness it encounters (Zylinska 2005: 33-34). Hence, cultural studies may be characterised as a 'responsible response'—or *response-ability*—towards incalculable alterity.

As an ethical opening to the future, cultural studies '*can never properly be founded*: instead, it can only be described as a project-in-the-making, on-its-way' (Zylinska 2005: 35) The response-ability of cultural studies is thus predicated on a 'double-vector' decision involving, ideally, attentiveness towards the others it engages with, and continuous re-examination of its own commitments, boundaries and exclusions. This double-vector decision cannot be taken once and for all but must be constantly retaken. In other words, cultural studies acts from the space of undecidability. As Derrida says:

> there would be no decision [...] in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability. If you don't experience some undecidability, then, the decision would simply be the application of a programme, the consequence of a premise or of a matrix [...] Ethics and politics, therefore, start with undecidability (Derrida 1999a: 66)

Undecidability also means that cultural studies must remain 'open to the possibility of its pervertibility, collapse, annihilation and withering down' (Zylinska 2005: 36). Or to paraphrase Derrida (2001a: 54), the ethico-political heart of cultural studies pulsates with the most vigour when it is hospitable to 'that dangerous modality of the "perhaps" that Nietzsche speaks of and that philosophy has always tried to subjugate.' The 'spectre of the perhaps' does not sentence cultural studies to indeterminacy, since 'perhaps' is the condition of possibility for the making of decisions that must interrupt the 'perhaps' itself. And more pertinently, given my sacred-scholarly explorations, the 'perhaps' holds open 'the possibility of the emergence of unforeseen intellectual or political tasks, *alliances and connections*' (Zylinksa 2005: 37; emphasis added). Cultural studies' interventions—academic publications and conferences, engagements with consumer practices, cultural policy studies, etc.—thus have to be accompanied by a form of delay or deferral, an openness to the unknown. In this way, cultural studies participates in a messianic politics as a responsible response towards incalculable alterity: *cultural studies as a promise, a messianic-project-in-the-making* (Zylinska 2005: 38-39).

Curiously, Zylinska does not mention 'faith', even though the idea of a performative ethics of cultural studies recalls Derrida's claim that every speech-act is at heart a promise, a solicitation of trust, an originary appeal to the other or quasi-transcendental condition of trustworthiness that possibilises every mode of address. So if a deconstructive, foundation-less normativity is presupposed and performed by cultural studies' interventions to keep the future open—does this not elicit a necessary response of 'anticipatory confidence' or 'faith', embodied one way or another with certain existential sensibilities or spirituality? *Perhaps*?

An enunciative practice of a sacred-scholarly profession

Inasmuch as the ethics of cultural studies responds to an anterior otherness that puts the 'I' into question, the self-reflexive 'personal' analyses of this thesis perform what Elspeth Probyn describes (1993) as an 'enunciative practice'. Nick Couldry (1996) extrapolates from Probyn's specific concern about gendered subjectivity a general formulation of cultural studies in terms of 'general discursive skills', rather than particular objects of enquiry. This approach to cultural studies as an enunciative practice would incorporate an investigation of its own social embeddedness as a voice, but with the understanding that '"self-reflexivity" is not a licence for autobiographical writing but a theoretically informed examination of the conditions for emergence of "selves"' (Couldry 1996: 315). As Probyn (1993: 11) writes, 'I consider the possibilities of speaking selves to be great, and the liabilities of an untheorized return to the "I" to be even greater.' For Couldry, cultural studies performs the work of 'truth-telling' and is guided by 'a scepticism in speaking about others that is loyal to the uncertainties each analyst recognizes in the formulations of her or his own identity' (Couldry 1996: 315). The idea of an enunciative practice is informed by

Foucault's late work on the art of living and the guiding precept of the care of self (Probyn 1993: 94-118; Foucault 1988a,1990a), which will also provide the framework for my analysis of meditation and Buddhist spirituality. The purpose in finding a 'voice' is to cultivate 'aspects of wider skills "for living", whose expression (and repression) stretch far beyond the academic sphere'. The skills for living proposed here refer to 'long-term patterns of "resistance" which are barely recognizable as particular skills, but registrable at some point in a complete redirection of the narratives through which 'I' recognize myself against the definitions of others and against earlier selves' (Couldry 1996: 317).

Cultural studies work that speaks about the self—or more precisely, the investigation of the relation between power, truth, and subjectivity; the relation of self to self, others and the world—engages in a task of becoming otherwise than before, of opening up spaces for different sociopolitical choices and relations, or what Foucault (1984a) might describe as a critical ontology of ourselves. To give an account of oneself whilst accepting that any account is already crossed many times over by others not 'my own', is 'to accept a sense of self that is necessarily suspended "in tension", internally inadequate and unstable' (Couldry 1996: 328). To persist in speaking the self in spite of irreducible complexity is to implicitly rely on a larger 'community' of other reflective agents; or as Probyn (1993: 169) underscores, self-reflexivity should open a 'perspective which allows us to conceive of transforming ourselves with the help of others.' In this regard, Couldry evokes Levinas (1989: 102)—'I am "in myself" through the others'—and thus his vision (also Probyn's) for cultural studies joins a deconstructive, messianic model of cultural studies in pledging response-ability to incalculable alterity. This pledge of ethical and 'intellectual

commitment is sustained not by a confidence in "completion" but by a sense of necessary *incompleteness* (of any statement or theory as much as of any formulation of identity)' (Couldry 1996: 328-329).

A profession of faith on the contested ground of 'spirituality'

This thesis's original contribution to the critical, ethical and political itinerary of cultural studies is to make a case for the movement of faith that necessarily suffuses its passionate work. Whilst the cultural studies voices surveyed above do not profess 'faith' as such, it is arguable that they do so implicitly. Consider, for instance, Couldry's claim that to 'suppress' the connections between 'analysing others' and 'speaking in one's own name' is 'not only *bad faith*, but also leads to (since those connections are themselves productive for analysis) a false economy' (1996: 317; emphasis added). Therefore, this thesis will endeavour to act in *good faith*, to investigate the dis/connections in the relations of knowledge-power that constitute this authoring-I's emergent subjectivity as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, someone who is pursuing an academic profession with a coterminous practice of Buddhism and cultural studies. The analyses to follow perform an autoethnographically-informed investigation of the long-term patterns of resistance that may be cultivated via hospitable exchanges involving processes of redefinition, and hopefully mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning, between Buddhist understandings and the knowledge-practices of academia and beyond.

Given cultural studies' longstanding investigation of the micropolitical contestations of a mediatised consumer culture, folding autoethnographic analyses of the researchers' personal investment in entertainment or subcultural formations onto

critical analyses-narratives would not be likely to provoke opposition (or at least not since the struggles of pioneering cultural studies discourses against the canonical and traditionalist hegemony of the humanities and social sciences). But what about the researcher who wishes to speak in their own voice about their discovery and acceptance of Western translations of Buddhist teachings in a milieu where Buddhism is neither taking root comfortably on the side of 'religion' nor 'secularism', but (for better or worse) on the contested ground of 'spirituality'? How does one find a voice within the disciplinary perimeters and discursive norms of humanities and social science research, where a significant body of scholarship has voiced suspicion, if not outright dismissal, of 'spirituality' (see Chapter One).[2]

[2] On 21 November 2013, it was brought to my attention as part of the supervision and feedback process that the tone of the writing and mode of address of this introduction are markedly different to the rest of the thesis (and my usual writing style in general), which were completed before this introduction. It was remarked that the writing here came across as 'machine-like'. So I have decided to include this footnote to expose what is usually effaced about the research process, as part of my experimentation with autoethnography and its attempt at finding a voice, to make what I hope will be a faithful 'profession of faith'. I understand that what I am articulating here, right now, within this peripheral space of the thesis, does not fall within the usual conventions of a PhD dissertation/examination process. But I am prepared to take this risk, to expose this thesis in its absent encounter with the reader, to the incalculable alterity that is the condition of possibility for this authoring-I to able to say 'I' in the first place. I had written this introduction in a style which I had assumed would be the 'appropriate' one to convince the reader of my intellectual confidence and rigor. But perhaps, in truth, it is just that: something I had to deliberately and consciously 'put on' in order to meet perceived norms. Maybe. *I do not know.*

This is partly the reason why this thesis explores an enunciative practice, including 'speaking personally' and 'finding a voice', which is especially pertinent given that I will be making what might be an objectionable claim to some: that *this,* this piece of writing, a necessity in order for the authoring-I to acquire the qualification to advance in the academic profession of the university, that *this is a profession faith*. So I submit for your consideration here that if the tone of the writing and mode of address in this introduction are indeed different from the rest of the thesis—since your participation, the actual extent to which I cannot presume but which is already presupposed by this thesis's autoethnographic experiment/enunciative practice, is the condition of possibility for this piece of writing or any discourse, really. In particular, I submit for your consideration whether, and in what ways, by the end of this thesis (I was drafting the conclusion when I received the feedback), I have managed to find a voice, to make a persuasive case for this profession of faith.

This sacred-scholarly narrative will thus begin by considering how issues concerning religion play out in the context of a politics of spirituality. This is not to reduce 'religion' to 'spirituality'—a term whose meaning is notoriously difficult to pin down. But precisely because of the contestations surrounding the slipperiness of 'spirituality', it offers a strategic analytical diorama in which to stage an investigation of the role of sacred understandings in contemporary society, where it is not uncommon to hear people sympathetic to sacred ideals say: 'I am not religious but spiritual.' The thesis is principally concerned with the strategic relations of knowledge-power that circumscribe such a justification of one's existential orientation and the transpositions of sacred teachings beyond religious contexts. That is, it examines 'spirituality' not in order to pin down its meaning but to interrogate *what it does or how it is deployed*. I will work with Connolly's operational definition of spirituality as the embodied sensibilities by which one's existential orientation is cultivated, an understanding informed by his reading of the Foucauldian ethical sensibility as an 'ethico-political spirituality' (Connolly 1993). Foucault's own working definition of spirituality (which turns on the dual aspect of subjectivity as *subjectification* under normative influence and *subjectivation* via conscience and self-knowledge) describes it as 'a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself [sic] in order to accede to this mode of being (Foucault 1988f: 14). By staging dialogical encounters between cultural studies approaches, Buddhist sacred teachings and scholarship, Derridean deconstruction, Foucauldian critique, and selected discourses within 'affect studies', the analyses to follow will demonstrate that '[e]xistential sensation, performative faith, and immanence are... the problematics on which the spiritual is based' (Dewsbury and Cloke 2009: 709).

Chapter Outline

Chapter One considers how cultural studies could draw on the prevailing ethos of engagement within its own archives to redress the neglect of religion and/or unacknowledged secularist hubris. The chapter first juxtaposes personal reflections on the discomfort I have experienced in developing a sacred-scholarly profession, beginning with a critical review of the analogous approaches of scholarship on fan cultures as well as those engaging sympathetically with alternative therapies/spiritualities. In light of how these discourses foreground the passions and corporality of academic work and/or subcultural consumptive practices, the two overarching themes of the thesis will be raised: 1.) Could the question of faith be developed via inquiries on the affective dynamics of experience? 2.) How might the Foucauldian approach widely adopted in cultural research be deployed differently to investigate spiritual self-cultivation as ethically and politically enabling? The chapter then contextualises contemporary contestations over 'spirituality' within a Foucauldian framework of governmentality, so as to show how the politics of spirituality is coterminous with the politics of subjectivity. This account of the ways in which 'spirituality' may function under neoliberal governmentality as the object-target of pastoral and disciplinary power, will help to elucidate how emergent 'Western Buddhism' has to negotiate the hegemonic imperatives of individualist and capitalist articulations of spirituality. The chapter then makes a case for a 'reparative' reading strategy that investigates the productive micropolitical functions and socially-engaged organisations of spirituality. This is evinced by the transnational movement of engaged Buddhism, whose threefold modalities of scholarly inquiry, spiritual cultivation, and social engagement will be developed in this thesis with an

investigation of whether meditative experience offers the false comfort of an Inner Self—in other words, the question of the transcendental subject.

Chapter Two connects the challenges of a spiritually-engaged cultural studies with the methodological reorientations developing within the field of religious studies to redefine its work as a multiperspectival and polymethodical form of cultural studies, and thereby one better equipped to sharpen critical reflexivity about the Orientalist, colonial legacy of the academic study of non-Western sacred/wisdom traditions. This move to open up channels of dialogue and research on 'religion' is taking shape in the emergent discourses called Buddhist theology and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection; the latter, which explores new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society, will serve as the main methodological framework of the thesis. Much like cultural studies work, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection is committed to always being mindful of the role of the subject in its own discourse. Hence, I will experiment in this chapter (and where appropriate in the rest of the thesis) with autoethnographic writing-analysis. The interweaving of personal reflections with historical analysis contextualises my hybridised approach to Buddhist understandings as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, and clarifies why my experience with Vipassana Meditation (a detraditionalised and demythologised approach to Buddhist teachings) lends itself to a Foucauldian analysis of its micropolitical potential.

Chapter Three articulates the ethos of intellectual hospitality that must guide any dialogical exchange between Buddhist understandings and the Western intellectual tradition. First, the chapter considers how the Buddhist sacred truth claim about an unmediated awareness (which the practice of meditation purportedly enables) figures

as the main point of disagreement with the broadly constructivist paradigm informing my research. The chapter will argue that in order for the constructivist paradigm to honour its commitment to difference, it has to affirm the incommensurable dimensions of the non-Western sacred understandings it engages with and not efface the specificities of the traditions it cross-reads. Otherwise it risks enacting intellectual *in*hospitality and even the continuing ideological subversion of non-Western lifeworlds. I will show how the risk of intellectual inhospitality cuts both ways by examining the ways in which Buddhist philosopher David Loy misrepresents Derrida's work in order to valorise Buddhism as more radical than deconstruction in decentring the metaphysics of presence. The intellectual inhospitality of this argument effectively stymies further dialogue. The chapter will therefore re-evaluate the affinities between Buddhism and deconstruction to show how they share a praxis-ideal of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*, and thereby open up a way for a more hospitable cross-reading of Buddhism with Foucauldian thought.

Chapter Four explores the neglected subtextual 'religious question' in the Foucauldian corpus, or the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality'. Part I of the chapter considers how the concept of 'experience' develops in Foucault's itinerary as both structuring conditions and transformative force; the latter is also expressed as 'limit-experience', the movement of desubjectification or becoming-other that tears the subject away from itself. 'Spiritual corporality', which refuses the mind/body dualism, offers a way to investigate how religious ideals could be both a technology of domination and a more positive technology of self for desubjectification. Part II of the chapter will map the concept of 'political spirituality' against the analytical reorientations that occurred during the late phase of Foucault's

intellectual life (post-1976). Marked by a so-called 'ethical turn', Foucault's late work devotes greater attention to the challenge of activating different forms of subjectivity and fresh ways of becoming. 'Political spirituality' emerges out of his research on the theological substratum of modern governmentality, and must also be understood with recourse to his journalistic engagement with the Iranian Revolution. I will show how this neglected aspect of Foucault's oeuvre not only problematises the distinction between the religious and the secular, but also affirms a messianic ontology in politics. This chapter thus aligns Foucauldian ethics with Derridean ethics, and sets the analytical grid for the analysis of Vipassana to follow.

Chapter Five investigates the ethical and political significance of Buddhist meditation by staging a dialogical exchange between the Foucauldian model of an art of living and a Buddhist one as articulated by Vipassana. Part I of the chapter will first show how the analytical shift in the *History of Sexuality* project to the sexual ethics of the Greco-Roman world invites us to rearticulate in contemporary contexts the praxis-ideal of an art of living as framed by Foucault's fourfold analysis of ethical substance, mode of subjection, ethical work, and *telos*. I will reconnect this praxis-ideal with the 'personal' enunciative practice of cultural studies, before analysing my experience with Vipassana from this perspective. Part II of the chapter cross-reads the Foucauldian and Buddhist arts of living to elucidate how the Vipassana meditator: 1.) adopts as ethical substance bodily sensation and contemplates on it as an object of meditation to develop insight about the utter contingency of the experience of phenomenal reality and selfhood; 2.) constantly re-makes the decision to 'let go' and thus accepts the open-endedness of existence as a mode of subjection; 3.) performs the ethical work of desubjectification by using the contemplation of bodily sensations

to defuse habitual tendencies; and 4.) cultivates the *telos* of the ongoing work of freedom by exposing the body to unexpected limit-experiences that may usher in new ways of becoming. This analysis will be sensitive to constructivist understandings of the historical and cultural forces that shape experience, whilst remaining hospitable to the Buddhist sacred claim of an unmediated awareness of phenomenal reality and selfhood. It thus paves a way beyond the critical impasse that has stalled around the question of meditative experience in existing debates on Buddhist and Derridean thought, by showing that Foucault's critico-political itinerary joins deconstruction and Buddhism in affirming *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

Chapter Six steers my Foucauldian analysis of Vipassana and a Buddhist art of living into the ambit of recent scholarship on the affective, visceral registers of experience, so as to chart trajectories for future inquiry between current thinking on the micropolitics of (un)becoming and an emergent Buddhist social theory supporting the broader initiative of engaged Buddhism. Buddhist social theory anchors itself on the 'self' end of the self-society continuum to understand how the work of spiritual self-cultivation may resonate at a social level. Inasmuch as mindfulness training figures in a Buddhist ecology of spiritual-social praxis as a catalysing force for a stronger ethos of engagement with the world, the question of meditative experience thus figures as a key problematic for Buddhist social theory. This chapter will show how prevailing models of Buddhist social theory overdetermine macropolitical accounts of power, even though ethical self-cultivation is posited as the fulcrum around which the transformation of oppressive social forces must pivot. To make the case for a more nuanced micropolitical account of power in Buddhist social theory, I will contextualise current thinking on affect within a Foucauldian analytic of biopower

and show how a politics of spirituality is as much imbricated with a politics of affect as it is with a politics of subjectivity. The chapter then stages a conversation between my analysis of Vipassana and William Connolly's cross-disciplinary research on the micropolitics of perception and affectivity. This conversation will develop four hypotheses for further dialogue between Buddhist social theory and academic knowledge-practices investigating the affective dynamics of (un)becoming. What this chapter performs, in other words, is the coterminous work of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and a spiritually-engaged cultural studies.

Chapter Seven draws the thesis towards a close by arguing that the question of faith cannot be ignored if cultural studies is to honour the ethical commitment to always be hospitable and response-able to difference. The chapter first shows, by way of an analysis of a discussion thread on a Buddhist forum I participate in, how I have come to trust in Buddhist teachings with a faith that makes its leap where knowledge ends: a faith in and of undecidability. I then elaborate on faith in/of undecidability by examining the dispute between a radical-atheist and a theologically-inspired reading of deconstruction. This will show how tensions between religious and non-religious commitments do not invalidate the notion of faith proposed here. Returning to examine in more detail the consonances and points of disagreement between Taylor's, Connolly's, and Derrida's thinking on immanence/transcendence, I will contend that the movement of faith supports the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers' alike. The chapter then postulates that Buddhism stands very closely with the Derridean and Foucauldian itineraries in professing faith in the possibility of always becoming otherwise, re-evoking the idea of cultural studies as a messianic project-in-the-making to conclude with the proposal that faith be investigated in

terms of affectivity: *Might it be that faith is tied to an open question, an affective response generated by and supporting the movements of an ongoing task?* This hypothesis of faith articulated by way of a profession of faith may also be visualised as a trail of: ?!?!?!

In the conclusion of this thesis, I relate the ideas developed about spirituality and faith to current concerns about the micropolitics of the university, and more importantly, dedicate this thesis to the future of the profession in and of the university without condition to come.

CHAPTER ONE

Towards a Spiritually-Engaged Cultural Studies

> Religion is an embarrassment to us; it's an embarrassment to me, and above all because we Western intellectuals are so deeply committed to the secularization thesis which makes of religion an archaic remnant which ought by now to have withered away. This thesis—never more than a polemical one—is plainly wrong. It is wrong as a matter of fact, both because organized religion is flourishing in many parts of the world, and because religious sentiment—the belief in a cosmic order and in the continuing life of the dead—has migrated into many strange and unexpected places, from New Age trinketry to manga movies and the cult of the famous dead [...] The secularization thesis is also wrong, however, as a matter of theory, predicated as it is on a logic of historical progression through necessary historical stages culminating in the achieved rationality of a fully secular and fully Western modernity. We have been told the story of disenchantment so many times that we have come to believe it, despite all evidence to the contrary (Frow 1998: 207-208).

This chapter explores the question: how might cultural studies' neglect of religion be investigated *qua* the politics of spirituality? It takes as its point of departure John Frow's reflections above. In being candid about his own feelings of embarrassment, Frow is ostensibly hoping to elicit a sympathetic response of self-reflexivity from other cultural studies scholars—an invitation to interrogate any unacknowledged

Western-centric, intellectual conceits regarding the putative transparency or neutrality of our 'secular vocation' (Robbins 1993) that might dismiss matters of faith and/or spirituality as irrelevant to cultural studies research. In this regard, an overarching subtextual question of this thesis might be formulated as 'Is critique secular?', which is the title of a volume by Talal Asad, Wendy Brown, Judith Butler and Saba Mahmood (2009). In her introductory essay, Brown notes that the question 'Is critique secular?' invites a work of critique that doubles back on the presumptive secularism governing the Western academy. The critique of 'secular critique' must begin with this governance, because '[u]nseating governance of this sort is the very signature of political, social, and cultural critique; it targets what is presumptive, sure, commonsensical, or given in the current order of things' (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood 2009: 8). I flag at the outset of this chapter 'Is critique secular?' as an overarching *subtextual* question of the thesis to give an indication of the destination, or rather, an opening I aim to arrive at in the conclusion—a profession of faith about the form and function, the inheritance and future, of the profession of the university.[1]

[1] The pertinence of the question 'Is critique secular?' only emerged in the late stages of writing this PhD project—after all the chapters were drafted and when I was beginning to outline the introduction and conclusion. This question could be a very productive way to formulate the problematic of cultural studies' reluctance to engage with religious or sacred understandings, or to relate to them as a subject of conversation rather than merely an object of knowledge. It behooves me to position it as a *subtextual* question because (as it will become clear when we approach the conclusion) it pertains to the profession of faith I wish to make. But the question in itself warrants a fuller treatment, which I am unable to do in this thesis, given my primary focus on the problematics confronting the development of 'Western Buddhism' within the context of a politics of spirituality. A fuller treatment of 'Is critique secular?' requires thoroughgoing genealogical and cross-cultural analyses. A starting point for this debate about the function of critique, as Asad, Brown, and Butler have attempted, could be taken with a re-evaluation of received understandings of the Foucauldian approach, which turns on a notion of critique that Foucault derives from his reinterpretation of the legacy of the Enlightenment and Kantian critique. Chapter Four will touch on this issue with its re-examination of Foucault's 'Iranian experiment' alongside the lectures he was giving at the time, which includes 'What is Critique?' (2007b), the precursor to the more well-known essay, 'What is Enlightenment?' (1984a).

This chapter takes the first steps towards rethinking academia's 'secular vocation' by considering ways to redress cultural studies' neglect of questions about religion, spirituality, and faith. It pursues the pathways opened up by recent discourses on cultural studies' unacknowledged secularist conceits. One of them is the 2012 issue of *Cultural Studies Review* with the theme of 'Secular Discomforts', to which I contributed the preliminary outline of this thesis's hypothesis about faith (Chapter Seven). The editors of the issue position it at the limits of normative, secular and religious comforts: 'Rather than interpreting discomfort as a stricken moment—a critical *caesura* in conversation, methodology and praxis—for the purposes of this collection we utilise discomfort as a practice of scholarly vitality' (Sunderland and Randell-Moon 2012: 5).

This chapter will likewise inhabit discomfort. From this space of uneasiness, it first shows how an ethos of sympathetic engagement can be drawn from existing cultural studies discourses on subcultural formations. These strands of cultural studies have had to be forthcoming about the role of the subject in their own discourse, as they investigate the micropolitics of everyday practices, treating popular culture not simply as an object of analysis but also a source of cultural theory (for example, Brooker 2000; Doty 2000; Jenkins 1992; McKee 2002, 2007). By 'speaking personally' whilst speaking about others (Couldry 1996), these discourses perform cultural studies as an enunciative practice (Probyn 1993), which, I will argue, allows for 'reparative' readings of spirituality. Then, using a Foucauldian framework of governmentality, the chapter examines the politics of spirituality. I will show that the 'psy disciplines', as Nikolas Rose (1989; 1996) puts it, paved the way for a therapeutic culture of the self, within which the teachings of sacred traditions are being 'rebranded' as individualist

and capitalist forms of spirituality. Such a trend calls for counter-discourses on alternative models of spirituality, which I will illustrate by examining developments in contemporary Buddhism. The chapter thus delineates the problematic of meditative experience, which the thesis will investigate to develop a Buddhist-inflected spiritually-engaged cultural studies.

Who or what is embarrassed by matters of faith?

Frow (1998: 207) confesses his discomfort with religion to highlight 'the failure of cultural studies—with rare exceptions—to come to terms with, to theorize in any adequate way, what is perhaps the most important set of popular cultural systems in the contemporary world, religion in both its organized and disorganized forms'. He identifies three ways to overcome this secularist oversight. Firstly, it is important to engage with the history and sociology of religion, and/or other cultures or traditions that uphold sacred understandings. Secondly, it is necessary to take religion seriously in all its dimensions, but 'without participating in those religious myths of origin and presence [...] which are a constant theoretical temptation in the study of popular culture' (Frow 1998: 208). And thirdly—extrapolating from the Australian context where an increasing desire to honour Aboriginal heritage bespeaks an inescapable tension between a sacred cosmology and the Enlightenment ethos governing academia which 'we cannot pretend not to be subject to'—Frow (1998: 208) says it is 'crucial to the future of the discipline' that it reflects on this tension and 'enter sympathetically into forms of understanding which are quite alien to it, and moreover 'to do so without condescending to those other knowledges'.

Frow's discourse effectively performs the double-vector decision of cultural studies' ethical engagement (Zylinska 2005). As indicated by his call for greater engagement with other knowledge-practices and/or cultural heritages, it is the promise of response-ability that holds the door open for dialogical exchange between my pursuit of Buddhism and cultural research. But it is also in the name of this promise (at once a profession of faith?) that I question Frow's cautionary note about participating in 'religious myths of origin and presence'. Does he mean to imply that those who are engaging with sacred traditions ought not profess faith in them, even if (as indeed I am) the researcher is also cultivating the sacred teachings or spirituality that s/he investigates as the object of academic research?

Being 'insiders' does not of course prevent researchers from subjecting so-called myths of origin and presence to critico-historical interrogation, as Buddhist practitioners-scholars have done (Jackson and Makransky 2000; Lopez 1995; Makransky 2008; Sharf 1993, 1995) and which this thesis likewise attempts to do. So when Frow (1998: 207) says, 'Religion is an embarrassment to us', *who or what* exactly is this 'us' that is presumed to be embarrassed? Should this authoring-I, whose pursuit of Buddhism is coterminous with his professional training in academia, be embarrassed? This authoring-I is someone who, despite growing up in Singapore where it was compulsory that he studied Mandarin as a 'mother tongue', can only think, speak, read and write competently in English; and even though Buddhism is a part of his diasporic 'Chinese' ancestral heritage, he only felt a connection with Buddhist sacred teachings after encountering them in Australia via Western translations and scholarship (Chapter Two). Does the subject of this discourse qualify as one of those 'Western intellectuals' that figure in Frow's essay as his interlocutor?

I am not sure if I am embarrassed, but there are definitely feelings of ambivalence and discomfort about my researching and pursuit of Buddhism within the secular academy. Or if there is 'embarrassment', it is not because of religion per se. I do not find the continuing influence of religious formations in the contemporary world embarrassing. The expectation that I *ought* to be embarrassed is what generates discomfort. I recall, for example, a group conversation where upon learning about my research interests, a professor of cultural studies half-jokingly remarked, 'Perhaps there are some issues that you need to work on privately', a remark which drew laughter from the others present, and I joined in too. When the topic of my research interest arose on a separate occasion, the same professor said: '*You know*, after all, Marx did say that religion is the opium of the masses.' Never mind that this oft-quoted line by Marx has been grossly lifted out of context, or that the metaphor of opium could be read in multiple ways, or that Marx's criticism of religion remains the subject of ongoing scholarly debate (Boer 2007, 2009, 2011; McKinnon 2006; Roberts 2005). The message behind this professor's remarks appears to be: matters of faith are not an appropriate subject for academic work, and since everyone knows that religion is a source of oppression, a serious scholar ought not be duped by such concerns. In the introduction to the 2005 issue of the *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* on 'Religious/Secular', Everett Hamner recounts similar experiences:

> As an undergraduate at Johns Hopkins in the mid-nineties, I visited one of my advisors during office hours. As I accepted the proffered chair and my marked-up paper, she gave me a gentle but unambiguous message: "Everett, if you really want to go to graduate school in English, you've got to stop writing

> about religion. There's nowhere to do that anymore." [...] Advice like that which I received from my advisor a decade ago remains possible, if less likely. Indeed, early in my doctoral work at the University of Iowa, I was again faced with considerable resistance from an instructor during office hours. "*You know*," this professor pondered, "it never ceases to amaze me that someone can be in grad school and still take religion seriously." Looking at me in honest bewilderment, he asked, "What the hell makes you think religion even matters any more?" (Hamner 2005; emphasis added)

I cannot help but observe the use of the phrase 'you know'. Whilst I can only speculate on Hamner's experience, given the repeated reaction of incredulity from the professor I spoke with, I wonder if this otherwise innocuous linguistic 'filler' could be read more suggestively in these contexts as implying that '*one ought to know better*.' In any event, it is arguable that what Hamner and I brush up against is a certain disciplinary device prevalent in academia: the imagined subjectivity of the resolutely rational scholar. Following Barbara Hernstein Smith (1988) in conceiving of academia as a system of values, Matt Hills (2002: 3) has argued in *Fan Cultures* that 'academia [...] is bounded by its own imagined subjectivity', which 'attributes valued traits of the subject "duly trained and informed" only to those within the given community, while denigrating or devaluing the "improper" subjectivity of those who are outside the community [or, those deemed to fall short of prevailing expectations]'. The resolutely rational academic is an *imagined* subjectivity 'precisely because it does not relate to the actual subjectivities of embodied academics':

> The possibility that this intense valuing of rationality is imagined is evident from the fact that different theoretical approaches within the academy cannot be brought together via rational activity, nor can the truth claims of any one theory be rationally adjudicated on the grounds of pure "evidence", whatever such a thing would look like. In short, academics have no choice, when all is said and done, other than to believe in their favoured theories. But, at the same time, *the possibility that faith is the ultimate glue within academic argument* is typically disavowed and ignored in favour of the imagined subjectivity of the rational academic (Hills 2002: 3-4; emphasis added).

Hills is questioning the moral dualisms posited between supposedly detached, 'rational' academics of subcultural formations and hero-worshipping 'irrational' fans. Such dualisms are problematic because it is not uncommon for academics to participate in the subcultural formations they are researching. Hence, they are just as emotionally invested as fans. Moreover, academics also have emotional investments in their intellectual heroes; the tendency towards fandom or 'cultism' is arguably a feature within academia too. As philosopher and film theorist Stanley Cavell (1981: 273) puts it, 'I have spoken of a university, with its commitment to rational discourse toward some public goal [...] but I have also admitted its own propensity to cultism [...] Wittgenstein and Heidegger [...] were clear candidates for a university curriculum, yet I know that each of them is mainly the object of a cult.' Sociologist of emotions Randall Collins, who regards 'emotional energy' as a driving force of social life, expresses similar sentiments: 'When a group has a high degree of agreement on the ideas put forward by some intellectual leader, that person becomes a sacred object for the group. Thus arise the cult figures of intellectual life: [...] Hegel, Marx, Wittgenstein

[...] intellectuals are highly aware of the cult heroes of the past. (Collins 1998: 36). Therefore, in terms of their *embodied* subjectivities, academics are never fully aligned with the imagined subjectivity of 'good' rationality. Yet, despite consistently failing to measure up to this idealisation, the imagined subjectivity of the resolutely rational academic persists as an extremely powerful cultural device: 'Imagined subjectivity is hence not just about systems of value; it is also always about who has power over cultural representations and cultural claims to legitimacy, and who is able to claim "good" and moral subjectivity while pathologising other groups as morally or mentally defective' (Hills 2002: 5).

This brief discussion on scholarly passion outlines the basic premise of the thesis's hypothesis about faith—namely, *that faith be investigated as an affective response that suffuses the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'nonbelievers' alike; that the question of faith demands critical attention, since the pursuit of knowledge is not devoid of passion, feelings of trust or anticipatory confidence, and the hopeful belief that what we do will make a difference.* This hypothesis will be developed in due course. The task here is to lay the foundations for this line of inquiry. The foregoing discussion sheds light on a key problematic that studies of fan cultures grapple with: the question of whether the researcher is willing or able to question the imagined subjectivity of the resolutely rational academic, and work reflexively with the affective dimensions of experience (of passion and perhaps, faith?) that inspire and sustain scholarship of many kinds. In *Flaming Classics: Queering the Film Canon* (2000), the late Alexander Doty reflects on the notion of the 'scholar-fan' thus:

> Why shouldn't readers know something about a critic's personal and cultural background and training? Why is hiding or suppressing information like this still considered more professional and scholarly by most people? [...] The result of a couple of decades of ignoring or hiding personal and cultural investments in our [...] academic writing, however, has been to squeeze much of the life out of it in many senses, often relegating our investments in, and enthusiasms for, film and popular culture to the realm of hidden pleasures [...] [T]he question is then how to introduce this into our work/teaching without losing the respect of the reader/student by coming off as *embarrassingly* egotistical or gee-whiz celebratory (Doty 2000: 11–12; emphasis added).

There it is again: embarrassment. For Doty, the refusal to relegate his own passion for the cinematic texts he examines to the realm of hidden pleasure not only performs an epistemic intervention that challenges hierarchies of values, boundaries of cultural expertise and legitimacy, but also a micropolitical function of giving voice to the marginalised, slienced 'other' of queer experience. His reflections evoke the proverbial closet from which queer individuals (academics, fans, or otherwise) have had to 'come out', if they do find the courage or are allowed to come out. So what if the ethos of reflexive engagement pervading such cultural studies research on subcultural formations, is adopted with matters of faith? What if academics who profess faith in sacred knowledge-practices 'come out' and work reflexively with their own experience of religion or spirituality?

Although they do not put it in such terms, to 'come out' is what Ruth Barcan and Jay Johnston call for too in their study on alternative therapies and related spiritualities

(Barcan and Johnston 2005; Johnston and Barcan 2006). They explain that they juxtapose New Age author '[Shakti] Gawain with Deleuze and Guattari, psychics with psychoanalysts, spiritualists with Spinoza', in order to perform 'a tactical collapsing of authority important at this particular juncture because of the silence within cultural studies surrounding alternative therapies, even while many of us make use of these very practices in our private lives' (Johnston and Barcan 2006: 28). It is beside the point whether this claim has been proven empirically or not. These knowledge-practices are part of the contemporary cultural landscape, of which we are active participants; they are consumptive habits of everyday life that fall under the ambit of the self-help, New Age, or mind/body/spirit genres, or the category of 'spirituality' more generally. The fact is that these knowledge-practices, which variously draw on the teachings of sacred or wisdom traditions, have largely escaped the attention of mainstream cultural studies. A reflexive engagement with such knowledge-practices of 'spirituality' thus offers a way to redress the neglect of religion, which, to recall Frow (1998: 207), needs to be investigated in both its 'organized and disorganized forms'. Barcan and Johnston say that their aim is to find 'pathways between cultural studies and other discourses and traditions', and that being active participants in these aspects of culture, their study will be 'expository and analytical' without being 'naïvely celebratory' or 'a priori dismissive or unsympathetic' towards their objects of analysis: 'We claim that they are important objects for cultural studies to examine [...] In particular, they can offer cultural studies a variety of new ways of conceptualizing the body and intersubjectivity' (Johnston and Barcan 2006: 28).

This thesis is predicated on an analogous understanding. It explores the same goal of mutual learning by staging a sympathetic, hospitable encounter between Buddhist

understandings and poststructuralist ideas that have been influential in cultural research. It likewise aims to be expository and analytical, receptive and interrogative. As Barcan and Johnston's study too attempts, this thesis experiments with what Eve Sedgwick (2003) has called a 'reparative' reading strategy, rather than a 'paranoid' one that fixates on exposing the ideological assumptions of others or the political complicity of popular cultural practices. A wary and distrustful mode of 'paranoid' analysis has typified studies on the contemporary trend of spirituality and/or the associated New Age, self-help, and mind/body/spirit genres. Barcan and Johnston note, for example, the tendency to criticise the goal of spiritual self-transformation as a form of infantile wish fulfilment (Rosen 1998), or as reflective of the broader trend of narcissism (Lasch 1979). Or the criticism that the emphasis on personal empowerment impoverishes political empowerment (Coward 1989), or that social change is forsaken in favour of personal development (Ross 1991). But above all, I would add, it is the commercialisation and seeming hedonism of personalised spirituality that provoke the strongest objections. Hence, criticisms of contemporary approaches to spirituality as: 'consumer self-indulgence' (Bauman 1998: 70); 'another commodity to consume and sell' (Lau 2000: 17); 'the profane pursuit of self-gratification' (Hunt 2002: 43); 'the promotion of unrestrained desire-fulfilment as the key to happiness' (Carrette and King 2005: 21); 'forms of hyper-individualism, self-help as self-grooming, custom-made eclecticism that proffer a pop transcendence and pamper to the need for "good vibrations"' (Ward 2006: 185). The suspicious, dismissive scholarly attitude towards 'spirituality' is perhaps best encapsulated by Wade Clark Roof's claim: 'Much of what passes as spirituality is as thin as chicken soup and as transparent as celestine profits' (1999: 138).

However, renowned sociologist of religion Paul Heelas has challenged the 'blanket reduction' of 'spirituality' as a form of self-indulgent consumption. Evoking the understanding (one regarded as axiomatic in cultural studies) that consumerist popular culture involves 'the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system' (Fiske 1989: 23), Heelas (2008) demonstrates with ethnographic research that participants of a wide range of popular mind-body-spirit practices—or what he calls 'spiritualities of life'—are not simply self-indulgent or narcissistic consumers, but are in fact cultivating a new ethic for the 'good life' as a reponse to the suffocating demands of twenty-first century living. Heelas's interrogative-receptive approach to sociocultural analysis is exemplified in cultural studies work by scholarship on media or entertainment formations that emphasise the active and creative 'meaning-making' activities of consumers, even as they keep a critical eye fixed on the econo-political functions and manipulative tactics of the 'cultural industry'. So, what might the cultural studies project discover, if it draws on this ethos of engagement that has typified some of its best work to perform spiritually-engaged research?

To be sure, I am not suggesting we abandon critico-political interventions against hegemonic deployments of 'spirituality'. In fact, I will show below the necessity to be vigilant about the ways in which sacred traditions and their teachings are being colonised by dominant cultural logics. But if there is a politics of spirituality, my contention is that a responsible response is not to simply fixate on the political complicity of the contemporary trend towards spirituality, but to also investigate how 'spirituality' might be deployed differently to open up 'strange and sometimes wonderful spaces—archaic persistencies, interstitial spaces, unforeseen horizons,

strange cracks, holes and black spaces in the dominant' (Barcan and Johnston 2005). A strategy of suspicion, in other words, does not obviate a 'reparative' strategy of hospitality and sympathetic engagement. If there is a trend toward individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality—what is in effect the colonisation of sacred understandings and practices by the biopolitical will to power of neoliberal governmentality—my proposal for a spiritually engaged cultural studies is that it responds with counter-discourses on alternative models of spirituality.

Governmentality, the neoliberal subject, and a politics of spirituality

A useful framework to situate the politics of spirituality is Foucault's portmanteau concept of govern-mentality, which is predicated not on the standard political definition of 'government' but the notion of the 'art of government'. Governmentality could also be described as the conduct of conduct:

> Perhaps the equivocal nature of the term conduct is one of the best aids for coming to terms with the specificity of power relations. For to "conduct" is at the same time to "lead" others (according to mechanisms of coercion which are, to varying degrees, strict) and a way of behaving within a *more or less open field of possibilities*. The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. Basically power is less a confrontation between two adversaries or the linking of one to the other than a question of government (1982a: 789).

Speaking of it also as the government of self and others (2011a), Foucault explains that the word 'government' has to be understood in the way it was used in the

sixteenth century, where it did not refer only to the structures and processes of political sovereignty but also entailed 'the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the sick' (Foucault 1982a: 790). The analytic of governmentality was a way for Foucault to fine-tune his longstanding investigation of power, and better account for the diffused dynamics by which persons recognise and act on themselves as a particular subject. What the art of government entails is not only 'the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection but also *modes of action*, which [are] destined to act upon the possibilities of action of other people. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the *possible field of action* of others' (Foucault 1982a: 790; emphasis added).

In the context of advanced capitalist, neoliberal democracies, an analytic of governmentality shows how power is exercised not through overt coercion or domination, but through the shaping of the ways in which individuals accede to certain ideals of 'free choice' and the moral injunction to be enterprising. As Nikolas Rose (1996: 155) puts it, a neoliberal art of government pursues political objectives '*through* the freedom and aspirations of subjects rather than in spite of them'; the power to govern is exercised in a diffused manner, flowing through 'a proliferation of discourses, practices, and techniques through which self-governing capabilities can be installed in free individuals in order to bring their own ways of conducting and evaluating themselves into alignment with political objectives'. What is contested in the government of the self and others is a politics of subjectivity, where subjectivity has to be understood in its dual aspects: as the mutualising force relations between, on the one hand, being 'subject to someone else by control and dependence', and on

the other, the cultivation of 'identity by a conscience and self-knowledge' (Foucault 1982a: 781).

Working with the Foucauldian analytic of governmentality, Rose's (1996) work shows how the politics of subjetivity could be analysed across three interrelated domains. There is the 'political' domain involving the complex array of truth claims articulated by diverse authorities in such domains as economics, religion, medicine, science, and so on, all of which seek to influence the lives and conducts of persons towards greater health, happiness, wealth, and so forth. Then there is the 'institutional' domain involving sites like the school, prison, workplace, and home, and also the embedded practices that shape the assumptions and objectives of those moving in and through these sites—spatial arrangement, time schedules, procedures of rewards or punishment, systems of norms, values and judgements. These are 'technological' in the broad sense of the term because they seek to calculate, direct, and orchestrate human activities towards certain goals, employing practical rationalities (e.g. medical, psychological, pedagogic expertise, and as we shall see, spiritual) to enhance the capacities of individuals and to encourage traits and attitudes (e.g. loyalty, diligence, discipline, entrepreneurship) that are conducive to the posited goals. The third domain is 'ethics', understood as the historically contingent ways in which persons act upon themselves and their relations with others with the aid of practical know-hows. Hence, Foucault (1993: 203) foregrounds what he calls technologies of the self, techniques 'which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality'.

With this schema, Rose extends on Foucault's argument that the discipline of psychology secures its own status as the definitive science of the human person by positing the self as a distinct unit whose truth can be examined and classified, and in so doing creates 'subjectivity' by 'subjecting' the self to the power of a normative understanding. Following Foucault—who traces a line from the Ancient Greek precept of the care of self through to the intersections between Christian pastoral care and the secularising trend of modern European history at the birth of the 'police state'—Rose contends that psycho-dynamically informed technologies of self are the contemporary successors of the spiritual *askēsis* of Greek philosophers and the Christian confession. Rose's (1989: xii-xiii) analysis of the governmental function of the psy disciplines elucidates how 'psychological theories have played a key role in the birth of [a] new concept of the [desiring, relating, actualizing] self', and how 'psychological techniques have had a crucial role in the development of those practices and techniques through which modern selves are constructed, sustained and remodelled'. The self constructed is not so much 'a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body' but 'an individual whose citizenship is to be manifested through the free exercise of personal choice among a variety of marketed options' rather than through the imposition of legal or religious obligation (Rose 1989: 226). The psy disciplines articulate technologies of self—or more precisely technologies of *individualisation*—to produce and regulate the individual who is 'not merely free to chose' but 'obliged to choose, obliged to make his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of a series of choices' (Rose: undated). There are two main ways in which the psy disciplines serve as the conduit for power in the neoliberal art of government:

> Firstly, they provided the terms that enabled human subjectivity to be translated into the new languages of government of schools, prisons, factories, the labour market, and the economy. Second, they constituted subjectivity and intersubjectivity as themselves possible objects for rational management, in providing the languages for speaking of intelligence, development, mental hygiene, adjustment and maladjustment, family relations, group dynamics, and the like. They made it possible to think of achieving desired objectives—contentment, productivity, sanity, intellectual ability—through the systematic government of the psychological domain (Rose 1996: 70).

Rose only mentions in passing that 'spirituality' is operationalised within this millieu. This is where Carrette and King's *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (2005) is instructive in showing how the politics of subjectivity is coterminous with a politics of spirituality.

Individualist and capitalist spirituality

For Carrette and King, a key moment in the development of individualist spirituality can be traced to William James's seminal work *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (2002 [1902]: 30), which distinguishes between 'institutional religion' and 'personal religion', the latter referring to 'the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine'. James had openly acknowledged the provisional nature of his hypothesis, explaining that he rendered religion in psychological terms for the heuristic purpose of investigating subjective religious attitude. This caveat

notwithstanding, later discourses of humanist and transpersonal psychology extrapolated from his analysis a moral-political claim for the *privatisation* of spirituality. For example, in *The Individual and His Religion* (1962) Gordon Allport describes institutional religion as 'immature' and privatised spirituality as 'mature' and 'healthy'. What was for James a strategic, analytical manoeuvre becomes for Allport a diagnosis of *pathology*, whereby the psychological reorientation of religion into 'spirituality' is legitimised on the basis of individual health and maturity. Religious experience and sacred truth claims, in other words, are subordinated under the authority of the psy disciplines.

Another figure whose work was pivotal in paving the way for the development of individualist and capitalist spirituality is Abraham Maslow. In *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*, Maslow (1976: 27-8) argues from the basis of 'peak experience' that the 'most fundamental religious or transcendent experience [is] a totally private and personal one'; that each person has their own 'private religion' which is revealed to them through their own 'private myths and symbols, rituals and ceremonials', which has 'no meaning to anyone else' beyond the individual concerned. Situating Maslow within the post-war economic climate of North America, Carrette and King (2005: 76) contend that his ideas about personal growth and self-realisation echoed the privileges of an affluent culture, and even suggest that his famous 'hierarchy of needs' is more a hierarchy of 'capitalist wants.' The commensurability of Maslow's psychology of positive motivation with capitalist imperatives is evinced by the adaptation of his ideas for business motivational purposes (Stephens 2000). According to Carrette and King, the trend towards individualist spirituality mutually enabled by

such discourses has been followed by capitalist spirituality. This represents the second phase in the 'silent takeover of religion':

> In recent times we are seeing the development of a second mode of 'privatising' religion, this time influenced not by liberalism, which placed religion on the private space of individual choice, but by neoliberalism, which is *re-placing* religion (already disentangled from its institutional and cultural origins and repackaged as 'spirituality') into the corporate realm of business. We are essentially witnessing an attempted corporate takeover of religions. This can be seen in the increasing tendency for the ancient and diverse religious traditions of the world to be simplified, homogenised, repackaged and then sold to consumers and business managers as ideologies promoting hedonism, business enterprise, work-efficiency, economic productivity and the values of a corporate business world (Carrette and King 2005: 133).

Individualist and capitalist spirituality participate in the therapeutic construction of selfhood. They are also oriented by an ethos of enterprise, where both mental and manual work have been transformed into a matter of personal fulfilment and identity, such that the significance and reward of an employment relationship derive not so much from the financial remuneration it offers but the subjectivity it validates. As Rose writes, 'therapeutics can forge alliances between the liberation of the self and the pathways to personal success, promising to break through the blockages that trap us into powerlessness and passivity, into undemanding jobs and underachievement'; therapeutics, in other words, can help us to 'become enterprising, take control of our careers, transform ourselves into high fliers, achieve excellence, and fulfil ourselves

not *in spite of* work but *by means of work*' (Rose 1998: 158). 'Enterprise' in this instance does not simply designate the activities of commercial organisations competing with one another in the market, but refers more generally to a mode of activity to be fostered across all domains of social life, from the university to the hospital to the factory to the family to public service. All these domains of human activity are to be evaluated in terms of enterprise, which, if found lacking, must be rectified with remedial efforts so that everyone would be more motivated to 'conduct themselves with boldness and vigor, to calculate for their own advantage, to drive themselves hard, and to accept risks in the pursuit of goals' (Rose 1996: 154). Whether it be organisations or persons, everyone ought to strive to maximise their own advantage by adopting inventive and competitive strategies of calculation and self-promotion. Neoliberal governmentality, in other words, normalises a moral injunction to selfhood that enjoins the individual to:

> make an enterprise of its life, seek to maximize its own human capital, project itself a future, and seek to shape itself in order to become what it wishes to be. The enterprising self is thus both an active self and a calculating self, a self that calculates about itself and that acts upon itself in order to better itself' (Rose 1996: 154).

This is how individualist and capitalist spirituality fulfil their function alongside such procedures as job satisfaction surveys, progress reviews and personal development, and through the expertise and techniques of human resources, life coaching, and the like. For Carrette and King (2005: 16), individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality exploit 'the historical respect and "aura of authenticity" of the religious traditions

[whose sacred teachings they appropriate] while at the same time, separating [themselves] from any negative connotations associated with the religious in a modern secular context'. This process of 'rebranding' seeks not so much to validate or reinscribe the sacred traditions but to exploit their cultural cachet for personal and capitalist gain.

The purpose here in questioning the hegemonic imperatives circumscribing the politics of spirituality is not to appeal to some absolute standard of 'authentic' spirituality. As explained in the Introduction, this thesis does not seek to pin down what spirituality means but to investigate *what it does or how it is put to use*. From the optic of governmentality, we see that spirituality is operationalised at the level of conduct, and as Foucault put it, within a more or less open field of possibilities. And if accordingly, the exercise of power, or more precisely any relation of power, is understood as a mode of action upon actions—a way in which certain actions may structure the field of other possible actions—then, immanent to this field of possibilities is the crucial element of freedom: 'Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which *several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments, may be realized*' (Foucault 1982a: 790; emphasis added).

My point, therefore, in critiquing the neoliberal hegemony in the politics of spirituality is to underscore the need for counter-discourses, the search for and articulation of alternative models of spirituality, where different ways of behaving, different reactions and different comportments may be actualised to defuse the

normative construction of selfhood promoted by individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality. I also note here in passing before examining it more closely in Chapter Four, that in his late work Foucault developed this working definition of spirituality: 'a subject acceding to a certain mode of being and to the transformations which the subject must make of himself [sic] in order to accede to this mode of being' (Foucault 1988f: 14). This understanding of spirituality turns on the dual aspect of subjectivity mentioned above, but gives more emphasis to the ways in which the subject cultivates an identity by a conscience and self-knowledge. In individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality, the subject works on himself or herself in order to accede to a mode of being that is supposedly empowered by 'free choice' and entrepreneurship. However, pervasive as they may be, these are not the only ways by which spirituality may be operationalised. What other modes of being—or better, (un)becoming—might spirituality enable?

This question requires a tactical shift from 'paranoid' analyses of the political complicity of 'spirituality', to 'reparative' analyses of counter-hegemonic models of 'spirituality' that 'pay attention to the politics of knowledge, community and questions of social justice' (Carrette and King 2005: 172). To illustrate how trends in contemporary Buddhism invite both 'paranoid' and 'reparative' analyses—how it is both being colonised by and refusing the hegemonic imperatives of individualist and capitalist spirituality—I shall juxtapose a symptomatic reading of the book *White Collar Zen: Using Zen Principles to Overcome Obstacles and Achieve your Career Goals* (Heine 2005) with the aims and objectives of the transnational movement of engaged Buddhism.

The spirituality of *White Collar Zen*

That Buddhism is being colonised by individualist and capitalist spirituality is evident from a quick search on Amazon.com: *Mindfulness and Money: The Buddhist Path of Abundance; What Would Buddha Do At Work? 101 Answers to Workplace Dilemmas*; *Building A Business the Buddhist Way*; and *Enlightened Management: Bring Buddhist Principles to Work*. I choose *White Collar Zen* for a symptomatic reading because its decontextualised readings of Zen Buddhist ideals is especially curious, given that the author Steven Heine is an accomplished Buddhist scholar and professor of religious history. The book is part of a larger project (also called White Collar Zen) involving workshops and conferences on 'Asian wisdom' for the corporate setting. Its cover features an image of a young Caucasian woman dressed in a white collared shirt, sitting cross-legged in a meditation posture with her eyes shut in contemplation. This image of the cross-legged meditating body (which appears on the cover of Carrette and King's book as an apt parody) has become something like an icon in the contemporary mediasphere. Buddhist-related or not, it is readily recognised as a signifier for the therapeutic genres of self-help, 'mind, body, soul', and 'spirituality'. In *White Collar Zen*, in place of a contents page is a 'Game Plan', presented in a square grid of nine boxes that delineates the themes of each chapter, a layout which resembles the conceptual diagrams used at workplace meetings. The 'Game Plan' consists of chapters like 'Applying Zen: On making use of a Zen-based experience of intuitive insight which is not a thought process but a state of existence', 'Everybody Must Get Foxed: Why do obstacles block the path to professional development based on deficiencies in self-discipline?' and 'Seeing the Forest, But Not Missing the Trees: Activating and integrating the Hermit's intuition and the Warrior's spontaneity' (Heine 2005: ix).

In the opening chapter 'Applying Zen', Heine (2005: 4) explains that the book was prompted by a belief that 'the spirituality of Zen' could 'promote the discipline and self-control that contribute to mutually beneficial productivity'. He also says that it is not a text about Zen per se, insofar as it neither offers guidance in meditation or ritual practices nor engages in a study of the history and literature of the tradition. Rather, it is a book *from* Zen, in that it 'adapts traditional ideals and styles of training to the goal of improving interpersonal relations in the professional sphere' (Heine 2005: 4). Yet, despite claiming that it will not give instructions on the practices of Zen, Heine (2005: 5) nevertheless says that the aim of the book is 'to make use of a Zen-based experience of intuitive insight, which is not a thought process but a state of existence,' to help the reader deal with the challenges they face at work, 'like the case of a promotion denied or delayed or an unwanted assignment'. Heine appears to be suggesting that the Zen state of existence, whatever that may entail, is separable from the techniques of contemplation, the ritual environment, and the ethical precepts that constitute it. *White Collar Zen* thus performs a double gesture of, on the one hand, acknowledging the rich history and tradition of Zen, and on the other, portraying 'Zen experience' as something that can be cultivated without any sustained engagement (or at least a degree of engagement) with the embodied practices and customs of the tradition. This allows Heine's discourse to imbue itself with an aura of authenticity associated with Zen and Japanese culture more generally, whilst effacing the hegemonic implications of its decontextualised reading of Zen as being naturally compatible with prevailing neoliberal norms about the corporate workplace and the motivated entrepreneurial individual.

What *White Collar Zen* articulates is arguably a form of individualist and capitalist spirituality, one that exploits the cultural cachet of Japanese aesthetic sensibilities. Consider how Heine offers the ironic Zen saying 'What's the fuss? Every day is a good day!' as a piece of advice for dealing with the stress of working in a corporate environment. He claims that while the saying could be interpreted as 'a naïve affirmation of the status quo' which suggests no need for 'spiritual development, restructuring of priorities, or techniques for enhancement', what it really means is that 'each day can be made good through your capacity for self-control' and by learning 'to gaze beyond the world of ordinary trials and tribulations, beyond joy and sorrow, optimism and pessimism, and other artificial oppositions' (Heine 2005: 21). But perhaps the real irony is that *White Collar Zen*, its iconoclastic pretensions notwithstanding, thoroughly affirms the status quo. Whatever Zen advice it offers about spiritual development, the restructuring of priorities, or techniques of enhancement, it always serves a neoliberal ethos of enterprise. *White Collar Zen* accords with the logics of a therapeutic regime of self whereby the stresses and anxieties of contemporary work are pathologised as symptoms of personal 'spiritual' deficiencies, giving no consideration to how they may be symptoms of broader structural problems. The emphasis in Heine's Buddhist-inflected discourse of spirituality is placed overwhelmingly upon the individual's capacity to make the right decision, to exercise 'free choice', to attain personal achievements and profit. That the parameters for choosing are determined by and reinforce inequitable, exploitative socioeconomic relations remains unquestioned, as evidenced by the following advice on issues that may arise with the overworked or underpaid employee:

> The Zen Mind or Unmoving Mind contributes to the successful professional's leadership skills by at once sharpening the ability to negotiate the intricacies of the channels of hierarchy and stimulating charisma or free-flowing creativity that is unbounded by rules and protocol. The professional administrator, like the Zen master, knows when to disclose or to withhold while weighing the relative strengths of proposals in an imperfect world. Both kinds of leaders have a knack for handling the details of projects and personnel in a careful yet forceful fashion, whether using soft/tender or harsh/tough methods of training. Seeing an employee or trainee overworked and underpaid, they can rectify this with a soothing and indulgent approach as expressed in the Zen saying,
>
> - *Do whatever it takes to stop the baby from crying.*
>
> But, they can also evaluate a colleague or subordinate swiftly and effectively if that is what it takes to create far-reaching remedies. According to another typical epigram,
>
> - *You have to be cruel to be kind.*
>
> (Heine 2005: 22)

The Zen master-like leader, or aspiring leader-to-be, is portrayed here as a spontaneous spiritual warrior, one who is able to relate to others and make important decisions with discerning flexibility. The willingness to do whatever it takes to quell discontent amongst colleagues and subordinates is the key to one's spiritual progress and maturity. Never mind that the problems faced by the colleague or subordinate may be engendered by inequitable or exploitative conditions. To paraphrase Carrette and King (2005: 128), Heine's discourse portrays Zen in such a way as if it

'*unquestioningly* supports privatisation or consumerist values or derives its significance from the benefits to be gained from maximising worker efficiency and/or production or profits'. A distinction should be made here between the use of spirituality to cultivate business or workplace ethics, and the use of spirituality in service of prevailing institutional practices and normative regimes. In the former, ethical principles are drawn from sacred and/or philosophical traditions to countervail exploitative or inequitable practices. The latter, however, entails the subsumption of ethics into the dominant culture, rather than an exploration of how the ethical demands of the sacred or philosophical traditions whose cultural cachet they exploit may in fact require a substantial re-evaluation of prevailing habits and arrangements. *White Collar Zen* belongs to the latter category. In portraying a natural compatibility between Zen conceptualisations of reflexive self-awareness and the therapeutic conceptualisations of self-fulfilment and enterprise, what *White Collar Zen* attempts to do is arguably to render Zen as the metaphysical ground of contemporary corporate culture—what is in effect the neoliberal colonisation of Buddhist sacred teachings.

The spirituality of engaged Buddhism

White Collar Zen's model of Buddhist spirituality stands in stark contrast to the model of spirituality articulated by the transnational Engaged Buddhism movement:

> [E]ngaged Buddhism is an international movement whose participants seek to apply the Buddhist ideals of wisdom and compassion to present day social, political, and environmental issues. Although Buddhism has typically given priority to the spiritual liberation of the individual, engaged Buddhists look for

> ways to expand the notion of spiritual liberation to other arenas (without abandoning the essential role of individual enlightenment)' (Kraft 1999: 9).

Put simply, engaged or socially-engaged Buddhism entails 'both inner and outer work': 'We must change the world, we must change ourselves, and we must change ourselves in order to change the world' (Kraft 1999: 10). 'Engaged Buddhism' and 'socially-engaged Buddhism' are contemporary terms, but this does not imply that the diverse forms of Buddhism in the past were ever 'un-engaged'. Making what is in effect an argument against the privatisation of spirituality, Buddhist scholar-practitioner John Makransky has underscored the need for contemporary (and especially 'Western'-ised) laypeople who may favour an independent, deinstitutionalised engagement with Buddhism, to be reflexive about the romantic idealisation of 'authentic' Buddhist spirituality as a solitary, personal endeavour. For such as it is, 'adepts, ritual specialists, and scholars' in Buddhist cultures throughout history 'have routinely applied Buddhist practices to "worldly" needs and desires of their societies' (Makransky 2008: 138). Makransky makes this point to develop the case for an interdisciplinary and socially-engaged mode of academic Buddhist discourse called Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. The next chapter explains how Buddhist critical-constructive reflection serves as the main methodological framework for this thesis. For the present discussion, I flag this emergent discourse to clarify that if there is anything 'new' about engaged Buddhism it is due to the global challenges facing the world today, which require new methods of research and activism. The trend towards individualised and capitalist spirituality is one such challenge to be addressed. In fact, a response is already underway in the activities of engaged Buddhism.

According to Ken Jones (2003), there are at present three overarching approaches to engaged Buddhism: alternative societal models; social welfare and charity work; and radical activism. An example that explores alternative societal models is the Triratna Buddhist Community, an international fellowship of Buddhists formerly known as the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order, whose network extends from Europe, Australia and New Zealand, to North and South America, India, and China. Amongst its initiatives is a lay residential community project that builds 'communal living situations with the aims of living simply, developing friendships with like-minded people, and supporting and encouraging each others' attempts to practise the Dharma [Pali: Dhamma; as a proper noun it connotes the teachings of the Buddha]' (Triratna Buddhist Community 2012). The Tzu Chi ('compassionate relief') Foundation, the largest NGO of the Chinese-speaking world, is a movement whose chief activity is social welfare and charity work. Recent initiatives include humanitarian aid to the victims of Hurricane Sandy in New York and refugees in Jordan who have fled the Syrian civil war. An example that pursues radical activism is the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF). Emerging in 1978 out of the early contributions of prominent Euro-American lay Buddhist spokespeople, BPF's initiatives include training and educational programs; for example, a twelve-month-long crowd-sourced dialogical curriculum entitled 'The System Stinks', which addresses such themes as 'Theft of Land, Theft of Culture', 'The Lies That Build Empire', and 'Gender Freedom': 'If the whole system stinks, we need to identify what causes the smell and neutralize it at the source. A systemic problem requires a systemic solution [...] However we define "The System," we are it and it is us—there is no separation' (Buddhist Peace Fellowship 2012).

Regardless of their specific areas of activism, the different approaches to engaged Buddhism are predicated on the ethical precepts of Buddhism as well as a commitment to cultivate mental clarity and composure, or what is described in discourses on mediation as mindfulness.[2] Take for example the Tiếp Hiện or the Order of Interbeing founded by Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese Zen monk and exile whose peace activism prompted his nomination by Martin Luther King Jr. for the Nobel Peace Prize of 1967. The idea of 'interbeing' derives from the coterminous Buddhist sacred truths of impermanence (*anicca*) and not-self (*anattā*), both of which point to the interdependence of all phenomena: the mutually constitutive relation between the personal and social, self and other (see Chapter Five). Nhat Hanh's vision looks towards 'communities of resistance' that would embrace the 'long term struggle', whose participants would 'stand up more visibly and perhaps with more risk' (Berrigan and Nhat Hanh 1975: 117, 121). Resistance, Nhat Hanh says, 'means opposition to being invaded, occupied, assaulted, and destroyed by the system. The purpose of resistance [...] is to seek the healing of yourself in order to be able to see clearly' (Berrigan and Nhat Hanh 1975: 122) Functionally, Tiếp Hiện resembles 'a Buddhist version of liberation theology' (Hattam 2004: 183). Monastics and lay members of the order cultivate an ethico-political spiritual way of life, pursuing the praxis-ideal of 'interbeing' through coterminous 'healing' and 'resistance', or what

[2] The basic Five Precepts taken by Buddhists are: 1.) to abstain from killing; 2.) to abstain from stealing or taking what is not given; 3.) to abstain from sexual misconduct; 4.) to abstain from false speech; 5.) to abstain from intoxicants that cause heedlessness. These precepts can be rendered more positively as the commitment to: 1.) non-harm and compassionate action; 2.) contentment and generosity; 3.) responsible and respectful erotic relations; 4.) honesty and openness; 5.) clarity and composure of the body-mind

Nhat Hanh encapsulates as the Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings. To cite just two of them:

> *Openness* - Aware of the suffering created by fanaticism and intolerance, we are determined not to be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory, or ideology, even Buddhist ones [...] We understand that fanaticism in its many forms is the result of perceiving things in a dualistic and discriminative manner. We will train ourselves to look at everything with openness and the insight of interbeing in order to transform dogmatism and violence in ourselves and in the world.
>
> *Non-attachment* - Aware of the suffering created by attachment to views and wrong perceptions, we are determined to avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. We are committed to learning and practicing non-attachment to views and being open to others' experiences and insights in order to benefit from the collective wisdom. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Insight is revealed through the practice of compassionate listening, deep looking, and letting go of notions rather than through the accumulation of intellectual knowledge. We are aware that the knowledge we presently possess is not changeless, absolute truth. Truth is found in life, and we will observe life within and around us in every moment, ready to learn throughout our lives (Plum Village 2012).

The Fourteen Mindfulness Trainings rework the precepts and practices constituting the Noble Eightfold Path[3] into a manifesto that articulates at once the means and ends of both personal spiritual cultivation *and* collective social activism. 'Healing' and 'resistance' are interlinked such that the care for the spiritual wellbeing of self flips over into compassion for the suffering of others and vice versa. That the objectives of the Order are delineated as 'mindfulness trainings' is indicative of the role of meditation practice—or more precisely, the transformative potential of meditative experience—as the foundation for spiritual development and social engagement. For Nhat Hanh, it is important to address any misperceived divide between 'practice' and 'non-practice', and crucial for contemporary Buddhists to guard against any misunderstanding and misapplication of meditation as a means to 'escape from society'. Rather, meditation is to be cultivated as a way to strengthen one's 'capacity to reintegrate into society' and transform psychosocial alienation (Nhat Hanh 1987: 94). As per the praxis-ideal of Tiếp Hiện (i.e. 'to be in touch with and to continue to make it here and now and to realise'), Nhat Hanh (1993: 14) says, 'Means and ends cannot be different'. Or as Buddhist social theorist Robert Hattam (2004: 186) glosses it, the praxis-ideal of 'interbeing' embraces all aspects of our 'everyday lives as grist for transformation. For a Buddhist, there is nothing in life that is outside that transformative process'. To be more exact, then, 'interbeing' functions linguistically as a gerund: the action-ing of 'interbeing' is the generative force of spiritual-social praxis. If 'interbeing' pursues peacemaking goals, then as Nhat Hanh (1991) points out, peace is not an end but a path that opens out towards a horizon of hope and fresh possibilities with 'every step'.

[3] See Chapter Five; footnote 2.

The question of meditative experience

White Collar Zen and the engaged Buddhism of The Order of Interbeing, are two different models of Buddhist spirituality. But what they share is an appeal to the transformative potential of meditative experience. In *White Collar Zen* Heine depicts the Zen Mind or Unmoving Mind as a kind of direct, in-the-moment intuitive capacity to make discerning and spontaneous actions. What is problematic about Heine's claim is not whether such a quality of awareness, clarity, and composure is attainable or not, but that he effaces, and renders as superfluous, the commitment to the ethical precepts that form the basis of Buddhist spirituality and upon which the cultivation of meditation as an ongoing life-practice must be anchored. Shorn of its traditional ethical trappings, the benefit to be garnered from meditation practice is easily equated with individualist and capitalist gains. Thich Nhat Hanh, on the other hand, articulates the practice of meditation, the cultivation of mindfulness, as inseparable from the ethical work of transforming self-serving habits, which is at once a commitment to compassionate social engagement. What both *White Collar Zen* and Thich Nhat Hanh's engaged Buddhist discourse turn on is the question of meditative experience and the ethico-political possibilities of the practice. This is where an opening for a 'reparative' analysis of the politics of spirituality presents itself in the context of an emergent 'Western Buddhism'. How might we engage with the claims of engaged Buddhism sympathetically—in good faith—so as to understand the ethical and political implications of meditation practice, the micropolitical function of Buddhist spiritual self-cultivation? A 'reparative' analysis would stand in contrast with Slavoj Žižek's reading of 'Western Buddhism' as the ideological supplement to late-capitalism. He claims that Western interest in Asian sacred traditions like Buddhism and Taoism:

> [...] offers a way out of [the predicament and contradictions of late-capitalism] which definitely works better than the desperate escape into old traditions: instead of trying to cope with the accelerating rhythm of technological progress and social changes, one should rather renounce the very endeavor to retain control over what goes on, rejecting it as the expression of the modern logic of domination—one should instead, "let oneself go," drift along, while retaining an inner distance and indifference towards the mad dance of this accelerated process, a distance based on the insight that this social and technological upheaval is ultimately just a non-substantial proliferation of semblances which do not really concern the innermost kernel of our being (Žižek 2001: 12-13).

For Žižek, 'Western Buddhism' functions as an object of fetish in our supposedly post-ideological era, suggesting that Buddhism's meditative stance 'enables you to fully participate in the frantic pace of the capitalist game while sustaining the perception that you are not really in it; that you are well aware of how worthless this spectacle is; and that what really matters to you is the peace of the inner Self to which you know you can always withdraw' (2001: 15). He even muses that if Weber were alive today, he would supplement his *Protestant Ethic* with a second volume entitled, *The Taoist Ethic and the Spirit of Global Capitalism* (Žižek 2001: 13). It would be apparent even to the non-Buddhist reader that Žižek does not at any point engage with primary sources on Buddhist thought and practice, or even contemporary Western scholarship on Buddhism. His understanding of Buddhist ideals is questionable, to say the least (see Møllgaard 2008). Nevertheless, his arguments are not entirely invalid if we read them

not so much as a critique of Buddhism but of the econo-political conditions in which 'Western Buddhism' is taking shape. In this regard, Žižek's discourse joins Carrette and King's study in underscoring the urgency of intervening in the trend of the individualist and capitalist appropriations of Buddhist sacred ideals about the 'inner life' and techniques of spiritual cultivation. Against the backdrop of the politics of spirituality, the epistemic intervention of my research is to clarify how the Buddhist meditative stance is not, as Žižek claims, predicated on an inner Self to which one could withdraw for comfort or shelter from the challenges of the contemporary life. Rather, the Buddhist meditative stance is predicated on the *absence* of any enduring Inner Self. As we shall see, Buddhist meditation practice is a way to cultivate insight into the principal Buddhist doctrines of *anicca* (impermanence), anattā (not-self), and *dukkha* (existential dissatisfactoriness generated by craving for fixity and self-presence); the progressive realisation of these sacred truths could potentially defuse normative modes of (neoliberal) subjectivity and nourish compassionate social engagement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to show how cultural studies could draw on the existing ethos of engagement in its own archive to redress its neglect of questions about religion and spirituality. A spiritually-engaged cultural studies is one that would stage a hospitable encounter between sacred understandings and the secular knowledge-practices of the academy to invite mutual learning: new ways of investigating such themes as subjectivity, corporality, and ethical self-fashioning. As Barcan and Johnston suggest:

> Such a model [what this thesis proposes as a spiritually-engaged cultural studies] would call up another kind of Foucauldian response—one that stressed less the normatively subjectifying power of these practices so much as their potential to create new types of bodily experience and, potentially, new aspects of subjectivity. But to our mind, [the Foucauldian approach] needs augmentation and enrichment, in ways that do not so much contradict it as shift analytical focus. This involves a number of conceptual moves. First, the programmatic pessimism of Foucauldian accounts of selfhood needs to be reconsidered [...] this would mean evading the implicit assumption that self-constitution via confessional and/or corporeal rituals is a priori conservatizing, politically complicit, or intellectually weak. It would also mean moving past cultural studies' foundational secularism and being open to a rethinking of notions of spirit—at the very least as an object of discursive analysis, and potentially as a way into re-theorising the mind/body split and the nature of matter (Barcan and Johnston 2005).

In examining the politics of spirituality and the productive possibilities of a sympathetic engagement with Buddhist sacred thought and practice, this opening chapter of the thesis has, in a manner of speaking, refused the blackmail of any 'foundational secularism' according to which cultural studies must supposedly abide. In so doing, the chapter takes the first step towards exploring different ways of using the Foucauldian 'toolbox' which has been influential in cultural studies. As will be shown in later chapters, these tools can be very helpful in shedding light on the ethico-political functions of Buddhist meditation. Through a Foucauldian analysis of a Buddhist art of living—an analysis that will be connected with current thinking on the

micropolitics of affect and becoming—this thesis will show how sustained effort at embodying Buddhist sacred truth claims about the impermanence of the body-mind and what is called 'not-self', may foster the ethos of engagement necessary for the micropolitical pursuit of new social relations and freedoms: the movement of becoming otherwise or unbecoming. The thesis thus makes an original contribution to research by mapping new areas of dialogue between cultural research and the wider project of engaged Buddhism. This spiritually-engaged exercise involving hospitality between sacred and scholarly praxis-ideals will culminate in a hypothesis about the role of faith in cultural studies and micropolitics more generally. Inasmuch as this sacred-scholarly exercise performs cultural studies work via an enunciative practice (Probyn 1993, Couldry 1996) of a culturally embedded, emergent (social) self, it would have to entail a certain act of 'coming out' of the 'religious closet', as it were. The task, then, for the next chapter in this profession of faith is to contextualise by way of an autoethnographic account, the thesis's methodology and this authoring-I's hybridised approach to Buddhism as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert.

CHAPTER TWO

Methods, Traditions, Liminal Identities

A 'cultural thing'

'Buddhism', he had thought, was merely a part of his cultural heritage as a third-generation Chinese migrant born in Singapore. He still recalls the smell of burning incense in his grandmother's flat, wafting from an altar where Guanyin sits amongst offerings of fruit and rice cake, watching over him with an ever-serene gaze as he chucked yet another tantrum after losing a game to his brother. 'She was the kindest, most benevolent person I've ever known', he often tells his partner. 'She'd sometimes slip us small amounts of money together with a small amulet she got from the temple for our blessings.' He always accepted the gift even though he had learnt at the Christian primary school he attended that those things were superstitious practices of misguided beliefs. It was a gift difficult to refuse (not least because of the monetary incentive involved). Their grandmother's was where the extended family gathered most Friday evenings. While the adults chatted about adult matters, he and his cousins would re-enact with whatever props they could conjure - from coat hangers, unused bath towels, and discarded toilet paper roll - scenes from the mythical worlds of Journey to the West and Shaolin kung fu films. If he had known anything about this 'cultural thing' he inherited, it was a world of imagination and fun, of fond memories but also grief ...

The monks have started their chants again

A singsong litany of words

he does not understand

The night closes in, hot and humid

His sits cross-legged, head bowed

A sigh

that greets the plumes of incense smoke

Hanging heavy in the air

A farewell no one wanted

A departure not expected

This is a wake

He must stay awake

'She was the kindest, most benevolent person I've ever known'

he often tells his partner

'Awakening' now orientates his life as a horizon of faith. Having migrated to Australia in 2002, he discovered Western interpretations of Buddhism during a period of personal crisis, and now describes himself as a Buddhist who not only pursues the soteriological aims of the Noble Eightfold Path, but also researches contemporary articulations of the religion in pursuit of an academic profession.

This chapter constructs the thesis's methodology by picking up on Richard King's (1999: 53) proposal in *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India, and the "Mystic East'*, that one way for the discipline of religious studies to overcome the persisting influence of Orientalism and the secularist, intellectual hubris of social-scientific norms in its engagement with non-Western traditions is to redefine itself as a specific form of interdisciplinary *cultural studies*. In this model 'no particular methodological approach should be seen as immune from critical examination and interaction with the perspectives and approaches of other methodologies' (King 1999: 54). Such a multiperspectival, polymethodical, and above all *self-reflexive* exercise offers a means to sharpen critical awareness about any Euro-Christocentric biases, critical oversights and ideological imperatives circumscribing the study of non-Western traditions. In the academic study of Buddhism, one such approach is emerging in what has been described as 'Buddhist theology', and more recently, 'Buddhist critical-construction' (Cabezón 2000; Makransky 2008). Articulated by academics who are also practicing Buddhists, Buddhist theology or critical-constructive reflection brings the sacred and scholarly pursuits of the Buddhist practitioner-scholar together into a mutually supportive relationship, cross-fertilising Buddhist understandings with the knowledge-practices of the academy to facilitate the adaptation of Buddhism in new contexts as it negotiates the challenges of the contemporary world.

This chapter will first explicate the arguments for Buddhist theology and critical-constructive reflection to set up the methodological framework of the thesis. Insofar as Buddhist theology/critical-constructive reflection is predicated on a commitment to always be mindful of the colonial, Orientalist heritage of academic Buddhist Studies—that is, to work reflexively with the role of the academic subject in its own

discourse—my argument is that it shares the ethical stance of cultural studies (Introduction), performing a double-vector decision to always interrogate its own disciplinarity, limits and exclusions. The chapter experiments with a broadly autoethnographic style of writing-analysis to reflect on the tensions felt in this authoring-I's researching of the historical emergence of, and participation in, an emergent 'Western Buddhism'. From the perspective of a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, it will elucidate how Buddhism today, 'Western' or otherwise, is articulated in tension with the dominant discourses of modernity. By weaving historical analyses with personal anecdotes, this chapter contextualises the thesis's hybridised approach to Buddhist thought and practice.

A preliminary note about 'Western Buddhism'

It is necessary to clarify at the outset my use of the term 'Western Buddhism' before we examine Buddhist theology/critical-constructive reflection. While 'Western Buddhism' is widely used in academic and popular discourses to refer to the forms of Buddhism taking shape in Western societies, it is important to recognise that its boundaries are amorphous and indeterminate. Nevertheless, its genealogy can at least be traced to European encounters with Asian Buddhist cultures under colonialism that prompted the trend of 'modern Buddhism' or 'Buddhist modernism' (Almond 1988; Lopez 1995, 2008; McMahan 2008; Sharf 1995). Although 'modernism' here does connote the epistemological paradigms of Western modernity, its primary purpose is to designate the general notion of *contemporaneity*. Buddhist modernism thus refers to the ongoing, multidimensional and transnational processes by which the varied forms of Buddhism are attuned to the social, cultural, political, and intellectual frameworks of their historical milieu. 'Western Buddhism' develops out of this broad historical

continuum of Buddhist modernism. However, one is irreducible to the other. As will be shown later (but I underscore this point now to avoid any confusion) the trend of Buddhist modernism is a 'cocreation of Asians, Europeans, and Americans'; and accordingly, 'Western Buddhism' (or 'American Buddhism' or 'new Buddhism') ought to be regarded as 'a facet of a more global network of movements that are not the exclusive product of one geographic or cultural setting' (McMahan 2008: 6). Hence, some 'Western Buddhist' formations distinguish themselves with non-sectarian interpretations that rearticulate Buddhist insights with the understandings of other sacred traditions and/or secular (post)modernity, whilst others maintain ties with the sects/lineages of Asian Buddhism that are themselves undergoing a concomitant process of redefinition. 'Western Buddhism', in other words, is not so much a unified movement as an evolving constellation of diverse and sometimes conflicting ideas and practices.

This thesis's use of the term 'Western Buddhism' should therefore be understood accordingly: I employ the term not to universalise it or conflate it with 'Buddhist modernism' or 'modern Buddhism', but rather for the heuristic purpose of drawing attention to the tensions generated by Buddhism's encounter with Western modernity. Refracted through Western cultural and intellectual lenses, these tensions reverberate through such questions as whether Buddhism is properly a religion or philosophy, if it is rationalistic or even scientific, and the question of the ethical and political role of meditation practice in the contemporary world.

Buddhist theology and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection

In his contribution to the anthology *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars* (Jackson and Makransky 2000), José Ignacio Cabezón triangulates existing approaches to Buddhism to construct a framework for the study of 'Western Buddhism' (and contemporary Buddhist formations more generally). At one corner is the academic discipline of Buddhology. Inheriting the post-Enlightenment secularist ethos of early Western Buddhist scholarship, it engages in the detached, 'objective' historical and/or philological study of Buddhism. At another corner are formal Buddhist movements and organisations. As offshoots of traditional Asian Buddhist lineages, they are primarily concerned with transmitting Buddhist soteriology, defending its tenets against other religions and/or secular modernity. At the third corner is what might be called 'popular Buddhism'. Disseminated across the global mediasphere, popular Buddhism is primarily concerned with making Buddhist understandings accessible to the widest possible audience (Cabezón 2000: 27-29).

The respective methodologies of these existing discourses could be characterised as: positivism, traditionalism, and populism. Cabezón (2000: 27) stresses the importance of recognising the implicit ideologies of these discourses, especially in their more reductive versions, namely that: 1.) the positivist approach fails to apprehend the role of the subject in its own discourse; 2.) the traditionalist approach overlooks how doctrine and practice are always context-dependent; and 3.) the populist approach misconstrues rigorous scholarship, religious commitment, and the honouring of tradition as superfluous or anathema to the task of contemporising Buddhist knowledge-practices. To guard against these problems, Cabezón argues for the development of a Buddhist theology. While Buddhism does not posit a creator God,

Cabezón (2000a: 25-26) evokes 'theology' in the functional rather than etymological sense of the term in order to make the case for an approach in the academic study of Buddhism that would admit the sacred truth claims of the tradition, explaining that he employs the terms as a strategic, political move to argue for Buddhist theology's place 'within Buddhist Studies and alongside the field of, for example, academic Christian theology.'

Buddhist theology would interrogate the ideological assumptions of the three existing approaches but at the same time also adopt their more productive dimensions, recognising that: 1.) the historico-textual analyses of Buddhology and the underlying commitment to non-sectarian, free and open inquiry is pivotal to its own task; 2.) the commitment to continuity, devotion to practice, and sense of piety of traditional Buddhist scholasticism can similarly inspire its own endeavours; and 3.) the emphasis on the quotidian in popular Buddhism is a reminder that its own task has to be a constructive one that attunes Buddhist soteriology to contemporary circumstances (Cabezón 2000a: 29). Cabezón (2000b: 136) thus characterises Buddhist theology as 'a form of normative discourse that situates itself explicitly and self-consciously within the Buddhist tradition, and that, abiding by accepted scholarly norms, critically plumbs the tradition with a view to making relevant in a public and open fashion the meaning and truth of Buddhist doctrine and practice'.

More recently, John Makransky (2008: 114) reformulates the arguments for Buddhist theology in terms of a *Buddhist critical-constructive reflection* that pursues two co-constitutive aims: firstly, 'to explore how academic religious studies may newly inform Buddhist understanding of their own traditions, and thereby serve as a

resource for Buddhist communities in their adaptations to the modern world'; and secondly, 'to explore how Buddhist modes of understanding may help address the challenges of modern societies and inform current issues'. The first aim of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection considers the ways in which historical and socio-textual studies have informed, and might continue to inform, Buddhist understandings and institutions. For instance, there is a tendency for followers of the Theravada tradition (practised predominantly in Sri Lanka, Burma, Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand) to valorise the earliest extant teachings preserved in the Pali Canon as the 'perfect' or most 'authentic' conservators of the own words of Buddha, which were initially preserved via oral transmission. However, historical research has shown that these texts resulted from centuries of development and redaction, and that the re-systematisation and re-valorisation of the canon in modern history reflects, in part at least, the influence of Western criteria of archivisation, translation, and interpretation. Likewise, the depiction of the Buddha as the historical teacher of Mahayana teachings (practised predominantly in East and Central Asia) is shown to be a literary device for legitimising the tradition according to prevailing standards of authorisation (Makransky 2008: 119-120). In short, the academic study of Buddhism investigates how Buddhist understandings and institutions are always historically and culturally conditioned.

The purpose of historical, anthropological, social and/or cultural-textual analyses is not to denigrate the sacred truth claims of Buddhist traditions. As Makransky stresses, the Buddhist practitioner-scholar ought not merely adopt an 'outsider' stance to critique the hegemonic approaches of Buddhist commentators. Insofar as one also engages with Buddhist practices and communities as an 'insider', scholarly critique

ought to also adapt research findings to existing Buddhist formations, thereby 'strengthening their ability to meet the historical consciousness of the modern world by updating their understanding of the historical nature of their own texts and institutions' (Makransky 2008: 125). If Buddhist understandings and institutions are always historically conditioned and reflect the ways in which the communities of different times and places have attuned Buddhist doctrine and practice to their constitutive contexts, then, instead of reifying the orthodoxies of one's tradition as a verbatim record of the Buddha's words from thousands of years ago to secure legitimacy—an anachronistic exercise that fuels sectarianism, to say the least—they could be more fruitfully regarded as 'a record of diverse cultural adaptations of Buddha Dharma that can inform the current adaptations necessary to meet present cultures' (Makransky 2008: 129). To inform current Buddhist formations and facilitate their adaptations to the contemporary world, Buddhist critical-construction could consider the ways in which the Buddha's teachings have been adapted in the past in traditional Asian Buddhist cultures so as to pursue, for instance, such inquiries:

> How did Buddhist teachings become newly understood, ordered and articulated through the symbolic and linguistic patterns of those cultures? How did such adaptations meet the culturally conditioned mentalities and concerns of people in those settings? What systematic Buddhist visions were newly constructed to hold the particulars of doctrine and practice together in that context, both to meet social needs and to impart what was viewed as a complete path of awakening in its full depth? What figures, institutions and cultural strategies were used to authorize the adaptation of teaching and practice in those ways? (Makransky 2008: 144)

The second aim considers how Buddhist understandings and institutions have informed, and might continue to inform current ethical, social, and political issues. Accordingly, it is important that contemporary Buddhists, 'Western' or otherwise, do not cling onto the view that 'pure' Buddhist soteriology is unconcerned with this-worldly affairs. Tinged with Orientalist idealisations of Eastern spirituality, this romantic ideology ignores how 'adepts, ritual specialists, and scholars' in Buddhist cultures throughout history 'have routinely applied Buddhist practices to "worldly" needs and desires of their societies'—like the need to develop ethical frameworks for wider society, or the desire to assist the disadvantaged and the needy (Makransky 2008: 138). The view that Buddhist sacred pursuits ought to be insulated from worldly concerns is thus a myopic one that underappreciates the practical role of mundane applications of Buddhist ideals. Engagement with 'worldly' affairs not only represents a means for Buddhist constituencies to enact goodwill and compassion; it can also serve to nourish the growth of the tradition by demonstrating to existing lay supporters, as well as those in new cultural environments, the practical and continuing relevance of Buddhist understandings and institutions. Buddhist critical-constructive reflection could support the continuing development of Buddhism by exploring new interfaces between Buddhism, academia, and society with such inquiries:

> What, in current circumstances, is essential to draw upon from our traditions of thought and practice for this context, in dialogue with these people with these culturally conditioned needs, desires and assumptions? Which teachings and practices are to be understood, highlighted, ordered and communicated and in

> what ways for contemporary people? What systematic visions in our time are to hold the particulars of Buddhist teaching and practice together? Who can appropriately authorize the adaptation of teaching and practice to these new settings and mentalities—what individuals and communities of oversight, and what internal criteria of prior traditions that remain relevant today? (Makransky 2008: 136)

The modes of inquiry suggested here, when balanced with the historical, anthropological, social, and/or cultural-textual analyses outlined above, allows Buddhist critical-constructive reflection to honour tradition and heritage, without losing sight of the relations of power and hegemonic imperatives that constitute its own attempt at contemporising Buddhism. Buddhist critical-constructive reflection thus offers an instructive methodological framework for this thesis's overarching investigation of the politics of spirituality (the contemporary cultural space within which Buddhist understanding and practice are contested), and the role of faith in academia and micropolitics (since Buddhist critical-constructive reflection's aim of developing new interfaces between scholarly practice, sacred pursuit, and social engagement is predicated on an ethos of intellectual hospitality that invites sympathetic engagement with cultural studies and the question of faith). In effect, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection is participating in the larger project of engaged Buddhism (Chapter One), which the think tank Think Sangha suggests, is to be developed through a 'trialectic' of scholarly inquiry, spiritual practice, and social activism (quoted in Hattam 2004: 200). Buddhist critical-constructive reflection represents one example of this trialectic, figuring as a prismatic lens that can be angled in multiple directions and tinted with the varied hues of academic and

Buddhist knowledge practices to refract and cast new light on the challenges facing Buddhism and the contemporary world.[1]

This thesis's engagement with Buddhism is informed by the hospitable scholarly ethos of Buddhist theology and its methodology is based on Buddhist critical-constructive reflection (henceforth, to be succinct, I will employ only the latter designation). The dialogical exchanges I stage with a sacred-scholarly pursuit of Buddhism and poststructuralist-inflected cultural research will explore pathways towards a spiritually-engaged cultural studies and contribute to an emergent Buddhist social theory, both of which are ways to intervene in a politics of spirituality. The task for the rest of the chapter is to ground the self-reflexive ethos of the thesis on a historical contextualisation of the authoring-I's hybridised approach to Buddhism. If the development of new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society must be supported by critical reflexivity about the Eurocentric hegemony circumscribing the academic study of Buddhism, then, regardless of the kinds of research Buddhist critical-constructive reflection develops, it is crucial that Buddhist practitioner-scholars do not subordinate their own affective investment, anticipatory confidence, or faith in Buddhist sacred truth claims, under the will to knowledge-power of the secular academy. In other words, they must be prepared to 'come out' of the so-called 'religious closet', as previously suggested, or at least consider the productiveness of allowing the space to do so.

[1] Some models of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection include: Harvard Divinity School's Buddhist ministry program, which is exploring avenues for practising Buddhist graduate students to engage in pastoral work and practical theology; the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy in Boston, which is exploring new interfaces between modern psychology, psychotherapy, and Buddhist meditation; and research centres in American, Japanese, and Taiwanese universities, which are exploring new relationships between Buddhist traditions and contemporary academic disciplines in their study of Buddhism and society (Makransky 2008: 147).

Autoethnographical reflections of a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert

As part of my 'coming out', I began this chapter with personal reflections about my emergent subjectivity as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert. These reflections are part of a paper entitled, 'The autoethnographic genre and Buddhist studies: reflections of a postcolonial "Western Buddhist" convert' (Ng 2012b), where I narrate anecdotes of my engagement with Buddhism alongside historical research on the processes of Buddhist modernism (and particularly the colonial relations of power that shaped the emergence of Buddhist discourse in the West) to explore the place of autoethnography in Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. I revisit below the autoethnographic themes of the paper to reflect on my ambivalent relation to 'Western Buddhism', and more pertinently, to contextualise the thesis's hybridised approach to Buddhism.

Autoethnography is a genre of writing and research that foregrounds the connection between the personal and the cultural, 'a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context' (Reed-Danahay 1997: 9). It seeks to 'describe and systematically analyze (*graphy*) personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*)' (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011: unpag.). The relative emphasis on 'graphy', 'ethno', and 'auto' may vary from work to work, but regardless of the form it takes there is on the whole a combination of the characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. Rather than construct knowledge with 'analytical distance or detachment', autoethnography constructs 'partial, plural, incomplete, and contingent understanding' (Denzin 2003: 8). Autoethnography, in other words, is enabled by the postmodern and postcolonial turn in critical thinking, particularly the

poststructuralist decentring of the self-identical, self-knowing Cartesian *cogito*. Autoethnography should therefore avoid essentialising any transcendental subject in its self-narratives and endeavour to construct texts that 'stress the (im)possibilities of writing the self from a fractured and fragmented subject position', texts where 'genres and speaking positions proliferate' to 'foreground the dialogic relationship between the self and his or her tenuous and particular social/cultural/historical locations' (Gannon 2006: 475). In amplifying authorial voice, autoethnography 'is part of a corrective movement against colonizing ethnographic practices that erased the subjectivity of the researcher while granting him or her absolute authority for representing "the other" of the research' (Gannon 2006: 475).

This chapter experiments with a 'layered account', which situates 'the author's experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature'; it weaves together vignettes, reflexivity, multiple voices, and introspection to emphasise the 'procedural nature of research' (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2011: unpag; Ellis 1991). The aim is to 'invoke' readers to enter into the 'emergent experience' of doing and writing research (Ronai 1992: 123), conceive of identity as taking shape through an 'emergent process' (Rambo 2005: 583), and consider how evocative texts could be as useful as abstract analyses for developing academic knowledge (Ronai 1995; 1996). I offer a layered account here to contextualise my hybridised approach to Buddhism, and especially my ambivalent relation to the emergent 'Western Buddhism'. And where appropriate, I will also interweave personal anecdotes and reflections into the analyses of the chapters to follow, so as to highlight the tensions (hopefully, productive ones) that arise out of this ongoing attempt to cultivate reciprocity between the sacred and the scholarly.

I am someone who would pass for a 'Western Buddhist' insofar as my 'conversion' to and ongoing pursuit of Buddhist sacred truth claims is performed via engagements with Western academic knowledge-practices as well as popular discourses of Buddhism-in-translation. It had occurred to me in the early stages of my research that the ways in which I engage with 'Western Buddhism' resemble the practices of fan subcultures. For example, I participate in an online Buddhist discussion forum called DhammaWheel, which, functioning analogously to entertainment fan forums, offers a space for the collective production of non-institutional, lay Buddhist knowledge. Mirroring the discursive practices of media fan communities, members of DhammaWheel discuss Buddhism in a 'shared interpretive context, one that facilitates the emergence of jointly produced meanings' (Dawson 2004: 84; see also Jenkins 1992).

What had inspired me about cultural studies scholarship on media fandom and subcultural formations is how it does not focus exclusively on the hegemonic imperatives circumscribing the consumerist habits of media fans, but also explores how subcultural knowledge-practices might inform critical understanding of the micropolitics constituting everyday life and even be a source of cultural theory. Researchers in this area of cultural studies recognise that fans of popular cultural formations often perform activities that resemble academic work, such as the archiving and analysis of cultural texts (Hills 2002; Jenkins 1992; McKee 2002; McLaughlin 1996). They also recognise that, to some degree or another, academics themselves are 'fans'. Even if they are not fans of any particular popular cultural formation, it is arguable that the affective connections they have towards scholarly figures and canons are not dissimilar to the affective connections fans have towards

their objects of adoration or pursuit. Hence, researchers of media fandom have had to work reflexively with the moral dualisms posited between the academic-fan and fan-academic (Hills 2002), be critically aware of the constitutive contexts of its inquiries and the role of the subject in its own discourse. One of the ways in which media fan studies have attempted to address the problematics constituting its discourse is to fold the media interests or fan activities of the researcher themselves into their critical analyses—that is, to work autoethnographically (for example, Bukatman 1994; Fiske 1990; Wise 1990; Wolff 1995). The aim of autoethnography is not simply to indicate that the 'personal is political' but to show that 'the personal—the heart of the self and the core our cultural identity as we perform it—is always borrowed and alien' (Hills 2002: 72).

The problematics facing Buddhist theology/critical-constructive reflection are thus homologous with the problematics facing studies of media fandom and other subcultural formations. While this points to certain parallels between subcultural formations and religious ones that warrant further investigation (see for example, *The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*; Clark and Clanton 2012; Lynch 2007; Possamai 2005), my point here is not to equate the two. Rather, it is merely to highlight that the self-reflexive scholarly ethos of engagement in these modes of sociocultural analyses lends itself well to the purposes of the thesis. In view of these shared problematics, I examined the discussions on DhammaWheel and interrogated 'Western Buddhist' attitudes towards faith in order to reflect on cultural studies' neglect of questions about religion (Ng 2011; Chapter Seven). My analysis took as its point of reference a discussion thread entitled 'Why is Buddhist faith not blind?' (DhammaWheel 2009a). The discussion begins with a forum member named mikenz66 questioning (another

member) jcsuperstar's assertion that whilst Buddhist soteriology 'takes a lot of faith', it doesn't involve 'blind faith like other religions do'. Chapter Seven will return to examine this discussion thread more closely, and treat the responses by mikenez66 and other DhammaWheel members as a source of cultural theory to think through the question of faith. For the present purpose, consider mikenz66's counterclaims:

> I mean, basically I have accepted the proposition: "Develop sila [ethical conduct], read dhamma, meditate, etc, and you'll eventually be liberated". And I can certainly see progress, but there is no logical way of proving that it will lead to liberation.
>
> Equally, a Christian might accept the proposition: 'Live morally, go to church, read the Bible, meditate, etc, and you'll go to heaven'. And by doing that he/she would probably also notice quite a lot of progress, since he/she would be developing many of the same things that a Buddhist would, though the meditation and 'view' would be different. [And in fact, a Buddhist would say that if a Christian developed the loving-kindness values that (sensible) Christians aspire to, then he/she probably would be reborn in 'heaven'.]
>
> So, for the sake of argument, how would you argue that my 'faith' is less 'blind' than the faith of my Christian counterpart? (DhammaWheel 2009a)

jcsuperstar responds by saying 'because we're asked to test it, and told it can happen in our lives, not just after death. [Also] many other faiths have no tolerance for questioning the faith or the teaching themselves.' Another discussant chimes in,

'Christian faith is blind insofar as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, not based on one's own logic or intelligence or any other such ability.' The gross generalisations about Christianity and disregard for theological understandings aside, such an interpretation of Buddhism as a rationalist system is often articulated on the forum, such as the following post that criticises an article by a Thai monk-scholar who questions the limits of a rationalist interpretation of Buddhism and calls for 'skilful' uses of sacred expressions such as deities, miracles, and amulets:

> So praying to deities for good fortunate [sic], attaching to amulets and so on is a good thing. This to me has absolutely nothing to do with Buddhism. The Buddha taught a person to rely on themselves and not look to gods, rituals and things to make there [sic] life better (DhammaWheel 2009b).

Or the following claim that the rituals and devotional practices of the Mahayana have corrupted the Buddha's 'original' teachings preserved by the Theravada:

> I've studied Theravada for some time but only recently came over from a Mahayana practice (my final break was literally a few days ago). So I understand what you're saying. And for some time I was ending my evenings reciting Amida's name hoping for rebirth in the pure land, modeling compassion on Kuan Yin [...] and bowing to beings that I have no evidence for the existence of, and whose continued existence goes against a number of principles the Buddha spoke plainly of. There is something seductive about all the ritual and prayers and secrets, but at the end I was forced to conclude that they are not really the dharma, at best things we've layered on top of it over millennia. Asking why

> Theravada has no tantric practices is somewhat like asking why Theravada doesn't include prayers to Odin or Islamic salat; they're simply a different teaching with no perceived benefit (DhammaWheel 2009c).

Against rationalist interpretations of Buddhism, it appears that those who engage in devotional, ritual practices have to speak as apologists:

> I know that many people don't like ritual and fancy Buddhist-stuffs [sic]. But I'll [tell] you that from my pov [point of view], people who struggle with parts of the Buddha's dhamma might find spending time daily really focusing on venerating the Buddha might be [sic] useful. I know I might make people mad by saying that, but it's just my opinion (DhammaWheel 2009d).

Did he hear in this exchange the silenced voice of his late grandmother? She whose beliefs and ancestral customs formed the wellspring of a love, patience, and hospitality he fondly remembers, but which had seemed quaint, strange, even irrelevant; beliefs and customs that were unintelligible because she spoke neither English nor his second language of Mandarin (they called it 'mother tongue' in school), only her mother's Hokkien dialect, a language once familiar but which he now mangles awkwardly—a fading memory. The main reason he embraced Buddhism was because he could not find solace or answers to the existential questions he was grappling with in the Christianity he was taught. He had up till his early twenties considered himself a Christian, but had never engaged deeply with the religion. Sunday school was an excuse to hang out with friends, and the decision to attend church in his late teens was spurred not so much by divine calling as a desire to spend time with the girl who

would become his life partner. Whatever faith he possessed, if it qualified as 'faith', would erode over time, replaced by cynicism as he learnt about atheistic, sociopolitical criticisms of religion.

Desperate, lost, confused, he chanced upon Western discourses on Buddhism and was persuaded by their rationalist interpretations. He was especially drawn to the Theravada, since the Pali Canon upheld in the tradition is said to preserve the earliest extant Buddhist teachings. The simplicity of Theravadin instructions on meditation practice were particularly suited to his circumstances. Yet, despite the sectarian disputes, he cannot deny the affective resonance he feels towards certain aspects of the Mahayana. The poetry of Zen, the deconstructive philosophy of Nagarjuna, and even the Buddhist mythical tales and imagery of his Chinese ancestral heritage—these are sources of inspiration. The guidance he found in Buddhism helped him overcome that period of personal crisis and mend the broken relationship with his partner. She, who, even though highly critical of institutional Christianity, never fails to honour that great Christian virtue of forgiveness. Did he hear in the question 'how would you argue that my Buddhist "faith" is less "blind" than the faith of my Christian counterpart?' a call of duty and response-ability towards the other? What is a responsible response?

Reverberating through the posts on DhammaWheel are the tensions generated by the ongoing processes of Buddhist modernism, a historical trend that was precipitated by the colonial encounters between Buddhism and the West. David McMahan (2008) has adapted Charles Taylor's account of modernity in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989) to argue that Buddhist modernism, which refers to a process of transplantation and adaptation by which Buddhist knowledge-practices negotiate contemporaneity, developed within the framework of three dominant discursive paradigms of modernity and their respective successors: western monotheism,

scientific rationalism, and romantic expressivism. To critically reflect on the ongoing processes of Buddhist modernism through which my experience as a Buddhist practitioner-scholar is taking shape, the following sketches a series of portraits of prominent Buddhist spokespersons whose work paved the way for the development of 'Western Buddhist' discourse, the revivalism of traditional Asian Buddhist formations, and the trend of detraditionalisation and demythologisation characterising contemporary Buddhist knowledge-practices.

Portraits and legacies of Buddhist modernism

> Through the idea of religion, the West continuously speaks of itself to itself, even when it speaks of others. For when it does so, it is implicitly in relation to the perfected model that it thinks itself to be. This is narcissistic objectification (Dubuisson 2003: 95).

The early developments of Buddhist modernism can be traced to Orientalist discourses on Buddhism of the nineteenth century, where 'Buddhism' (a proper noun invented by European scholars) was 'discovered' through its texts. As Edward Said (1994: 52) has argued, 'The Orient studied was a textual universe by and large; the impact of the Orient was made through books and manuscripts.' By the middle of the nineteenth century 'the textual analysis of Buddhism was perceived to be the major scholarly task. Through the West's progressive possession of the texts of Buddhism, it becomes, so to say, materially owned by the West; and by virtue of this ownership, ideologically controlled by it' (Almond 1988: 24). As the teachings attributed to the Buddha became an object of knowledge within a European taxonomy of 'world

religions', a textualised Buddhism emerged, one that prioritised the Pali Canon (the earliest extant Buddhist texts used in the Theravada tradition) because it was seen to embody 'the essence of Buddhism' (Almond 1988: 95). This textualised Buddhism was also described as 'original Buddhism', 'primitive Buddhism', and even 'pure Buddhism'. Accordingly, the figure of the Buddha was historicised as 'the greatest philosopher of India's Aryan past' and his teachings interpreted as a system based on 'reason and restraint, opposed to ritual, superstition, and sacerdotalism.' (Lopez 1995: 6). As an 'austere system of ethics and philosophy', the Orientalist interpretation of Buddhism was 'regarded as the authentic form [...] against which the various Buddhisms of nineteenth century Asia could be measured, and generally found to be both derivative and adulterated' (Lopez 2008: 9).

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, Western criticisms of Asian Buddhism were prevalent. These were often articulated by Christian missionaries who invoked 'original Buddhism' as an 'ideological justification for the missionary enterprises of a progressive, thriving Christianity against a Buddhism now debilitated' (Almond 1988: 40). Hence, we find Jonathan Titcomb, Bishop of Rangoon from 1877-1882, saying that 'the true glory of Buddhism has departed. It is now a crude mass of semi-idolatry and silly superstition; encrusted by dead formalism, and sunk in apathetic ignorance' (quoted in Almond 1988: 38). This was echoed in 1890 by Reverend Archibald Scott who asserted that Buddhism had been undergoing a long process of decline 'without having manifested any power as yet to recover and to reform itself according to its original and essential principles' (quoted in Almond 1988: 38-39). For these figures, Buddhism—or more precisely, an Orientalist interpretation of Buddhism—was an ally for the Christian mission.

He found himself returning to these quotes highlighted in his research notes, even showing them to his partner, who like him shook her head at the condescending tone of these commentators—not entirely in disbelief, since such attitudes shown towards the native are not something they are unacquainted with.

At the same time, there was growing curiosity about Buddhist understandings amongst those coming to grips with the 'Victorian crisis of faith'. This can be observed in T.W. Rhys Davids (1843-1922), whose work in translating Pali texts for a Western audience was highly influential in recasting the tradition as a largely ethical and philosophical system free from religiosity and ritual. Rhys Davids's interpretation of Buddhism built on and supplanted the early work of Reverend Spence Hardy, who 'had assumed, ordering the world through a Christian gaze, that the Buddha, whose image was so prevalent in Buddhist cultures, was the founder of the religion' (Snodgrass 2007: 189). The writing of a biography of the Buddha thus followed as a logical necessity if the true meaning of his teachings were to be extracted from sacred texts. But as Judith Snodgrass (2007: 189) points out, unlike Biblical writings Buddhist texts were composed for very different purposes and did not present any unambiguous life narrative of the Buddha that would adequately meet Western criteria for a biography. Nevertheless, this did not stop Hardy from establishing the historical humanity of Gautama Buddha, whom he even likened to the fourteenth-century Christian reformer John Wycliffe. Rhys Davids's work carried on this project of humanising Buddhism. Shaped by the progressive spirit of the age, Rhys Davids's writings reflected a desire in European culture of the time to find alternatives to Christian morality. As Richard Gombrich notes, 'Rhys Davids [...] naturally stressed the

rationalist elements in Buddhism, because they formed the most striking contrast to Christianity' (quoted in Hallisey 1995: 45). Adopting a secularist reading of Buddhism, we read Rhys Davids declaring, 'Agnostic atheism was the characteristic of the [Buddha's] system of philosophy' (quoted in Snodgrass 2007: 193).

For Rhys Davids (quoted in Snodgrass 2007: 194), the Buddhist soteriological goal of *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāna*) 'is purely and solely an ethical state to be reached in this birth by ethical practices, contemplation and insight. It is therefore not transcendental.' *Nibbāna* was translated by Rhys Davids as 'Enlightenment', which is suggestive of an attempt to buttress his nonreligious interpretation of Buddhism with an allusion to European outlooks. 'Enlightenment' appears today in both specialist and lay discourses as the standard translation of the Buddhist soteriological goal. The literal meaning of *nibbāna*, however, is 'blowing out' (like a candle flame): an allegory for the ineffable quality of unmediated awareness of phenomenal reality and selfhood that arises when the fires of desire, aversion, and delusion fuelling existential anguish and the cycle of rebirth have been extinguished. Rhys Davids's use of 'Enlightenment' in place of the literal translation of 'blowing out' or 'extinguishment' was perhaps an attempt to redress prevailing misconceptions of Buddhist outlooks as nihilistic. But given that the title 'Buddha' ('the Awakened One') derives from the abstract noun *bodhi* (from the root verb *budh,* 'to awake' or 'become aware'), a more accurate alternative translation of *nibbāna* would be 'Awakening'. That the translation of *nibbāna* as Enlightenment is today accepted as the norm in both scholarly discourses and vernacular speech is perhaps indicative of the lasting impact of the colonial 'discovery' of Buddhism, the lasting epistemological and ideological influence of

scientific rationalism (in tension with western monotheism and romantic expressivism) on the development of Buddhist modernism.

The portrayal of a natural compatibility between Buddhism and scientific rationalism as a means to criticise western monotheism is also evident in Henry Steel Olcott, who together with the co-founder of Theosophy, Helena Blavatsky, travelled to Ceylon in 1880, where they became the first known 'Western Buddhist' converts. Olcott had initially professed poor knowledge of Buddhism, expressing a desire to learn from the Buddhist elders in Ceylon (Prothero 1996: 66). But inspired by the writings of Rhys Davids, he quickly took it upon himself to educate the Sinhalese about 'authentic' Buddhism, which he always distinguished from the 'ignorant superstitions' of vulgar rites and rituals that were 'totally at variance with the Buddha's precepts' (quoted in Prothero 1996: 97). In his book *Buddhist Catechism*, which as the title suggests is presented in the question and answer format of Christian catechisms, Olcott links the theory of evolution with the Buddhist doctrine of *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*) to argue against 'creation out of nothing' (quoted in McMahan 2008: 100). Although Olcott evoked mainstream science, his theosophical approach to science was on the whole an idiosyncratic one: an 'occult science' that 'brought together the Romantic images of the mysterious East with the current vogue in spiritualism, tempered by scientific and quasi-scientific concepts' (McMahan 2008: 98). Olcott's *Buddhist Catechism* was disseminated in the curricular environment he established—the Buddhist Theosophical Society, and Buddhist secondary and Sunday schools—thereby initiating western-style Buddhist education in Ceylon (his book remains in use in some Sri Lankan schools today). So while Olcott denounced Christianity, it appears that his Protestant past (Prothero 1996: 14-37) had continued to influence his actions, for the

model of Buddhism he promoted reproduced distinctive features of liberal Protestantism.

It is important to reiterate at this point that Buddhist modernism is a 'cocreation of Asians, Europeans, and Americans' and not just a Western construct (McMahan 2008: 6). The translation of Buddhist understandings in the West prompted a process of reformation or revivalism in the traditional Asian Buddhist cultures of Burma, Ceylon, Thailand, China, Japan, and Korea during the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. On the whole, the reformation of Buddhism across these lands 'deemphasised ritual, image worship, and "folk" beliefs and practices and was linked to social reform and nationalist movements' (McMahan 2008: 7). For example in Ceylon, Sinhalese Buddhists appropriated Western discourses about 'original Buddhism' as well as features of Protestantism to restore Buddhist and national pride against colonial hegemony. Buddhist historians have described this movement as 'Protestant Buddhism' because it was 'both a protest against the Protestant missionaries (and the colonial power behind them) and in many ways a mirror image of their attitude and activities' (Gombrich 1993: 60). In Burma the revivalism of Buddhism was likewise linked to nationalist sentiments, where the laicisation of meditation practice and a new emphasis on personal spiritual cultivation supported the push for postcolonial independence. By the time of Burma's independence in 1948, a mass lay meditation movement had been established and it continues to play an integral role in the legitimisation of Burmese sovereignty today (Jordt 2007).

Developing via a process intercultural mimesis, the revivalism of Asian Buddhisms exemplifies Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity, which refers to the ways in

which colonised people rework the cultural knowledge-practices of the colonisers to subvert colonial hegemony. However, the role of colonialism on the transformation of Buddhism in Asian lands should not be overstated. As Charles Hallisey (1995: 48-49) notes, similar developments in Thailand 'were clearly not determined by the presence of antagonistic Westerners' and to this extent provide 'a useful reminder that we should avoid attributing too much force to the "West" (or Christianity, or Protestant assumptions, or Orientalism) in the changes to Theravada Buddhism [as well as other Buddhist traditions] which occurred in the nineteenth century.'

The process of intercultural mimesis transforming traditional Asian Buddhism can be observed in the discourses of Anagarika Dharmapala, prominent spokesperson of the Sinhalese Buddhist revival. Born Don David Hewaviratne to an English-speaking upper class family in Colombo and educated in Catholic and Anglican mission schools, he adopted the name 'Dharmapala' (Sanskrit words meaning 'homeless one' and 'protector of the *dharma*') after meeting Olcott and Blavatsky in 1881 (see Lopez 2008: 92). While Dharmapala initially allied himself with the theosophists, he would eventually denounce them, finding their universalising vision that mixed Buddhist ideals with Hindu understandings unacceptable. Perhaps recognising how their endeavours belie a will to power not dissimilar to Christian missionisation, he would accuse Olcott of betraying Buddhism and the Sinhalese cause. But like Olcott, Dharmapala was highly critical of Christianity, performing a similar tactic of appropriating the discourses of scientific rationalism to argue for the superiority of Buddhist understandings as antecedents to modern Western thought.

Christianity, for Dharmapala, was the 'political camouflage' for the underlying motives of 'politics, trade and imperial expansion' (quoted in McMahan 96). Christian missionaries, he argued, were 'utterly deficient in scientific knowledge', and rather than a missionary education, what the 'noble born' of Asia ought to be learning was the 'pure knowledge born of science' (Dharmapala 1915: unpag.). At the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893, Dharmapala proclaimed to the largely Christian audience that Buddhism was 'Aryan psychology' and praised the Buddha as 'a scientist full of compassion for all', whilst condemning Abrahamic religions for their 'persecuting spirit' and Christian theology for 'its unscientific doctrines of creator, hell, soul, and atonement' (quoted in Lopez 2008: 101). We see here that Dharmapala not only interpreted Buddhism with science in order to criticise Christianity but also claimed that it had anticipated the secular philosophies of the West, implying that whilst the West was materialistically advanced, the East was abundant in spirituality. In so doing, he effectively reinforced the Romanticist and Orientalist stereotypes of the 'mystical' and 'exotic' East, but not without also turning the discourses of the colonial masters against them.

Another noteworthy figure in attendance at the Parliament was Shaku Soen, a Japanese Zen monk who was part of a delegation representing 'Eastern Buddhism'. According to the Orientalist, logocentric favouring of the 'original' teachings of the Buddha, the Mahayana tradition (of which Japanese Zen is a part) had been regarded as an 'adulterated' version of Buddhism, given its historical distance from the earliest extant texts of the Pali Canon. The prevailing criticism of Mahayana Buddhist formations was that they were ill-suited for the modern scientific age, since they involved 'superstitious' activities like the ritual veneration of deities. Drawing on

their experience and knowledge of Western culture, religion, and philosophy, the Japanese delegates refuted such criticisms, arguing that their approach to Buddhism not only preserved the teachings of the Pali Canon, but was in fact the highest fulfilment of early Buddhist teachings and of Western sacred and philosophical thought. The implication, then, was that the Buddhism of Japan was more suited than Christianity to be the future world religion (Snodgrass 2003: 198-221). Again, it is important to underscore here that the representatives of Japanese Buddhism were not pandering to Western expectations. The move towards rationalised accounts of 'Eastern Buddhism' was precipitated by the Meiji Restoration (approximately 1868 – 1912), whereby Buddhism was connected with a nationalist identity, reinterpreted to appeal to the Western-educated elite of the new Japan, and 'bound to concepts of Japanese racial superiority and Japan's late nineteenth-century bid for world-power status' (Snodgrass 2003: 201).

So we find Shaku Soen claiming at the Parliament that the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising refers to a complex system of interdependence that negates the notion of a Creator. Any assertion of a first cause was, for Soen, 'contrary to the fundamental principles of nature' (quoted in Snodgrass 2003: 212). Yet, to maintain a distance from the mechanistic naturalism of modern science, he also insisted that Buddhism 'is not atheistic' and that it 'certainly has a God', whereby 'God' does not refer to the anthropomorphic idea of a Creator but to ultimate reality, which he also described in Hegelian terms as 'universal reason' (quoted in McMahan 2008: 67-68). According to Soen, Buddhists do not ascribe to God 'any special abode' or 'fixed center' from which he administers the universe. Rather, if 'we want to see him face to face, we are able to find him in the lilies of the field, in the fowls of the air, in the

murmuring of the mountain stream' (McMahan 2008: 68). Here we can detect allusions to the parable of the birds and lilies in the Gospel of Matthew (6:24-23) as well as a nod to the poetic appreciation of nature found in the literary works of Romanticism and American Transcendentalism. This is a strategy that Soen's student, D.T. Suzuki, would later develop more fully to usher in what might be called Zen Romanticism, popularised by such figures as Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and Alan Watts. So for example, Suzuki describes Zen as the experience of 'pure subjectivity', where 'timelessness has not negated itself so that we have a dichotomy of subject-object, Man-Nature, God-world'. According to Suzuki, 'pure subjectivity is pure objectivity; the *en-soi* is the *pour-soi*; there is perfect identity of Man and Nature, of God and Nature, and of the one and the many. But the identity does not imply the annihilation of one at the cost of the other' (Suzuki 1956: 240-241). Zen in other words, 'is "pure experience" itself—the ahistorical, transcultural experience of "pure subjectivity" which utterly transcends discursive thought' (Sharf 1993: 2). And just as the discourses of Dharmapala and Soen were shaped by the political contestations of their time, Suzuki's discourse, which in claiming that the samurai ethos of *bushido* is 'the close ally of Zen', supported the legitimisation of Japan's military efforts in the twentieth century (Victoria 2006).

Did he, in learning about the contestations and processes of intercultural mimesis shaping Asian Buddhist revivalism, recognise the need to be circumspect about placing too much emphasis on the influence of Orientalism or 'the West'? To what extent, then, does he speak as a 'Western Buddhist'? How might he go about interrogating the hegemonic imperatives that circumscribe his coterminous pursuit of Buddhism and academia: a sacred-scholarly profession?

There are questions about the place of the genre of autoethnography in Buddhist Studies that I must leave aside for now (see Ng 2012b).[2] The purpose here of interweaving a personal narrative of the tensions I feel as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert with a historical analysis of Buddhist modernism is to illustrate

[2] However, it is important that I flag the issue here as I will come back to touch on this in the conclusion. In (Ng 2012b) I made the claim that inasmuch as Buddhist critical-constructive reflection is driven by a desire to bring the sacred and scholarly Buddhist pursuits into a mutually supportive and illuminating relationship, it is in both senses of the word, a *profession* of faith. That is, it at once makes a *profession* of faith in the transformative possibilities of Buddhist teachings and cultivates them within the context of the academic *profession*. Therefore, irrespective of our chosen spiritual and/or academic affiliations, those of us developing Buddhist critical-constructive reflection share a profession of faith in the Noble Eightfold Path. In which case, could we not relate to one another as *kalyana mitta* (Pali), admirable or spiritual friends? And if we all trace a spiritual lineage back to the figure of the Buddha—who in the Pali Canon advised, 'admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life' (Thānissaro 1997a)—how might we foster admirable, spiritual friendship and cultivate such virtues to support our sacred-scholarly pursuits? Perhaps autoethnographic narratives and analyses of the practitioner-scholar's profession of faith could help us learn from one another, and more importantly, strengthen Buddhist critical-constructive reflection's commitment to self-reflexivity as it attunes Buddhist understanding and practice to contemporary circumstances. Brooke Schedneck (2007) has suggested that the memoirs and autobiographies of well-known Buddhist teachers—especially those who have had to negotiate intercultural displacements—is a genre of Buddhist writing that not only offers a glimpse into their life stories, tribulations, and personal reflections on Buddhist ideals, but may also prompt the reader to become more mindful of the historical conditionings, cultural specificities, social habits, and relations of power shaping their own life-practice of Buddhism. Buddhist critical-construction reflection could arguably explore similar possibilities with autoethnography.

Immanent to the work of autoethnography is the risk of narcissistic self-indulgence (Sparkes 2002). For even as one speaks personally with the aim of exposing the structuring conditions and relations of power that shape the self and to think them otherwise, the blindspots in one's own narrative can be difficult to spot, not least because they are by definition blind to the eye. Yet, this is precisely the condition of possibility for autoethnography. If the danger of self-indulgence is always present, does this not also issue a demand for vigilance, the reason to persist in continuous self-reflection? If the critical oversights generated by self-writing are more easily spotted by others, does this not suggest that autoethnography is best pursued collectively, with the participation and feedback of others? And if what unites those of us pursuing Buddhist critical-constructive reflection is our faith in the Buddhadhamma, given our shared profession of faith, why shouldn't we explore ways to foster what the Buddha calls *kalyana mittata*, admirable or spiritual friendship? Perhaps alongside the research projects we develop, we could engage in the sharing and critique of one another's autoethnographies, so as to cultivate the relational capacities of spiritual friendship—which, to recall the Buddha's advice, is nothing less than 'the whole of the holy life' (Thānissaro 1997a).

how my engagement with Buddhism has always been interstitial, within a liminal space, neither fully 'inside' nor 'outside'. Whilst I could outwardly pass for a 'Western Buddhist' whose sacred practice is mainly informed by a modern interpretation of the Theravada—and not a 'Chinese Buddhist' whose ancestral heritage is partly shaped by the Mahayana—I always remain to some extent a stranger to, and even an illegitimate offspring of, these genealogies. *I inherit, I betray*. Hence, the affinity I feel with/for the work of Derrida, the self-described 'little black and very Arab Jew' who constantly reflected on his attempts to maintain 'unfaithful fidelity' to the cultural, intellectual, and sacred lineages he inhabited (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 58). The thesis will therefore use this in-between position as leverage to perform a version of the 'cross-reading' exercise proposed by Richard Kearney in his recent reflections on the hermeneutics of the religious stranger, where the aim is not some 'unitary fusion' between the understandings of disparate traditions but 'mutual disclosure and enhancement':

> What happens, for instance, if we read the text about Shiva's pillars of fire alongside passages on the Burning Bush or the Christian account of Pentecostal flame? What new sparks of understanding and compassion fly up if we read Hindu texts on the *guha* alongside Buddhist invocations of the "void" (in the Heart Sutra) or biblical references to Elijah or Muhammed in his cave, Jonah in the whale, Jesus in the tomb? What novel possibilities of semantic resonance are generated by juxtaposing the sacred bird (*hamsa*) of Vedanta alongside the dove of Noah's ark or of Christ's baptism in the Jordan? (Kearney 2010: 50)

The thesis had begun with an encounter with certain Judeo-Christian ideals inherited, betrayed, and affirmed anew by the so-called 'religious turn' in deconstruction. The autoethnographic reflections above also reflect the ongoing cross-readings between 'Western' and 'Eastern' cultural heritages that I have had to perform (if only tacitly) throughout my life as a postcolonial subject. The forthcoming chapters will fold these onto new cross-readings of Buddhist understandings with Derridean and Foucauldian thought. Whilst there will be an indirect encounter between Buddhist themes and the theological themes addressed in Derrida's and Foucault's work, the cross-reading I am performing is not strictly speaking 'interreligious'. Nevertheless, the principles of hospitality underpinning Kearney's suggestions remain pertinent. Just as it is envisioned with interreligious dialogue, this thesis will likewise stage an encounter between Buddhism and poststructuralist thought—an exercise in which one 'hosts the stranger', where one tradition 'confronts, challenges, augments and amplifies another via collaborative exchange of symbols and narratives' (Taylor 2011: 19). The main issue to be addressed in this cross-reading is the question of the transformative potential of Buddhist meditation experience, the micropolitical possibilities of spiritual self-cultivation. My own engagement with insight meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka's organisation, Vipassana Meditation, will serve as the exemplar for the analysis.

The insight (*vipassanā*) meditation movement

On the whole, the historical trend of Buddhist modernism has demythologised and detraditionalised Buddhist knowledge-practices, a trend that is especially evident in 'Western Buddhism'. One of the consequences of demythologisation and detraditionalisation is the laicisation of scriptural resources and meditation practice,

both of which were traditionally restricted to the monastic community. The laicisation of Buddhist doctrine and practice and the attendant emphasis on personal spiritual cultivation is exemplified by the transnational movement called *vipassanā* or insight meditation.

The word *vipassanā* means roughly 'to see things as they are' or to see the nature of reality 'as it is'. Also rendered simply as 'insight', *vipassanā* meditation is based on the discourses on 'mindfulness' in the Pali Canon of the Theravada (see Anālayo 2007). Whilst I speak of a transnational *vipassanā* or insight meditation movement, it is by no means a unified one. There is no single point of origin for the movement, which more or less emerged concurrently with the modern revivalism of Theravada Buddhism across Ceylon and Southeast Asia. In Thailand, for example, the reformation of Buddhism initiated by the state consolidated monastic authority in urban centres. This prompted the revival in rural areas of what is called the Forest Tradition, upheld by a collective of monks who model their life-practice after the ascetic, mendicant lifestyle of the historical Buddha's time. Unlike the monastics in urban centres whose principal mode of practice is the memorisation and study of scriptures, monks of the Forest Tradition dwell in the forests of the northeastern regions of Thailand, engaging in periods of intense solitary meditation practice to foster contemplative awareness in everyday activities. A parallel trend of a meditation-centric approach to Buddhist practice occurred in Burma too, where monks renowned for their expertise in *vipassanā* were drawn into the development of a mass lay meditation movement, which, as previously, played a pivotal role in the push towards postcolonial independence. The lay meditation movement continues to influence the legitimisation of political power in Burma today (Jordt 2007). There are two main

lineages in the Burmese *vipassanā* movement, one associated with the monk Mahasi Sayadaw, and the other with lay teacher and first Accountant General of the Union of Burma, U Ba Khin.

Generally speaking, then, these are the three main streams of insight meditation (the Thai Forest Tradition and the Burmese lineages of Mahasi Sayadaw and U Ba Khin) that served as the point of contact in the late sixties and early seventies for Western visitors who travelled to Southeast Asia to explore new forms of spirituality. In the time since, these visitors have either helped these lineages of Buddhism (and others) establish institutional bases in Western societies, or founded their own organisational networks. These lay-oriented transnational movements often cross-fertilise *vipassanā* meditation with other knowledge-practices, thereby continuing the trend of detraditionalisation and demythologisation. For example, the Insight Meditation Society (IMS) founded by Americans Joseph Goldstein, Jack Kornfield, and Sharon Salzburg, international bestselling authors of Buddhist books who variously discovered *vipassanā* meditation via the Thai Forest monk Ajahn Chah, Burmese monk Mahasi Sayadaw, and U Ba Khin's student S.N. Goenka. Whilst its main centres are located in the United States, the IMS and its affiliates have an international reach, incorporating the understandings of Mahayana lineages (e.g. Zen and Tibetan Buddhism) as well as western psychology to make meditation practice and Buddhist doctrines more accessible to non-sectarian, secular-minded audiences. A similar but unaffiliated network exists in Australia, Insight Meditation Australia, which is likewise led by teachers who have trained in the Theravadin lineages of *vipassanā* meditation as well as Mahayana ones like Zen. This is how the Melbourne branch of Insight Meditation Australia describes itself:

> Melbourne Insight Meditation Group is a community of meditators practicing in the tradition of Insight (Vipassana) meditation., which emphasises direct experience through the practice of meditation. [...] Insight Meditation refers to both Buddhist meditation practices and a largely Western form of Buddhism, which is either free from ritual or has minimal ritual. A common thread is the focus on settling the mind, developing a level of clarity, and looking carefully at one's experience. Aims of Insight Meditation include coming to a deep understanding of who, what and how we are, and finding a sense of connection with, and compassion for, other living beings (Melbourne Insight Meditation: undated)

It was through the non-sectarian and cross-traditional discourses of the transnational insight meditation movement that I began to experiment with formal Buddhist practice. Perhaps because of the way it is articulated as a life-practice that could be cultivated without formal membership in a Buddhist organisation, I found myself settling on *vipassanā* meditation as a main technique of contemplation, relying specifically on the discourses of the Pali Canon for guidance in formal practice, but reading widely in all resources of Buddhism (Mahayana texts, scholarly works, and popular lay discourses) for spiritual-philosophical clarification and inspiration. Hence, by association, I consider myself a follower of the Theravada, even though my experience of Buddhist sacred truth claims has from the start been shaped by multiple sources, which, perhaps because of my already liminal identities-in-the-making, I do not regard as incompatible with my commitment to Theravadin teachings. So from the Mahayana, I've found inspiration in the poetic musings of Zen

(and its Chinese counterpart Ch'an) and the Madhyamika (Middle Way) philosophy of the Indo-Tibetan sage Nagarjuna; from continental philosophy, the deconstructive thinking of Derrida and the critical ethos of Foucault. In fact, it was in December 2006, at my first ever ten-day meditation course with Goenka's organisation—named simply as Vipassana Meditation—where it occurred to me that I could use my pursuit of Buddhism as the basis for a PhD, and particularly, to investigate the possible consonance between Buddhist and Foucauldian understandings.

This thesis will treat Vipassana as an indexical discourse of 'Western Buddhism' to investigate the relationship between the Buddhist and Foucauldian arts of living. Accordingly, I use the proper noun 'Vipassana' when referring to Goenka's interpretation of the Buddha's teachings and insight meditation practice, and '*vipassanā*' when referring more generally to the Buddhist praxis-ideal of developing insight into the experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood 'as it is'. I must, however, stress at the outset that I do not regard Vipassana as representative of the Theravada tradition or 'Western Buddhism'; nor am I a student of Vipassana exclusively. After sitting three ten-day Vipassana courses and some shorter ones between 2006 and 2009, I began to visit and practice in hermitages and monasteries in Australia associated with the lineage of Ajahn Chah. If pressed to acknowledge my Buddhist affiliation, the Thai Forest Tradition is what I would currently identify with. Nevertheless, Goenka's instructions and advice on meditation continue to be a foundational aspect of my life-practice. So, provided that it is contextualised appropriately within the historical continuum of Buddhist modernism, as I have attempted to do, my personal engagement with Vipassana can arguably serve as a case study with which to investigate the ethico-political significance of Buddhist

meditation in the contemporary world, where the question of meditative experience is become increasingly salient. As McMahan observes:

> Meditation in the modern context is detraditionalized precisely at the point where it can now *become* a mode of open-ended inquiry, a tool of self-investigation that may lead to any conclusion whatever [...] [It] has entered an entirely unprecedented arena in which its benefits, purposes, and even methods are open to question and revision not only by meditation masters but by neuroscientists, psychologists, and the public at large. It is not that meditation within more traditional contexts has disappeared; it is rather that it has overflowed its traditional containment within the borders of the monastery and now contends in the postmodern marketplace of ideas and practices (McMahan 2008: 211).

This indicates that contemporary forms of Buddhism, and especially 'Western Buddhism', are constituted by a politics of spirituality. As we have seen, the proliferation of discourses about meditative experience and adaptation of the practice across various contexts have made it an urgent task for proponents of Buddhism to be critically aware of the capitalist imperatives of neoliberal governmentality, and to be in dialogue with possible misunderstandings and misappropriations of Buddhist sacred teachings. There is, in other words, an ethico-political challenge facing Buddhist critical-constructive reflection (and particularly, within Buddhist constituencies taking root in advanced neoliberal societies) that draws it into an alliance with the cultural studies project, and more specifically, what the thesis

proposes as a spiritually-engaged cultural studies. This is a challenge of response-ability: what is a responsible response?

Conclusion

This chapter has configured the thesis according to two reciprocal sets of methodological challenges. Responding to Richard King's call for studies of non-Western sacred traditions to defuse the persisting influence of Orientalism and secularist conceits of social-scientific norms, I situated my coterminous pursuit of cultural research and Buddhism within the methodological frameworks of Buddhist theology, and more pertinently, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. This allows me to fold my hybridised engagement with traditional, scholarly and popular discourses of Buddhism into the development of new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society. The chapter also contextualised the thesis's hybridised approach to Buddhism by interweaving autoethnographic reflections of this authoring-I's emergent subjectivity as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert with a historical account of Buddhist modernism. In so doing, I begin to develop a response to the call (articulated by the likes of Frow, Barcan and Johnston) for cultural studies researchers with sacred commitments and/or those participating in some form of spirituality, to redress the neglect of these knowledge-practices by staging 'reparative', sympathetic exchanges between sacred and scholarly understandings. This chapter thus sets the methodological and historical groundwork for developing a spiritually-engaged cultural studies from the perspective of Buddhism—or a hybridised approach to 'Western Buddhism', at any rate. Accordingly, it should be kept in mind that the interpretation of Buddhist understandings in this thesis is

articulated from the perspective of a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, a novice who is still coming to terms with Buddhist sacred teachings-in-translation.

Such a task of developing a *spiritually-engaged* cultural studies in alliance with Buddhist *critical-constructive* reflection performs an exercise of cross-reading and could be summed up with the notion of 'working the hyphen'. As Michelle Fine (1998: 131) puts it, to work the hyphen is a way to 'rupture the textual laminations within which Others have been sealed' and 'the complicity of researchers in the construction and distancing of Others'. More specifically, I evoke the notion of working the hyphen in the sense that Robert Hattam (2006: 26) has in his mapping of 'a new constellation in which Buddhism and critical theory can be juxtaposed yet resist a forced or extorted reconciliation'. Like Hattam's experimentations with Buddhist social theory, this thesis too works the hyphen in such relations as sacred-scholarly, academia-Buddhism, inside-outside, traditional-contemporary, East-West, religious-secular, self-society, personal transformation-social engagement, and theory-practice. The purpose in working the hyphen is to host an 'interrelational and transactive' exchange, and to amplify a 'feedback loop [...] which places both moments in a reciprocally constitutive relationship, and thus hinders their one-sided absolution' (Hattam 2006: 26).

Another way to express the notion of working the hyphen is to speak of it as *intellectual hospitality,* or inversely, the challenge of guarding against intellectual inhospitality. Intellectual *in*hospitality is evident in the discourses of the Buddhist modernisers examined above. Irrespective of whether they draw Buddhism into a sympathetic or antagonistic relationship with western monotheism, scientific

rationalism, and/or romantic expressivism, they have tended to adopt a strategy of claiming that Buddhism not only anticipated the discursive paradigms of modernity but can in fact improve, if not supersede, them. To be sure, that Buddhist knowledge-practices may serve as a countervailing force to the challenges of (post)modernity is indeed something that warrants investigation. However, the claims by these Buddhist modernisers all turn on decontextualised readings of the discourses they bring into dialogue with Buddhist understandings. It is arguable that they do not allow for the forging of interrelational and transactive relationships or feedback loops, but tend towards one-sided absolution. Given the thesis's working of the hyphen, it is important to consider next the ethos of intellectual hospitality (or the lack thereof) by examining discourses that attempt to account for the transformative possibilities of Buddhist meditation practice via a dialogue between Buddhism and deconstruction—a body of scholarship that I will extend upon with a reappraisal of Foucault's critico-political itinerary and an analysis of Vipassana.

CHAPTER THREE

Of Intellectual Hospitality, Buddhism and Deconstruction

> [Intellectual hospitality] is something other than a critical dialectic in which the ideas of one thinker are positioned against those of another. Rather than an effort at one-upmanship or an attempt to repudiate or revise another thinker's work, these essays work to a completely different end: praise and affirmation [...] a new form of intellectual hospitality, a mode of being in common that is not a form of correcting or out-mastering the other, but a way of joining with the other in language or in thought so that what is created is a community of thought that knows no bounds, a hospitality that liquidates identity, a communism of the soul (Kaufman 2001: 7, 141).

This chapter examines a key challenge in dialogical exchanges between Western critical thought and Asian sacred traditions: the challenge of *intellectual hospitality*. The purpose of this chapter is to open a channel for the conversation I will stage in the chapters to follow between Buddhist and Foucauldian thought to explore the ethico-political possibilities of Buddhist meditation. The challenge of intellectual hospitality is summoned by the question of meditative experience, and particularly the possibility of pure or unmediated awareness which the practice purportedly gives access to. As King has pointed out, the claim of unmediated awareness 'constitutes a major point of disagreement between mainstream Western intellectual thought and classical Asian traditions of spirituality' (King 1999: 182). In particular it goes against what might be broadly described as the social constructivist paradigm, of which so-called

poststructuralist varieties of continental philosophy (e.g. the works of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, Gadamer, and Lyotard) and feminist theory (e.g. the works of Cixous, Kristeva, and Irigaray) are a part. These strands of constructivism share a firm belief in the conditionality of human experience and a commitment to question absolutising discourses and social, historical, and political essentialisms. Favouring a multiplicity of understandings and becomings, they argue in different ways that knowledge is 'conditioned by and firmly embedded within linguistic and cultural forms' (King 1999: 169-170).

Given that poststructuralist thinking strongly influences my research, it is important to address the tension between the Buddhist sacred proposition about unmediated awareness and the critico-political commitment of the constructivist paradigm. This chapter will first consider the disagreement that social constructivism might have with the idea of unmediated awareness, and explore a way to be hospitable to the Buddhist sacred truth claim about unmediated awareness without compromising the ethical and political commitment of poststructuralist critique. It then interrogates existing discourses on Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction that make the argument that the former is more 'effective' in defusing the metaphysics of presence by virtue of meditative praxis. Such a criticism of deconstruction, I will argue, enacts intellectual inhospitality and stymies further dialogue and reciprocal learning. I will then pave the way open for more hospitable exchanges between Buddhist understandings and poststructuralist thought by showing how Buddhism and deconstruction share a commitment of utter response-ability towards incalculable alterity, or what might be called *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

Social constructivist critique and the sacred claim of unmediated awareness

A social constructivist critique of the sacred proposition about unmediated awareness had been articulated by feminist theologian and philosopher, the late Grace Jantzen, who examined how discourses on mysticism tend to be bound up with issues of authority and gender. Insofar as such mystical claims are predicated on 'the ideal of a neutral, objective, universal stance', she argued that they are 'a fiction which disguised male partiality' for there can be 'no views from nowhere' or 'views from everywhere', only 'views from somewhere' (Jantzen 1995: 336-337). Jantzen is right to question the ways in which sacred propositions about unmediated awareness can and have often masked totalising impulses. Whilst I do not contest her feminist agenda or the broader social constructivist commitment to interrogate totalising outlooks as such, I wish to question the refusal to accept the possibility that there may be a way to cultivate an awareness of experience which may be unmediated by the web of language and cultural conditioning. Her discourse doesn't appear to entertain such a possibility. But why couldn't we be hospitable to what may very well elude conceptuality, and to allow the possibility to be just that, a *possibility*?

Therefore, I want to join King in arguing that to accept the possibility posited by such a sacred truth claim—or at least, to accept that such a possibility remains an open question—does not require us to reject *in toto* the social constructivist analysis of totalising claims. As King (1999: 172) argues, to be committed to the constructivist critique of totalising outlooks 'does not *in and of itself* require us to accept the view that all dimensions of human experience are socially constructed'; one could 'entertain the possibility (and nothing more)' of cultivating an awareness that 'might indeed be devoid of conceptualization, linguistic forms and socially constructed forms of apprehension'

(King 1999: 172). What is required, in other words, is an ethos of intellectual hospitality, a willingness not to only entertain the sacred truth claims of other traditions as an *open question*, but also to be mindful of the situated-ness (and hence, contestability) of one's own position. Philosopher of religion Morny Joy (1996: 89) writes, 'It is one thing to demonstrate the inadequacy of human efforts to secure an abiding absolute. But it is quite another to dispute the existence of a divine principle simply because of the incommensurable levels of discourse involved.'

Joy's remarks about the incommensurable levels of discourse involved raise an important cautionary note. Given that the Buddhist sacred claim about unmediated awareness derives from a very different historical and cultural context, do we risk betraying the ethico-political commitment to honouring difference, and even reenact symbolic violence, if we reject wholesale such a sacred truth claim? Or to put it another way, to what extent are we subordinating Asian sacred traditions under the will to knowledge-power of a scholarly paradigm whose own truth claims are conditioned by a specific Eurocentric cultural and intellectual history? If so, are we really engaging in dialogue? Are we performing an exchange or a takeover? If one is committed to difference, as the social constructivist paradigm professes to be, this question becomes crucial. Even as we seek to maintain fidelity to the principles of our scholarly vocation, how might our interrogations also be hospitable towards sacred truth claims like the Buddhist soteriological goal of Awakening, which even if incommensurable with our own discourses, nevertheless find reality as the horizon of hope orienting the everyday habits and ancestral customs of those in other non-Western life-worlds, many of whom 'have been subjected to centuries of colonial oppression and the ideological subversion of their traditions by Westerners who have claimed to know better?' (King 1999: 172)

This thesis's pursuit of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection from the perspective of a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert is an attempt to respond to this plea for the recognition of differences in comparative, dialogical studies on different traditions. It seeks in particular to extend upon existing studies that examine Buddhist sacred understanding alongside the deconstructive project of decentring the metaphysics of presence. As will be shown below, these studies adopt a social constructivist stance but also take seriously the soteriological promise of Buddhist spirituality, and particularly the transformative potential of meditation practice. However, what will also become clear is that the risk of intellectual inhospitality cuts both ways. I shall take Buddhist philosopher and Zen teacher David Loy's writings on Buddhism and deconstruction as a main point of reference as they have been influential in setting the tone of the conversation between the two sets of discourses (see, for example, Berry 1996 and Joy 1996).

In the volume *Healing Deconstruction: Postmodern Thought in Buddhism and Christianity*, Loy claims that the collection of essays explores pathways that were opened up by deconstruction but which Derrida himself was 'unwilling or unable to explore'—that is, 'the possibility of a "leap" from theory to practice [...] which is better exemplified in religious disciplines' (Loy 1996: 2). According to Loy, the possibility of unmediated awareness is not something that deconstruction is able to account for because it is ensnared by its preoccupation with the infinite play of language. Hence, the dialogical exchange performed by the essays offers 'healing' possibilities for both religious understandings and postmodern forms of critical thought. On the one hand, by clarifying how deconstruction alerts us to the danger of 'an idolatry of self-presence', the exchange helps to correct the logocentric, ontotheological habits of religious knowledge-practices.

On the other hand, by refusing the 'textual idolatry that *theoria* encourages when it remains divorced from a more holistic *praxis*', the exchange illuminates a way out of the 'abyss' that Nietzsche spoke of and into which we find ourselves staring in the wake of the postmodern rupture of grand narratives about Truth and Being (Loy 1996: 2).

Inasmuch as it aims to be mutually 'healing', the dialogical exchange performed by Loy and the contributors to the volume is ostensibly extending intellectual hospitality towards Buddhist sacred understandings (Christian understandings are explored too, though this is beyond the scope of the current discussion). I do not as such contest the agenda of this exercise of reciprocal learning, which dovetails with what I previously suggested via Kearney as an exercise in cross-reading. But I want to question the way in which the exchange has proceeded on the claim that deconstruction remains bedevilled by 'textual idolatry' such that it is unable to make the 'leap' from theory to practice. My counterargument is that such a claim in fact enacts intellectual inhospitality towards deconstruction, because it effaces how Derrida, as well as those building on his work, have repeatedly explained that deconstruction is neither merely concerned with language nor is it an exercise that eschews *praxis* in favour of *theoria*. If anything, deconstruction challenges the distinction long held in Western thought between theory and practice by disrupting the very dualism of *theoria/praxis* itself. To evaluate Loy's criticism of deconstruction, we should first consider the affinities between Buddhist and Derridean understandings.

Dependent co-arising and *différance*

Dependent co-arising or co-dependent origination (Pali: *paticcasamuppāda*; Sanskrit: *pratītyasamutpāda*) is the central principle that serves as the basis for the doctrines and

practices of all schools and lineages of Buddhism. Buddhist texts describe it as the liberating insight of Awakening and recount the Buddha himself saying, 'Whoever sees dependent co-arising sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent co-arising' (Thānissaro 2003). Alternatively, the principle of dependent co-arising could be glossed as: 'This being, that exists; through the arising of this that arises. This not being, that does not exist; through the ceasing of this that ceases.' Dependent co-arising threads through the most basic formulation of Buddhist soteriology, the Four Noble Truths: 1.) the truth of *dukkha*, the unavoidable experience of suffering or existential discontent engendered by the impermanence of life; 2.) the truth of the generative condition of *dukkha*, the latent tendency towards craving which feeds the habit of clinging to fixed views and modes of being in the face of existential finitude; 3.) the truth of the cessation of *dukkha*, the possibility of transforming the habitual ways we relate to suffering and thus Awakening (*nibbāna*) to the possibility of liberation from existential discontent; 4.) the truth of the Eightfold Path, the life-practice necessary for the transfiguration of the experience of suffering. Or according to the basic formulation of dependent co-arising, we could explicate the Four Noble Truth thus: through the ceasing of craving, *dukkha* ceases. It is important, however, not to misinterpret dependent co-arising as an account of linear causality, but rather to see it as 'the invariable concomitance between the arising and ceasing of any given phenomenon' (Bodhi 1995). Such an account of emergent causality informs the twelve links of becoming:

> And what is dependent co-arising? From ignorance as a requisite condition come fabrications. From fabrications as a requisite condition comes consciousness. From consciousness as a requisite condition comes name-and-form. From name-and-form as a requisite condition come the six sense media. From the six sense media as a

> requisite condition comes contact. From contact as a requisite condition comes feeling. From feeling as a requisite condition comes craving. From craving as a requisite condition comes clinging/sustenance. From clinging/sustenance as a requisite condition comes becoming. From becoming as a requisite condition comes birth. From birth as a requisite condition, then aging and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, and despair come into play. Such is the origination of this entire mass of stress and suffering (Thānissaro 1997b).

Although accounts of the twelve links typically begin with the condition of ignorance it is not a first cause, nor does the process end with death as the final phase. The twelve links loop around to generate the continuous movement of what is described in Buddhist cosmology as *samsāra* or the cycle of rebirth. This is not the place to elaborate on the complex cosmological implications (not to mention that they remain the subject of inter- and intra-sectarian debates) of the links of becoming. For our purpose, the focus is on the proposition that every link only arises *reciprocally with* or *co-dependently upon* each other link. As Jin Y. Park (2006b: 14) points out in her discussion of the consonances between Buddhist and Derridean thinking, to say that A only arises dependently upon B, and reciprocally that if B were absent A does not arise, is to describe a nonlinear movement of causality. Dependent co-arising, in other words, describes an *emergent*, multimodal and multilevel movement of causation, and thus articulates a non-substantialist account of being and existence. That is to say, it does not presuppose any substantial entity, neither a subject nor object, that acts as the agent of the movement of interdependency. Park writes:

> A being exists at the crossroads of a complicated web of causes that are both causes for future happenings as much as they are effects of previous happenings. The "next-previous" connection exists only in the linguistic convention, since no moment—however brief it may be—can stand still to be identified as past, present, or future. In this sense, the past has never existed; the present and future will not ever exist; but all the same the past, present, and future influence and are influenced by others. The "dependent co-arising" then demands a maximum level of awareness of the mutability of a being (Park 2006b: 14).

A similar movement is described by Derrida's neologism *différance*, which 'has neither existence nor essence' and 'belongs to no category of being, present, or absent' (Derrida 1973: 134). *Différance* serves as 'the strategic note or connection' for the deconstructive manoeuvre of decentring the metaphysics of presence or logocentrism (Derrida 1973: 134, 137). Throughout the history of Western thought, speech has been valorised over writing because the presence of the speaker is believed to secure immediacy to Truth. Writing, on the other hand, is believed to lack immediacy since it can be reproduced in the absence of the author. Derrida, however, argues that language functions through iterability, that for any linguistic system to function it must be able to generate meaning in the absence of the original speaker or author. Hence, regardless of whether it takes expression as speech or writing, language has always been repetition, or more precisely, *differential* repetition. In speech, writing is already inscribed, and in writing, speech is already inscribed. Language, meaning, conceptuality—the apprehension of a subject in relation to an object—is possible only because of an anterior movement of *differing and deferring*, which is what the term *différance* puts into operation: 'Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to

another element which itself is not simply present. This interweaving results in each element [...] being constituted on the basis of the trace within it of the other elements of the chain or system' (Derrida 1981: 23-4). If *différance* indicates any 'thing', it is movement itself or the play of trace. Characterised thus, *différance* resonates with dependent co-arising, both of which are ways to describe the differing and deferring movement of causation, the ever-unfolding web of mutually dependent connections. Consider also how Derrida speaks of the 'middle voice':

> Here in the usage of our language we must consider that the ending —*ance* is undecided between active and passive. And we shall see why what is designated by "*différance*" is neither simply active nor simply passive, that it announces or recalls something like the *middle voice*, that it speaks of another operation which is not an operation, which cannot be thought of either as a passion or as an action of a subject upon an object, as starting from an agent or from a patient, or on the basis of, or in view of, any of these terms.' (Derrida 1973: 137)

What is announced by the 'middle voice' (*la voix moyenne*), as Derrida insists, cannot be thought of as the median point between two extremes. To position the 'middle' thus is to fall back on a dualism of 'either/or' that underpins a metaphysics of presence. Rather, the 'middle' which *différance* recalls affirms a double negation of 'neither/nor' that relinquishes even its own negation. Or as Park (2006a: 12) puts it, the Derridean 'middle' 'designates the impossibility of drawing a clear-cut demarcation between conditions that the history of philosophy has defined as binary opposites and which our linguistic convention has separated into two opposite realms'—namely, the dualism of subject/object. In Buddhism, any such dualism between the subject and object, or

between arising and ceasing, is regarded as an illusory after-effect generated by the misapprehension of the movement of dependent co-arising, which announces the Buddha's 'middle path' or 'middle way'. A traditional explanation of the 'middle way' recounts the Buddha's life story, where he first renounced a life of sensual pleasure as a young prince to pursue ascetic practices of bodily mortification, before renouncing that also at the point of near death to settle on a path of moderation between two extremes, a middle path which led to Awakening. This, however, is a limited explanation of the 'middle' of the middle path. Like the 'middle voice' of *différance* the 'middle path' of Buddhism cannot be reduced to the median point between two extremes—it is not to be discovered through a thinking of the 'either/or' but affirmed through a double negation of 'neither/nor' that relinquishes even its own negation. In a text from the Pali Canon where the Buddha is asked by a follower to clarify the necessary 'Right View' for the goal of Awakening, the 'middle path' is explained thus:

> By and large, Kaccayana, this world is supported by (takes as its object) a polarity, that of existence and non-existence. But when one sees the origination of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'non-existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one. When one sees the cessation of the world as it actually is with right discernment, 'existence' with reference to the world does not occur to one (Thānissaro 1997c).

The Buddha neither affirms existence nor non-existence, and in so doing arising is accepted together with cessation, being is affirmed alongside non-being (see Park 2006b: 9). He goes on to say, '"Everything exists": that is one extreme. "Everything doesn't exist": that is a second extreme. Avoiding these two extremes, the Tathagata ['one who

has thus gone'; used by the Buddha when referring to himself] teaches the Dhamma via the middle [this is followed by an explication of the twelve links of becoming]' (Thānissaro 1997c). In the Mahayana tradition, the 'middle path' is explicated in the *Nirvana Sutra* as the unconditioned awareness of Awakening: 'Buddha-nature neither exists nor exists/both exists and non-exists/ [...] being and non-being combined/This is what is called the middle path' (quoted in Park 2006b: 10). Like deconstruction, Buddhism evokes the 'middle' to disrupt binary oppositions. This, then, is how Loy glosses their relationship:

> [Buddhism and deconstruction share:] similar critiques of self-existence/self-presence; a shared suspicion about the ontotheological quest for Being, and a corresponding emphasis on groundlessness; the deconstruction of such "transcendental signifieds" into ungraspable traces of traces; a rejection of Truth (with a capital T) as the intellectual attempt to fixate ourselves; and the questioning of both objectivist and subjectivist values (Loy 1993: 483-484).

In addition to the edited volume *Healing Deconstruction* (1996), Loy has examined the relation between Buddhism and deconstruction in at least three other essays: 'The Clôture of Deconstruction: A Mahayana Critique of Derrida' (1987), 'The Deconstruction of Buddhism' (1992), and 'Indra's Postmodern Net' (1993). That 'Indra's Postmodern Net' has been republished more than a decade later in the anthology *Buddhisms and Deconstructions* (Park 2006a) is perhaps indicative of the continuing influence of Loy's critique of deconstruction. In his first essay on the topic, Loy (1987: 59) claims that 'Derrida's radical critique of Western philosophy is defective only because it is not radical enough', and that 'Derrida remains in the halfway-house of proliferating "pure textuality" whereas

deconstruction could lead to a transformed mode of experiencing the world'. This argument is repeated in the subsequent essays where he again claims that Buddhism is more radical because Derridean deconstruction 'is still logocentric, for what needs to be deconstructed is not just language but the world we live in and the way we live in it, trapped within a cage of our own making' (Loy 1992: 227-228); Loy (1993: 481) asks, 'What would happen if [Derrida's] claims about textuality were extrapolated into claims about the whole universe?' (1993: 481) Employing Indian Madhyamika, Chinese Huayan, and Zen Buddhist understandings, he contends that Buddhist deconstructive strategies not only predate Derrida's but also offer a more thorough deconstruction of existence, or as he puts it, the whole universe. This is illustrated with the metaphor of Indra's Net:

> Far away in the heavenly abode of the great god Indra, there is a wonderful net that has been hung by some cunning artificer in such a manner that it stretches out infinitely in all directions. In accordance with the extravagant tastes of deities, the artificer has hung a single glittering jewel in each "eye" of the net, and since the net itself is infinite in all dimensions, the jewels are infinite in number. There hang the jewels, glittering like stars of the first magnitude, a wonderful sight to behold. If we now arbitrarily select one of these jewels for inspection and look closely at it, we will discover that in its polished surface there are reflected all the other jewels in the net, infinite in number. Not only that, but each of the jewels reflected in this one jewel is also reflecting all the other jewels, so that there is an infinite reflecting process occurring (quoted in Cook 1977: 2).

Indra's Net, according to Francis Cook's description, symbolises 'a cosmos in which there is an infinitely repeated interrelationship among all the members of the cosmos' (1977:

2). If each element in the net reflects infinite other elements, it cannot be said to be self-existent or have self-presence, for each element is interpermeated with infinite other elements. Indra's Net, in other words, expresses the principle of dependent co-arising. The cosmos it depicts precludes the notion of a creator or origin, for it has 'no center, or perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere' (Cook 1977: 2). Loy then compares the wisdom of Indra's Net with Derrida's claim in *Of Grammatology* (1978: 36): 'In this play of representation, the point of origin becomes ungraspable. There are things like reflecting pools, and images, an infinite reference from one to the other, but no longer a source, a spring. There is no longer simple origin'. But although Loy acknowledges the affinities between Buddhism and deconstruction, he contends that the experience of selflessness and interdependency of self and others cannot 'be gained from the study of texts alone', for it 'requires a 'leap' which cannot be thought', a leap which could be better performed by 'religious practice' (Loy 1993: 485). He further claims that if Derrida's aim is to seek 'a nonsite, or a nonphilosophical site, from which to question philosophy', meditation can be one such nonsite, for insofar as meditation is a religious practice it constitutes the 'other' of philosophy, 'the repressed shadow of our rationality dismissed and ignored because it challenges the only ground philosophy has' (Loy 1993: 485).

Reconsidering the Buddhist criticism of deconstruction

As a committed Buddhist like Loy, I too profess faith in the transformative potential of meditation practice, and this thesis is indeed an attempt to articulate the reasons supporting this faith. However, I would refrain from passing judgment about the superiority of Buddhist strategies over Derridean ones. For to claim that Derrida's conceptual critique lacks the practical applications of Buddhist meditation is to efface the specificities of the respective traditions and gloss over how the

religion/philosophy opposition does not sit comfortably with either Buddhism or deconstruction. My argument is that such a judgment about the supposed superiority of meditation or `religious praxis enacts intellectual inhospitality towards both deconstruction *and* Buddhism. As Park (2006a: xvii) has noted in the introduction to the volume *Buddhisms and Deconstructions,* the comparative project is off-balance from the start: 'By juxtaposing the religio-philosophical tradition of Buddhism with the philosophy of deconstruction, the project might have attempted to cross the border of genre as much as that of geographic specifics, which could damage the value of this project'. Likewise, in his essay on the affinities between Derridean deconstruction and the Madhyamika understanding of the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist sage Nagarjuna (whom Loy also engages with in his writings), Ian Mabbett (2006: 22) suggests that 'the comparison between the two systems of thought from such different cultural environments must be radically incommensurable, and the plotting of similarities could only be a *jeu d'esprit*'.

In other words, incommensurability between Buddhism and deconstruction need not lead to a critical impasse. Loy (1993: 505) appears to acknowledge this: 'That there are also major differences is not an impasse but an opportunity: the place where fruitful dialogue can occur. I think such a conversation has much to offer both parties.' Yet, in order to mount the criticism of Derrida's 'textual idolatry' Loy has to ignore the specific aims of deconstruction and efface the incommensurabilities between Buddhism and deconstruction, and in so doing stymies fruitful dialogue. This is evinced by the way he does not work consistently with the *jeu d'esprit* Mabbett speaks of, especially where Derrida's own playful writings about the 'text' or 'textuality' are concerned. Consider what Loy says:

> Today Jacques Derrida argues that the meaning of such a multi-dimensional space [of the text] can never be completely fulfilled, for the continual circulation of signifiers denies meaning any fixed foundation or conclusion. Hence texts never attain self-presence, and that includes the text that constitutes me (1993: 481).

These claims are followed by the question quoted above: 'What would happen if these claims about textuality were extrapolated into claims about the whole universe?' On the one hand, Loy appears to acknowledge how deconstruction's focus on textuality questions the gap or gulf between language and reality, such as when he says that the lack of enduring self-presence of texts includes the 'the text that constitutes me' (Loy 1993: 481). Yet on the other hand, he implies that the critical itinerary of deconstruction does not go beyond language, such as when he ponders the implications of extending Derrida's thinking about textuality onto 'the whole universe' (Loy 1993: 481). Has Loy raised a question about the need to seek the 'outside' of language not already considered by Derrida himself? Consider what the latter has said (in a published interview that Loy also cites in his essay) about the repeated allegations that deconstruction is concerned only with language: 'I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language, that we are imprisoned in language; it is in fact, saying the exact opposite. The critique of logocentrism is above all else the search for the 'other' of language' (Derrida quoted in Kearney 1984: 123). Consider also the one utterance in Derrida's lexicon which has incurred more ire than any other, the notorious aphorism

'il n'y a pas de hors-texte', or there is nothing outside the text/no outside-text. Derrida says:

> What I call the 'text' implies all the structures called 'real', 'economic', 'historical', socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents. Another way of recalling once again that 'there is nothing outside the text.' That does not mean that all referents are suspended, denied, or enclosed in a book, as people have claimed, or have been naive enough to believe and have accused me of believing. But it does mean that every referent, all reality has the structure of a differential trace, and that one cannot refer to this 'real' except in an interpretive experience. (Derrida 1988: 148)

What Derrida variously calls the 'general text', 'arche-text', 'textuality', or just 'text', does not refer only to language or meaning but also implies all the constitutive forces of human experience. Or as Caputo (1997b: 79-80) puts it, 'We are always and already, on Derrida's telling, embedded in various *networks*—social, historical, linguistic, political, sexual networks (the list goes on nowadays to include electronic networks, worldwide webs)—various horizons or presuppositions.' The word 'networks' when used in this context dovetails with the Buddhist understanding of dependent co-arising as a web of mutually conditioning forces that constitutes the experience of phenomenal reality. So when Caputo (1997b: 80) says of the Derridean understanding of text—'we are all in the same textual boat together, forced to do the best we can with such signs and traces as we can piece together, working out of one worldwide-web site or another'—what the word 'textual' connotes is not exclusively language but the movement of trace immanent to differential repetitions of habit and habitat, *both words and things*, forming the body-mind's sense of temporal existence-in-this-world world. Mabbett makes the same point:

> When we speak of deconstruction, then, there is no unique given reality with which we can identify it apart from the phenomenal world itself, which is a text, a structure or seeming structure whose real nature can be recognized to be incapable of consistent characterization once it is seen for what it is. "Reality," or all that can be recognized as such, is not something that *comes to be known*, having existed previously. It is a construction of knowing (2006: 25).

Derrida's later work, which is discussed below, goes some way towards clarifying the common misconception that deconstruction is concerned only with language, engaging explicitly as it does with questions about justice and democracy (Derrida 1992a, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2001b). But even in his earlier writings, Derrida (1982: 18) speaks of the 'worldling of the world', characterising *différance* as 'the name we might give to the "active" moving discord of different forces'. In *Of Grammatology* ethnocentrism is mentioned as a corollary of logocentrism, and the question of writing vis-à-vis *différance* or the movement of trace is also linked to the question of violence: 'What links writing to violence? And what must violence be in order for something in it to be equivalent to the operation of the trace?' (Derrida 1978: 112) As Elizabeth Grosz (2005: 58) notes, what Derrida investigates here is not the question of what writing must be in order for something in it to be equivalent to violence: 'Rather, he seeks out the modes of divergence, ambiguity, impossibility, the aporetic status of violence itself, a status that it shares with the trace, and thus with writing, inscription, or difference.' That is, 'Derrida does not ask how violence is like writing, but rather, what is it *in* violence, what operative element in violence, is equivalent to the trace?' (Grosz 2005: 59).

Would Loy agree with commentators like Grosz and Mabbett that life behaves in a textual way had he not effaced how Derrida's understanding of 'text' or 'writing' engages with the problems of lifeworlds like violence, or how *différance* disrupts the silence/language dualism as much as the subject/object dualism? In light of how Loy has published a book for a general readership entitled *The World is Made of Stories* (2010), one wonders if he has implicitly conceded on this point about the 'textuality' of life. But perhaps he would still maintain that deconstruction only attempts to decentre the dualism of subject/object *theoretically* and offers no *practical* means to truly 'forget the self', as the Japanese Zen master Dōgen put it:

> To study the Buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly (quoted in Loy 1993: 503).

Loy asserts in all his essays on Buddhism and deconstruction that such a realisation requires 'religious practice', and specifically meditative exercise: '"Forgetting" itself is how a jewel in Indra's Net loses its sense of separation and realizes that it is the Net. Meditation is learning how to die by learning to "forget" the sense-of-self, which happens by becoming absorbed into one's meditative-exercise' (Loy 1993: 503). As an authorised teacher of the Sanbo Kyodan lineage of Zen Buddhism—a lineage whose emphasis on meditation is, like the modern *vipassanā* movement, shaped by the hegemonic imperatives of Buddhist modernism (Sharf 1995)—Loy is no doubt committed to the transformative possibility of the practice. And here we again confront one side of the

central problematic of this chapter: how might we extend intellectual hospitality towards the sacred truth claim guiding Buddhist meditation?

The argument I am developing is that the dialogue has congealed around the position propounded by Loy that meditation is the necessary 'practical' corrective for a merely 'theoretical' deconstruction. This position turns on a blinkered reading of Derrida's work and effaces its own inhospitable analytical manoeuvres. Loy's deployment of the 'religious practice' of meditation as the necessary corrective to deconstruction's 'textual idolatry', ends up also enacting intellectual inhospitality towards Buddhism. The religion/philosophy distinction he relies upon is not subject to interrogation. But as King (1996) has argued, this is something that cannot be taken for granted, for the religion/philosophy distinction is not native to non-Western traditions like Buddhism. To position, then, Buddhist meditation as a 'religious' corrective to Derrida's 'philosophical' analysis is to universalise Eurocentric categories onto Buddhism, to negate difference. But even if we bracket these inhospitable manoeuvres in Loy's discourse, his reading of Buddhist non-dualism with the metaphor of Indra's Net is not unproblematic in itself:

> Indra's Net implies that when a jewel has no inside, the outside is not outside. The mind that Dōgen [refers] to is not some transcendent Absolute [...] Our minds need to realize that they are absolute in the original sense: "unconditioned" [...] The poststructural realization that the meaning of a text cannot be totalized—that language/thought never attains a self-presence which escapes differences—is an important step towards the realization that there is no abiding-place for the mind anywhere *within* Indra's Net. But the textual dissemination liberated by Derrida's

> deconstruction will not be satisfactory unless the dualistic sense of self—not just its discourse—has been deconstructed (Loy 1993: 505-506; emphasis added).

Consider here Robert Magliola's (2006: 246) observation that even though Loy disavows any totalising claim of a 'transcendent Absolute', his understanding of Indra's Net slips into a form of totalism by making an implicit claim of 'the all is one' and 'the one is all'. Loy's understanding of Indra's Net is informed by the Huayan [Flower Garland] school of Mahayana Buddhism, which conceives of 'Perfect Reality' as unchanging. There are controversies within Huayan over specific doctrinal interpretations, which are beyond the scope of the present discussion. For the purpose of evaluating Loy's critique of deconstruction, it is sufficient to highlight Magliola's point 'that—*a priori*—the key ideas of the Huayan School, and even more so, the rhetoric associated with the school, alienate the deconstructionist: s/he turns a cold shoulder' (2006: 246). He adds, 'No doubt, Huayan—like all Buddhist schools—intends its chosen ideas and images [of the mutual identification of the one and many, and perfect harmony] to serve only as *prajñapti* [Sanskrit: provisional designation], but this is in fact my point: precisely on this score, vis-à-vis deconstruction, Huayan's unitariness doesn't pass muster' (Magliola 2006: 246). In other words, Loy's discourse stakes its claim on an insistence on the kind of ontotheological closure that deconstruction questions; his claims that Buddhist analytical strategies are better at relinquishing such a logocentric habit notwithstanding, ontotheological closure is precisely what his discourse enacts. This is evident in the passage quoted above. As Magliola (2006: 247) astutely observes, the ontotheological closure of Loy's discourse is revealed by the phrase '*within* Indra's Net', which exposes how his 'rhetoric of inside/outside, and non-abidingness is unabashedly *inside* the holism [of Huayan]'.

To criticise deconstruction Loy has to seek recourse in a rhetoric of boundaries, of an inside/outside dualism which Derrida had repeatedly challenged with tropes like 'contamination' and 'double-bind', so as to 'thwart closure, unmarked space, and other hallmarks of holism' (Magliola 2006: 247; Bennington and Derrida 1993: 306, 310; Kamuf 1991: 599). On this point we could further note that despite quoting the Buddha on how it is unwise to conclude, 'This alone is Truth, and everything else is false', Loy nevertheless asserts: 'Awareness of mutual identity and interpenetration is rapidly developing into *the only* doctrine that makes sense anymore, perhaps *the only one* that can save us from ourselves' (1993: 483; emphasis added).

My point in problematising Loy's discourse is not to dismiss as futile the dialogical exchange between Buddhism and deconstruction (or poststructuralist thought in general), but merely to underscore that any such comparative scholarship needs to exercise intellectual hospitality. What next for the dialogue, we could ask, after concluding that Buddhism is more 'radical'? How would this decision of one-upmanship enable further dialogue, mutual enhancement or reciprocal learning? As my aim is to rejuvenate this dialogue on the affinities between Buddhism and poststructuralist thinking—to take seriously the transformative potential of Buddhist meditation without positing its superiority—I shall consider a way to move beyond the critical impasse by refocussing attention on how Buddhism and deconstruction both affirm an open horizon of utter response-ability, sharing a praxis-ideal of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. This praxis-ideal will orientate my Foucauldian analysis of Vipassana as well as the profession of faith I wish to eventually make in a deconstructive

conceptualisation of cultural studies as a responsible response towards incalculable alterity.

Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally

In 'The Deconstruction of Buddhism', Loy (1992: 228) points out that there is no transcendental injunction to follow Buddhist teachings. Rather, the practitioner accepts ethical precepts and makes vows to cultivate a certain mode of living conducive to Awakening. As we have seen in Chapter One, the ethical precepts of Buddhism form the basis for the activities of engaged Buddhism. Here, I want to consider the additional set of vows, articulated in the Mahayana tradition, that derives from what is known as the bodhisattva ideal. Roughly speaking, a *bodhisattva* (Sanskrit) is a being who has generated the spontaneous qualities of unconditional wisdom-compassion necessary for Awakening, but who defers their own liberation from the cycle of rebirth in order to strive for the Awakening of all sentient beings. Being a Zen teacher, Loy's practice would be guided by the bodhisattva vows, as would the Dalai Lama, who is regarded in Tibetan Buddhism as a manifestation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteśvara (who is also personified in East Asia as the female figure of Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy).

'Buddhism', he had thought, was merely a part of his cultural heritage as a third-generation Chinese migrant in Singapore. He still recalls the smell of burning incense in his grandmother's flat, wafting from an altar where Guanyin sits amongst offerings of fruit and rice cake, watching over him with an ever-serene gaze as he chucks yet another tantrum after losing a game to his brother. 'She was the kindest, most benevolent person I've ever known', he often tells his partner.

The bodhisattva ideal is not adopted by the Theravada tradition from which my formal practice of insight meditation derives. The precise qualities and status of the bodhisattva and its role as a praxis-ideal is in fact a point of contention between the Mahayana and the Theravada. Historically, proponents of the Mahayana have described some of the early Buddhist schools from which the Theravada derives as Hinayana ('yana' means 'vehicle', and the prefix 'hina' means 'lesser' or 'inferior', as opposed to 'maha' which means 'greater'), because they emphasise the work of personal liberation from *dukkha* and do not posit the concomitant Awakening of all sentient beings. This sectarian tension still plays out today. For instance, on the Theravadin forum DhammaWheel there is resistance to the belief that the bodhisattva ideal represents a fuller realisation of the Buddha's teachings; the general consensus amongst members is that the bodhisattva ideal was not taught by the historical Buddha (DhammaWheel 2012). It will take us too far afield to consider debates about the historicity and pejorative connotation of 'Hinayana'. But it is important that I acknowledge this dispute. For my interest in the bodhisattva is not to perpetuate sectarian conflict. What inspires me is the *ethos of utter response-ability* elicited by the figure as a praxis-ideal, which given my hybridised, inter-traditional approach to Buddhism, I do not regard as a necessary corrective to the supposedly 'lesser' teachings of the Theravada on personal liberation from *dukkha*. If anything, where the Theravada offers practical advice for my day to day practice, the Mahayana offers poetic and philosophical inspiration for my understanding of Awakening, the precise nature of which remains ineffable, impossible to pin down in discourse. What I want to elucidate, then, is how the poetic, philosophical inspiration I draw from the Mahayana resonates with the poetic, philosophical inspiration I draw from the deconstructive passion for the *impossible*. The precise wording may differ according to translations, but the principal vows of the bodhisattva ideal are:

> Beings are numberless; I vow to awaken with them.
>
> Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them.
>
> Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.
>
> Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to become it.

The bodhisattva ideal figures thus as an impossibility: how does one awaken with all beings, end the delusions that cause suffering, enter the dharma gates of liberation, and become the Buddha's way of Awakening, if they are numberless, inexhaustible, boundless, and unsurpassable? Yet, these are the very words a Mahayana Buddhist would recite on a regular basis, as if to say: '*That it is impossible is precisely why it can and must be done.*' The bodhisattva ideal could therefore be read as a pledge of commitment to utter response-ability, a commitment to *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. For if one is to relinquish all selfish desires and strive for the Awakening for all sentient beings, then it is necessary to undercut one's own desire for bodhisattvahood and even to refuse Awakening as a determinate endpoint. As a praxis-ideal of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*, the bodhisattva ideal imagines Awakening as an ever-receding horizon that, by definition, cannot be reached. Yet, that the horizon is impossible to reach, that it is ever-receding, is what makes it possible to initiate and navigate the journey towards any destination in the first place. The condition of possibility for embarking on a path of action is at once its impossibility—or the impossibility of circumscribing it in any determinate manner, at any rate. Otherwise, how does one enact hospitality towards incalculable alterity, respond to the call of the other, and actualise the potential of always becoming otherwise, the freedom of unbecoming, of Awakening? Could it be said, then,

that the bodhisattva aspirant holds a passion for the im-possible, a passion professed by Derridean deconstruction?

Derrida's writings, especially during the later stage of his career, deal with a series of possible-impossible aporias, such as hospitality and forgiveness. The idea of hospitality that underpins this chapter has been strongly influenced by this aspect of Derrida's work: 'Hospitality is the deconstruction of the at-home; deconstruction is hospitality to the other' (Derrida 2002: 364). On Derrida's account, hospitality—or to be more exact, *absolute* or *unconditional* hospitality—must be without imperative, order or duty, and hence it is both 'inconceivable and incomprehensible' (2002: 362). He writes:

> The law of hospitality, the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible and perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the "pact" of hospitality. To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner [...] but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names (Derrida 2000: 25).

If absolute hospitality must be unlimited, then, there can be no exchange or debt between the host and guest. To extend hospitality to an other, one must have the power to host; there has to be a claim of ownership or mastery over a certain domain in order to welcome whoever and whatever arrives without expectation and

discrimination. The host must be able to set some limitation on the guest, for if the guest takes over the domain then one loses the status of host and the capacity to extend hospitality. The very condition of possibility for the act of hosting, however, also renders hospitality impossible. For to exert ownership and control is to circumscribe absolute hospitality, which calls, rather, for a response of non-mastery or unconditionality. Hospitality as such is always deferred, never complete, and absent to itself. Yet, the impossible response elicited by the call of absolute hospitality is why a welcoming hand can and must be extended—why a relationship to the other is possible. The possible-impossible aporia that constitutes hospitality does not paralyse decision (see Introduction and Chapter Seven), but serves as the open horizon of possibility for determinate action, for the striving towards unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, even if such a praxis-ideal remains ever-receding and unfulfilled as such. So for example, in relation to the issue of immigration, Derrida says that unconditional and conditional hospitality are irreducible to one another, but that it is in the name of 'hyperbolic hospitality' that 'we should always invent the best dispositions [...] the most just legislation [...] Calculate the risk, yes, but don't shut the door on what cannot be calculated, meaning the future and the foreigner—that's the double law of hospitality' (2005a: 67).

The same logic is at work in the possible-impossible aporia of forgiveness: 'If I only forgive what is forgivable or venial, the nonmortal sin, I am not doing anything that deserves the name of forgiveness. Whence the aporia: it is only the unforgivable that ever has to be forgiven' (Derrida 2005a: 160). Forgiveness must therefore always remain 'heterogenous to the order of politics or of the juridical as they are ordinarily understood', and in this sense it is 'excessive, hyperbolic, mad' (Derrida 200b: 39). The

moment a transgression is deemed forgivable, or the moment a response is met by a plea for forgiveness, it becomes conditional, an act of calculation, amnesty, or pardon. Yet, conditional forgiveness must remain in tension with the impossible ideal of unconditional forgiveness, otherwise there would be no possibility of any determinate act of forgiving as such. Like hospitality, forgiveness is structured, preceded, by a double bind such that it is always incomplete, and hence, always response-able. Derrida portrays the relationship between the conditional and unconditional thus:

> These two poles, *the unconditional and conditional*, are absolutely heterogeneous, and must remain irreducible to one another. They are nonetheless indissociable: if one wants, and it is necessary, forgiveness to become effective, concrete, historic; if one wants it to *arrive*, to happen by changing things, it is necessary that this purity engage itself in a series of conditions of all kinds (psycho-sociological, political, etc.). It is between these two poles, irreconcilable but indissociable, that decisions and responsibilities are to be taken [...] pure and unconditional forgiveness, in order to have its own meaning, must have no 'meaning', no finality, even no intelligibility. It is a madness of the impossible. It would be necessary to follow, without letting up, the consequence of this paradox, or this aporia (2001b: 44-45).

At the end of the thesis, I will return to examine how the Derridean passion for the im-possible provokes the question of faith, and indeed I will argue, a profession of faith. But for now, to draw this discussion to a close, I want to simply underscore how Derrida's treatment of such aporias as hospitality and forgiveness exposes the impossibility of being in itself, the double bind of temporal experience, messianicity,

the 'exposure to what comes or happens. It is the exposure (the desire, the openness, but also the fear) that opens, that opens itself, that opens us to time, to what comes upon us, to what arrives or happens, to the event' (Derrida 2003: 120). In other words, deconstruction recalls and affirms the finitude of the human condition, our mortality, the absolute limit, of death, of the incalculable and unforeseeable event—that impossible horizon of a future to come that makes possible the differing and deferring movement of the trace, the movement of life, the absence that haunts the absent presence of the present. As Derrida (1978: 5) writes in the 'exergue' *Of Grammatology*, the writing of *différance* attests to the utter unpredictability of the absolute future to come, which 'can only be anticipated in the form of an absolute danger. It is that which breaks absolutely with constituted normality and can only be proclaimed, *presented*, as a sort of monstrosity.' I want to therefore join Park in affirming the relationship between Buddhism and deconstruction:

> To remember the face of death—its presence and absence in our being—is to refresh our existential condition of the human being all over again [...] Our existence is marked by an open ending. Without openness toward the inconceivability of the world, we are trapped. Derrida tells us, this is a dangerous play. Buddhists know that it is not easy to give up the illusory "self" we have created since the beginningless beginning of the phylogeny of the human mind. Danger and difficulty, however, do not change the reality. It might be only through a constant engagement with them that we may be able to peep into a fragment of the groundless ground which we call our "existence" (Park 2006b: 18).

So perhaps it is at the impossible juncture of our mortality where deconstruction resonates most strongly with Buddhism, both of which stand resolutely on the groundless ground of being to give witness to the finitude of the human condition, or what Buddhism attests to as the First Noble Truth of *dukkha*—the acceptance of which is the necessary first step towards becoming otherwise, the condition of possibility for Awakening, the arrival of something wholly other: *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. To be clear, my point is not that Buddhism and deconstruction are the same. Rather, since there is no determinate way to arbitrate on whether a Buddhist or Derridean approach to defusing the metaphysics of presence is more radical or effective, what I am arguing is simply that one way to go beyond the impasse of existing debates about their affinities and differences, is to (re)affirm their shared commitment of utter response-ability towards difference or incalculable alterity, their shared ethos of unconditional unconditionality unconditionally.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the challenge of intellectual hospitality in comparative scholarship on Buddhism and Western thought informed by the constructivist paradigm, focussing in particular on the exchange between Mahayana Buddhist understandings and Derridean deconstruction. It considered the question of how might we engage with the sacred proposition of an unmediated awareness of reality that is purportedly accessible via meditative exercises. I argued that it is important not to dismiss such sacred truth claims simply because they appear to be incommensurable with poststructuralist understandings about the constitutive historical and cultural forces of experience. To dismiss them in a sweeping manner is to risk perpetuating the continuing ideological

subordination of Asian sacred traditions and lifeworlds under the will to knowledge-power of a Eurocentric intellectual paradigm.

The chapter then examined how existing scholarship has attempted to take the transformative possibility of meditation practice seriously. I showed how the writings of David Loy enact intellectual inhospitality when they make the claim that whilst Buddhism and deconstruction both challenge a metaphysics of presence, the latter is unable to make the 'leap' from theory to practice, and is therefore less radical than the former. Such an argument turns on a blinkered reading of deconstruction that effaces the incommensurabilities between the two sets of knowledge-practices. In so doing, it stymies fruitful dialogue. To open a path beyond this critical impasse, I refocussed attention on how Buddhism, and particularly the bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana tradition, joins deconstruction in affirming the possible-impossible aporetic condition of temporal existence. Both of them are committed to what I have described as a praxis-ideal of unconditional unconditionality unconditionally.

In reading the bodhisattva ideal alongside the im-possible aporias of hospitality and forgiveness, what this chapter has done is, in effect, to draw Buddhist understandings into the ambit of contemporary philosophical interest in the messianic, and particularly Derrida's thoughts on messianicity without messianism. The profession of faith in Chapter Seven will return to engage in a fuller treatment of this. To designate a checkpoint in the (endless?) movement towards this profession of faith, I want to underscore here that the messianic tone adopted in contemporary radical thought marks a concern not with 'the determined theological content of the messianic—the specific who, what and when of redemption—so much as a *generalized* ontological,

phenomenological, temporal, ethical or political structure that can be gleaned within it' (Bradley and Fletcher 2009: 188). This concern with the 'messianic now', to put it another way, cannot be circumscribed by any conceptual or institutional horizon of expectation. Or as Derrida (1994: 211) puts it, to affirm the messianic is to say '"yes" to the *arrivant(e)*, the 'come' to the future that cannot be anticipated'. A problematic that confronts Derrida's thinking of the 'messianic now' (as well as others like Badiou and Žižek) is the thorny question of whether we can even speak of a messianic without a Messiah, whether the messianic could indeed be spoken of as a generalised structure of experience that exists *independently* of the historical event of the Abrahamic revelations. An analogous problematic confronts a messianic reading of Buddhism. If there's a messianic tone in Buddhism (identifiable in the Mahayana praxis-ideal of the bodhisattva, for example), we could also ask what its relation is to the figure of the future Buddha or Maitreya Buddha. According to Buddhist discourses, the Awakening of this successor to Gautama Buddha would occur in a future age to come when the teachings of the Buddha are forgotten in the world. Is this a form of messianism? Or if not, how might we bring this eschatological narrative in Buddhism into dialogue with current attempts to think the messianic without the determinate messianisms of the Abrahamic traditions?

These are clearly large philosophical questions that I cannot broach in this thesis. These questions require sustained conversations between different participants, including Buddhism, and especially an emergent 'Western Buddhism'. But, as I have been arguing, any such conversation must always be mindful of *intellectual hospitality*. This, then, I hope, would be the modest contribution of this chapter to the wider 'messianic turn' in contemporary radical thought. The conversations-to-come could begin with intellectual hospitality, if, without effacing the levels of incommensurability involved in the

exchange, they consider how Buddhism may similarly affirm an absolute future with its guiding doctrine of dependent co-arising. Where Buddhism and deconstruction are concerned, their shared affirmation of the messianicity of temporal-existence ought not be seen as a rejection of the present. Rather, as Bradley and Fletcher (2009: 185) put it, to 'imagine an absolute future whose only relation to the "now" takes the form of a total interruption or renunciation' is not to ignore the here-and-now, but 'to expose the historical contingency of every form of current political or philosophical organization'. In this sense, the thinking of the 'messianic now' performs 'an absolutely timely, current and ongoing critique of neo-liberal modernity's own (messianic?) pretensions to monopolize the "now"' (Bradley and Fletcher 2009: 185).

With these caveats in mind, the subsequent chapters will attempt to participate in this broader project of inquiring into, and of harnessing, the differential forces animating a futural politics of the 'messianic now'. The aim, in particular, is to show by the end of the thesis how these three sets of knowledge-practices—Buddhism, Derridean deconstruction, and Foucauldian critique—affirm the messianicity of temporal-existence, the utter contingency of every relation of self to self and others, and profess faith in the possibility of unbecoming, of always becoming otherwise than before. What I'm exploring, in other words, is a way to take seriously the transformative possibilities of meditative experience without subordinating the sacred claim about unmediated awareness under the poststructuralist commitment to interrogate the historical and cultural forces that shape experience. The task for the next chapter is to reconsider the role of 'experience' and subtextual 'religious question' in Foucault's oeuvre.

CHAPTER FOUR

The 'Religious Question' in Foucault's Genealogies of Experience

This chapter charts the trajectory of Foucault's critico-political itinerary to draw attention to the threads in his work that weave together a subtextual 'religious question'. The purpose is to set the analytical grid for a Foucauldian reading of a Buddhist art of living as articulated by Vipassana in the chapters to follow. This will articulate a detailed response to Barcan and Johnston's question about whether cultural studies is mired in the programmatic pessimism of Foucauldian accounts of selfhood that fixate on the workings of normalising power. Accordingly, they ask whether received interpretations of the Foucauldian approach could be rethought and augmented 'in ways that do not so much contradict it as shift its analytical focus', so as to enable 'a rethinking of notions of spirit', the 're-theorising [of] the mind/body split and the nature of matter' (Barcan and Johnston 2005). It is unclear whether Barcan and Johnston have considered the small body of scholarship on the 'religious' dimensions of Foucault's thinking (Foucault 1999; Carrette 2000; Bernauer and Carrette 2004), which could provide critical leverage for interrogating received deployments of the Foucauldian approach and cultural studies' 'foundational secularism'. In any event, this chapter will excavate Foucault's subtextual 'religious question' to respond to this challenge.

If there is a 'religious question' in Foucault's oeuvre, it is important to contextualise at the outset the term 'religious' when it is appended to Foucault's critico-political itinerary. This idea of a 'religious question' is inspired by—indeed, I am indebted to—

Jeremy Carrette's work on Foucault: namely, a series of Foucault's essays and interviews that Carrette selected and edited as *Religion and Culture* (Foucault 1999), and his own book *Foucault and Religion: Spiritual Corporality and Political Spirituality* (2000), which to my knowledge, remains the only book-length study of Foucault's engagement with the question of religion. Whilst 'religion' or 'religious' will be evoked in the course of this chapter as a shorthand to connote the theological inheritance of Western culture in general, when 'religious' is appended to Foucault's work it refers to the religious subtext that Carrette pieces together from the main studies and diverse fragments of essays, lectures, and interviews comprising Foucault's oeuvre. This subtextual 'religious question' threads through the essays of his 'literary period' of the 1960s (where he sometimes refer to theological themes) to his later studies on the ethics of Classical and Late Antiquity and the spiritual exercises of early Christianity.

To append 'religious' to Foucault's critical itinerary is not so much a task of applying Foucault's methodology to religion or theology, such as what has been developed in the sociology of religion. Rather, as Carrette (2000: 2) explains, the 'religious question' is posed in order to shed light on how Foucault's 'late work on Christianity was not a sudden or abrupt turn to religion, but that he continually drew religion into his work.' Insofar as religion is a formative stratum of the social and political formations of Western culture, the Foucauldian project of writing 'a history of the present' (Foucault 1979: 31) or the 'critical ontology of ourselves' (Foucault 1984a: 47) already involves a certain question of religion. Consider for instance Foucault's very first book, *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1976 [1954]), a version of his doctoral dissertation and precursor to *History of Madness* (2006 [1961]). Even if Foucault would come to

disavow this book because of its underdeveloped theoretical and methodological formulations (he purportedly attempted, unsuccessfully, to suppress its reprint in 1962), we can see in the following how the Foucauldian itinerary had, from the start, included within its purview a subtextual concern with the question of religion:

> It is not that religion is delusional by nature, nor that the individual, beyond present-day religion, rediscovers his most suspect psychological origins. But religious delusion is a function of the secularization of culture: religion may be the object of delusional belief insofar as the culture of a group no longer permits the assimilation of religious or mystical beliefs in the present context of experience (Foucault 1976: 81).

An interview from 1967 about some of the important influences on his thinking also reveals Foucault's longstanding curiosity about the 'religious question':

> For a long time, there was a sort of unresolved conflict in me between a passion for Blanchot and Bataille, and on the other hand the interest I nurtured for certain positive studies, like those of Dumézil and Lévi-Strauss, for example. But in fact, these two directions, whose only common denominator was perhaps the religious question, contributed in equal measure in leading me to the theme of the disappearance of the subject (Foucault 1999: 98).

So if the aim of this chapter is to shed light on the implicit 'religious question' in the Foucauldian corpus, it should not be regarded as an attempt to ascertain the hidden

creedal commitment behind this acknowledged atheist (Macey 1993: 192, 415). The aim, rather, is to explore how a subtextual concern about religion had informed, and may continue to inform, the Foucauldian 'analysis of cultural facts' (Foucault 1999: 91). More specifically, as per Foucault's comments above about the 'disappearance of the subject', my argument is that this 'religious question' is inseparable from his critico-political aim of desubjectification, of enabling new modes of thinking and ways to become otherwise than before, 'a patient labor giving form to our impatience for liberty' (Foucault 1984a: 50). This chapter will therefore examine Foucault's 'religious question' in two parts: Part I presents an account of the development of the concept of 'experience' in his work, whilst Part II presents an account of his turn towards the question of the subject and ethics. This chapter will graft onto its account of the Foucauldian corpus the twin analytic of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' developed by Carrette.

Briefly, then, 'spiritual corporality' groups together the theoretical formulations and methodological resources of Foucault's work from the early 1960s to the early 1970s, whilst 'political spirituality' groups together those from post-1976, that is, after *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I. 'Spiritual corporality' entails a critique of the silencing powers of the dominant religious formations of Western culture, a critique that seeks at the same time to (re)embody that which is silenced: the body, and its potential for transgressive, limit-experiences. 'Political spirituality' entails a critique of the Christian confessional apparatus and pastoral power, a critique that seeks at the same time a rearticulation of the relationship between the subject and truth, ethics and politics: the continuous task of desubjectification, or, 'critique', understood as the inter-involvement of the activity of problematisation, the art of voluntary

insubordination, and the audacity to expose oneself as a subject. In mapping the movements of Foucault's itinerary, this chapter adds an additional thread to Carrette's reading of Foucault's subtextual 'religious question'. Alongside Carrette's thesis about the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality', I will articulate a complementary account of the continuities between the early conceptualisation of 'experience' and later development of 'limit-experience' in Foucault's work, and of the analytical shift in Foucault's thinking that occurred in the late 1970s.

PART I: THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN FOUCAULT'S OEUVRE

'Experience' as constitutive historical conditions

Along with other so-called poststructuralist critics, Foucault argues that because experience is constituted by culturally and historically contingent discursive formations and networks of practices, the experience of the subject cannot figure *a priori* in the investigation of perception and knowledge of the world. Hence, we find that until the shift to questions about the subject and ethics, Foucault was ambivalent about using the concept 'experience'. In the Preface to the first edition of *History of Madness* (1961), Foucault says that threading through the study are two notions of experience. Firstly, he speaks of the idea of 'limit-experience', which in the context of the history of madness, entails a question of tracing back to a time when reason and unreason were not differentiated; however, he also suggests that a series of histories of limit-experiences could be written by investigating the construction of the Orient as other by the West or the institutionalisation of sexual prohibitions, for instance. The idea of limit-experience at this juncture of Foucault's work could thus be read as designating 'a foundational gesture by which a culture excludes that which will

function as its outside' (O'Leary 2008: 8). Secondly, to shed light on the limit-experience that differentiated unreason and reason, Foucault speaks of the 'classical experience of madness'. This phrase recurs throughout the book—appearing alongside such phrases as 'all the major experiences of the Renaissance', 'the Western experience of madness', and 'the experience of madness in the fifteenth century' (Foucault 2006: 8; 16, 24)—but there is no determinate definition of experience' as such. Nevertheless, as O'Leary (2008: 8-9) points out, it is possible to piece together from the analyses of *History of Madness* an implicit conceptualisation of experience as: the forms of perception and sensibility shaped by systems of thought, institutions, and legal apparatuses which allow for certain ways of sensing, seeing, feeling an object. This reading of 'experience' finds support in, for example, the discussion of how the practice of internment partly shaped 'the mode in which madness was perceived, and lived, by the classical age'—a practice from which a 'new sensibility' of madness emerged (Foucault 2006: 55, 62). O'Leary (2008: 10) thus argues, 'To speak of "the classical experience of madness" is, then, to speak of the forms of consciousness, sensibility, practical engagement and scientific knowledge which take "madness" as their object.'

The concept of experience also appears in *The Order of Thing*s (1991a [1966]: xxi), where Foucault claims that the pure experience of order exists in every culture, explaining that the study 'is an attempt to analyse that experience.' The aim is to identify the forces shaping the 'experience of order' between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries by examining how the 'experience of language' (which Foucault also describes as a 'global, cultural experience') of the late Renaissance gave way to a new experience of the classical age (Foucault 1991a: 45-46). Yet, in his next book *The*

Archaeology of Knowledge (2008a [1969]: 18), Foucault would modify his position, saying that in *History of Madness* he had 'accorded too great a place, and a very enigmatic one too,' to what he had called 'experience', such that it remained 'close to admitting an anonymous and general subject of history'. Hence, between the late 1960s and late 1970s, Foucault shied away from the concept of 'experience', presumably because the word, with its connotative baggage of individual psychology, risked misrepresenting the arguments he was developing about a microphysics of power that operates on and through bodies to condition modes of thought and action. In an interview of 1978, however, Foucault would come to characterise his work as an investigation of 'experience':

> The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and the same thing. That is really the heart of what I do (Foucault 2000: 244).

'Experience' as transformative force

In the aforementioned interview Foucault also revises the idea of 'limit-experience'. Limit-experience at this moment of Foucault's work is conceived as a movement of (un)becoming through which the self encounters its limit in such a way that it 'tears the subject away from itself', leaving us different than before. This reinvigorated understanding of limit-experience was prompted by his encounters with certain works by Bataille, Blanchot, and Nietzsche, writings he calls 'experience books' rather than 'truth books' or 'demonstration books' (Foucault 2000: 241, 246). The idea of an

experience book turns on the dual meaning of the French word *expérience*, which also means 'experiment'. An experience book is one that experiments with ways to actualise the potential for becoming otherwise by putting the author and the reader to the test of their own limits. Although this latter understanding of limit-experience is articulated differently from how it was explicated in *History of Madness*, the two are not mutually exclusive; the later conceptualisation does not contradict but accommodates the earlier one. For Foucault, the foundational gestures by which a culture excludes that which will function as its outside represent moments of rupture that give rise to certain experiences in which a subject emerges as a concomitant to a field of objects. In the exclusion of unreason by reason, the emergence of 'madness' as an object of knowledge also entailed the emergence of a subject capable of knowing the truth of madness. This, O'Leary (2008: 12) asserts, 'qualifies as a kind of limit-experience because it involves a transformation in a form of subjectivity, through the constitution of a field of truth.' As Foucault says above, a book that writes a history of a limit-experience (of madness, penalty, sexuality, and so forth) should also evoke a limit-experience in the absent encounter between the author and reader—this is the effect he wishes his books to generate. The concept of 'limit-experience' thus serves at once as the object and objective of inquiry. Hence, Foucault (2000: 257) explains that the 'tangle of problems' with which he had concerned himself always involves 'a question of limit-experience and the history of truth.' Or as O'Leary (2008: 12) puts it, Foucault's work 'continuously strives to understand and disentangle the connections between forms of experience and forms of knowledge, between subjectivity and truth.'

This account of the role of experience in Foucault's work allows us to unknot the seeming contradiction between, on the one hand, his suspicion of philosophies of experience, and on the other, his foregrounding of experience as the primary concern of his research. The contradiction, as Thomas Flynn (quoted in Oksala 2004: 100) contends, is only apparent because what we are dealing with are really two different registers of experience: experience as temporal and lived; experience as spatial and objective. What this points to is that Foucault's work has to be given an 'axial' reading. That is, Foucault's deployment of 'experience' has to be understood in terms of the three analytical axes around which his oeuvre pivots: truth (knowledge), power (governmentality), subjectivity (ethics as the relation of self to self and others). This 'axial' reading is formulated explicitly in *The Use of Pleasure* where Foucault recasts the project of the history of sexuality as a history of the experience of sexuality: 'What I planned [...] was a history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture' (1990b [1984]: 4). The three axes, each addressing a different domain of experience, were more or less articulated in sequence over the course of Foucault's career. And while any given analysis may be oriented around one of the axes or focus on a particular domain of experience (such as this thesis, for instance, with its focus on the axis of subjectivity and the domain of ethics), it is important to note that they are inter-involved with no conceptual or chronological hierarchy ordering their interrelation with one another. As Foucault (1988b: 243) explains, 'these three domains of experience can only be understood one in relation to the others and cannot be understood one without the others'. We could therefore imagine the three axes as the constitutive planes of a prism through which 'experience' becomes intelligible in the space they enframe.

So the notion of experience in Foucault's work could be surmised as 'a limit-transcending, challenging event, but also the dominant historical structure which is to be challenged' (O'Leary 2008: 7). Or to put it another way, 'experience' figures as a prismatic lens for refracting, at the one end of the spectrum of Foucault's critico-political concerns, the interrogation of 'an objective, anonymous, and general structure connecting fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity', and at the other, the cultivation of 'a subjective relation of recognition' (Oksala 2004: 112; Beatrice Han 2002). Such an approach to 'experience' that examines its constitutive forces, its limits and moments of rupture, does not posit *a priori* the consciousness of phenomenologists or the atomic individual of empiricism—that is to say, it examines experience without the subject. In her essay 'Anarchic Bodies: Foucault and the Feminist Question of Experience', Johanna Oksala says:

> Foucault's understanding of experience can thus be understood as an experience without the subject in two senses. Firstly, Foucault is aiming to study the historical constitution of experience through an objective conception of it: experience is a spatial structure constituted by the interrelated elements of power, knowledge, and forms of relation to the self. Secondly, he is interested in experience as a possible path to the dissolution of the subject. This sense of experience contains a potential of resistance to normalizing power because it offers the possibility of transgression into the unpredictable (2004: 112).

Oksala evokes an axial reading of 'experience' to think beyond the critical impasse in feminist debates between: on the one side, the argument that Foucault's analytical focus on the workings of knowledge/power amounts to discursive reductionism; and on the other, the argument that his claims about how gendered subjects of sexuality are constituted by a microphysics of power which nevertheless presupposes its own resistance, belie a naive slippage to a prediscursive body. Taking Judith Butler's work as a point of reference, Oksala suggests that the argument elaborated in *Gender Trouble*—that the body 'is not a being, but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality' (Butler 1990: 139)—performs what could be described as a strong reading of the Foucauldian understanding of the discursive dynamics of experience. This strong reading of the cultural construction of the body provokes the question of the possibility of resistance against normalising power, which Butler addresses in *Bodies that Matter* (1993) and *The Life of Power* (1997a) with what is arguably a more productive understanding of embodiment. A point of contention for Oksala is the way in which the latter combines the Foucauldian understanding of power with the psychoanalytic understanding of the psyche. She argues that Butler's turn to psychoanalysis for a principle of resistance, with the rationale that the psyche exceeds the normalising effects of power, still gives short shrift to the question of the body's capacity for resistance. Hence, picking up on Butler's (1997a: 94) observation that 'perhaps the body has come to substitute for the psyche in Foucault—that is, as that which exceeds and confounds the injunctions of normalization'—Oksala (2004: 106) contends that 'the enabling shift in subjection that Butler locates on the level of the psyche can also be thought to take place on the level of the body'. Oksala pursues this line of inquiry by refracting Foucault's views on the

body's capacity for pleasure through an axial, prismatic reading of 'experience', arguing that a subject-less experiential body might offer a space for the possibility of an unpredictable event—limit-experience—and thereby figure as a locus of resistance to normalising power. That the body may figure as a space for limit-experience returns us to Foucault's 'religious question', particularly the notion of 'spiritual corporality', which Carrette extracts from Foucault's writings of his 'literary period': 'Hidden in the diverse fragments of his avant-garde studies Foucault began to articulate a series of religious ideas concerned with sexuality and the death of God. It was this discourse which rescued the body silenced by religion' (Carrette 2000: 63).

'Limit-experience', 'transgression', and 'spiritual corporality'

In a 1966 interview entitled 'Philosophy and the Death of God' Foucault says that whilst philosophers like Hegel and Feuerbach had addressed the question of the death of God by positing that reason and man's conscience would replace God, he prefers to align himself with the views of Nietzsche, for whom the death of God does not provoke a question of man assuming the place occupied by God, but rather a question of an 'empty space' left exposed and unfilled by God's death (Foucault 1999: 85). It is well known that for Foucault the proclamation of the death of God announces also the death of man. This is articulated in, for example, *The Order of Things* (Foucault 1991: 385), where he says: 'Rather than the death of God—or, rather, in the wake of that death and in the profound correlation with it—what Nietzsche's thought heralds is the end of his murderer; it is the explosion of man's face in laughter'. But according to Carrette, there is another dimension to Foucault's understanding of the death of God that has received less attention—one shaped by the Marquis de Sade's influence on French literature and philosophy. For Carrette (2000: 79), these two dimensions of

Foucault's understanding of the death of God effectively re-contour the theological landscape: 'The dead God of Sade is joined with the dead God of Nietzsche to create a new theological territory constructed on (male) sexuality'.

It will take us too far afield to elaborate on the theological implications of Foucault's linking of the death of God with language and sexuality (see Bernauer and Carrette 2004). For our purpose, it suffices to note that Carrette's analysis demonstrates that a subtextual concern with religion existed even in the early phase of Foucault's intellectual life. More pertinently, we could note that for Foucault it is not enough simply to link the death of God to the death of man, or to repeat that it exposes an empty space. Rather, as he says in 'What is an author?' (1977 [1969]: 121), for the same reason the disappearance of the author ought not be repeated like an empty slogan, it is not enough to keep repeating (after Nietzsche) that God and man have died 'a common death', but that we must also 'reexamine the empty space [...] attentively observe, along its gaps and fault lines, its new demarcations, and the reapportionment of this void; we should await the fluid functions released by this disappearance.'

Guided by a thread interwoven with the question of language, sexuality, and the death of God, Foucault follows the distribution of gaps and fault lines to locate the body as the space for transgression, the opening for limit-experience. This is articulated in the essay of 1963, 'A Preface to Transgression' (see Foucault 1999: 57-71). The essay reads the Sade- and Nietzsche-inspired understanding of the death of God alongside Bataille's writings on eroticism to posit the idea of transgression as the crossing of limits, a movement of 'non-positive affirmation'. Inspired also by Blanchot's writings, Foucault describes transgression in terms of 'contestation', where 'to contest is to

proceed until one reaches the empty core where being achieves its limit and where the limit defines being' (Foucault 1999: 62). This essay informs Oksala's hypothesis that a principle of resistance against normalising power may be found in the body's capacity for limit-experience, which I will consider in the analysis of Vipassana (Chapter Five). For now, I want to connect Oksala's reading of the body as the site for limit-experience with the notion of 'spiritual corporality' developed by Carrette, who glosses 'A Preface to Transgression' thus:

> When God dies there is a loss of authority. In a similar fashion, when the notion of man is questioned, there is a loss of ontological stability. When theology and anthropology have provided a conceptual matrix to assert the power and domination of man, the collapse of such a structure threatens the whole male identity and precariously throws man back to the reality of his own body [...] When the traditional frameworks of male authority are threatened, the question of sexuality assumes priority [...] When language is no longer a simple referent to God, when the idea of God and the idea of man disappear, there is an anxiety and crisis about the nature and limits of existence [...] At the limits of existence there is the possibility of transgression (Carrette 2000: 80, 81).

For Foucault, then, one of the most significant implications of the death of God is that the limit imposed by God's existence on the apparent limitlessness of being is broken, such that 'the individual is also brought back to the limits of existence in the face of what is "impossible"', and such that 'the body, desire and language are discovered at the limits of existence, at death. At the limit, at the point of transgression, a discourse

silenced by religion is opened up and a space for a 'spiritual corporality' emerges.' (Carrette 2000: 82). As can be seen above, if there is a 'spiritual corporality' in Foucault's oeuvre, it is informed by a distinctively male paradigm. This seeming gender blindness on Foucault's part, the seeming lack of concern for women in his analysis, indicates the need to filter his 'religious question' through feminist critique. Insofar as Oksala's reading of 'transgression' and 'limit-experience' is premised on the same linkage between the death of God, language, and sexuality underpinning Foucault's 'spiritual corporality', the issue of gender blindness in Foucault's work is addressed indirectly by her attempt to reinvigorate feminist debates about women's experiential bodies' capacity for resisting normalising power—a task she develops by augmenting the influential ideas of Judith Butler.

In Butler's work, we find another point of connection between Oksala's and Carrette's thinking. The latter's conceptualisation of 'spiritual corporality', I want to suggest, is in fact sensitive to feminist debates about Foucauldian ideas; Carrette's thinking about Foucault's 'religious question' is in fact informed by feminist discourses (see Carrette 1999: 7-13). For example, like Oksala's conceptualisation of the experiential body, Carrette's reading of 'spiritual corporality' also builds on Butler's observation in *Bodies That Matter*: that Foucault's analysis of the prison shows how 'the body is not an independent materiality that is invested by power relations external to it, but it is that for which materialisation and investiture are coextensive' (Butler 1993: 9). According to Butler, Foucault's arguments about the soul in *Discipline and Punish* perform an 'implicit reworking of the Aristotelian formulation', which conceives of the soul as a 'schema' whereby 'materiality and intelligibility' are inseparable. She thus reads in *Discipline and Punish* a conceptualisation of the soul 'as an instrument of

power through which the body is cultivated and formed. In a sense, it acts as a power-laden schema that produces and actualises the body itself' (Butler 1993: 8). Such an understanding of the soul does not presuppose a split between the body and soul or spirit, but rather, recognises that conceptuality shapes the materiality of life and vice versa. For Carrette, this not only 'reorientates the understanding of the body, but reconstitutes the understanding of spirituality as well [...] *Spirituality is transformed into a process of shaping matter, of making bodies that matter*' (2000: 125; emphasis added). Articulating what reads like a direct response to Barcan and Johnston's question of how cultural studies might reconsider its over-reliance on a secularist model of the Foucauldian schema and rethink conceptualisations of body/spirit, Carrette writes that under Foucault's treatment:

> [r]eligious ideas become ways of expressing the body which can be both a technology of domination and a more positive technology of self, a religious aesthetic which animates matter. If the soul is 'around', 'within' and 'on' the body, then the implications of a religion on the surface of the body create a completely new understanding of religious discourse. The body is valorised and theological dualism is eliminated in the creation of a "spiritual corporality". The spirit becomes "a question of the body" (Carrette 2000: 126).

If there has been a persistent dualism between the soul or spirit and the body in religious discourse, a dualism that Foucault sought to overcome with his 'religious question', such a dualism had been shaped by a specific Christian theological tradition as well as a Eurocentric philosophical tradition. A body/spirit dualism is not native to Buddhism, for instance. In rethinking the problematics constituting the theological

substratum of Western thought and culture, Foucault thus not only reconsiders the body/spirit or materiality/intelligibility dualism of the genealogies he inherits but also opens the way for dialogical exchanges with non-Western genealogies. This is what the thesis explores with an analysis of Vipassana as 'a positive technology of self' and a reading of a Buddhist art of living alongside a Foucauldian art of living. But in order to understand how religious ideas expressing the body could be as much a technology of domination as a positive technology of the self, the notion of 'spiritual corporality' cannot be read without the twin concept of 'political spirituality.' As we shall see, the term 'political spirituality' crystallised in Foucault's thought circa 1978, and it is from this point in his intellectual career that he began to fully immerse himself in questions of the subject and ethics, questions that underscored the importance of analysing the role of technologies of the self in the broader context of governmentality, and which prompted him to research the spiritual exercises of early Christianity and the Greco-Romans.

PART II: THE TURN TO THE SUBJECT AND ETHICS

The 'Nietzschean legacy' and the quest for a different morality

The second part of this chapter argues that Foucault's construction of a genealogy of the subject and ethics represents an attempt and invitation by Foucault to chart new pathways towards a radically different socio-political reality, an attempt to welcome the possibilities of and for an always incalculable future by throwing the doors open for a departure from modern morality—what Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God announces. The death of God, for Nietzsche, signalled the eruption of a profound cultural crisis, the advent of a 'historical period during which humankind establishes new gods—science, technology, race or nation—to worship, new foundations upon

which to slake its thirst for metaphysical certitude' (Milchman and Rosenberg 2007: 44). This is because, as already noted, the death of God leaves exposed an empty space, a void, an abyss into which we cannot but stare and confront the 'great suffering' immanent to human existence. Under the influence of a Platonic, Judeo-Christian lineage, Western man (the gendered-ness of such civilisational outlooks persists) had sought to ameliorate the horror of life with a self-renouncing, self-mortifying mode of the ascetic ideal that longs for ahistorical, transcendent meaning in the face of this-worldly suffering, a longing that can generate resentment towards self and world and which is made all the more stubborn by the accompanying belief that the pain endured in this very life can and must be redeemed in another other-worldly existence. Nietzsche, however, argues that this longing for 'metaphysical comfort' is not an inherent or irreducible feature of human existence, but a historically determinate response to 'metaphysical need'. He says:

> We have absolutely no need of these certainties, regarding the furthest horizon to live a full and excellent human life [...] What we need, rather, is to become clear in our minds as to the origin of that calamitous weightiness we have for so long accorded to these things, and for that we require a history of the ethical and religious sensations (quoted in Milchman and Rosenberg 2007: 47).

What is at stake, according to Nietzsche, must be nothing less than the transfiguration of the human being. One way to achieve this is to relinquish attachment to the perceived shelter provided by the belief that inevitable suffering in this very life can and must only be endured in anticipation of heavenly redemption—to defuse the

habitual conditionings of resentment and guilt towards the impossibility of staving off feelings of grief and unknowingness that will surely arrive with the movement of life. To welcome a wholly different experience of the finitude of our condition, Nietzsche calls for the rearticulation of the ascetic ideal alongside an aesthetic ideal of giving 'style' to one's life, an idea that was recapitulated almost a hundred years later in the 1980s when Foucault began to explore the idea of an aesthetics of existence. He says that his interest in Antiquity is because 'the idea of morality as obedience to a code of rules is now disappearing, has already disappeared. And to this absence of morality corresponds, must correspond, the search for an aesthetics of existence' (Foucault 1988b: 49). The Nietzschean influence is quite unmistakable.

> To "give style" to one's character – a great and rare art! It is practiced by those who survey all the strengths and weaknesses of their nature and then fit them into an artistic plan until every one of them appears as art and reason and even weaknesses delight the eye (Nietzsche 1974: 232).

> What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (Foucault 1984b: 350)

In *The Order of Things* (1991a: 387), Foucault opines that if the present deployment of the subject—or more precisely, current modes of subjectification—were 'to crumble [...] then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand

at the edge of the sea'. What Foucault calls for is not so much the demise of the human being as the 'death' of a historically contingent form of subjectivity. Like Nietzsche, Foucault envisions a future horizon of fresh possibilities but also recognises the dangers confronting us, such as the impulse towards fascism. In his preface to Deleuze and Guatarri's *Anti-Oedipus*—a book which Foucault describes as a tract on ethics, calling it an 'Introduction to the Non-Fascist Life'—he explains that he does not take 'fascism' to connote only the historical fascism glorified by the likes of Hitler and Mussolini, but more precisely, 'also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us' (Foucault 1983: xiii). 'Fascism', in this broader sense, designates the will to power suffusing a historically contingent form of subjectivity which 'can be mobilized by the left as well as by the right, and, indeed, by democratic regimes and their leaders as well' (Milchman and Rosenberg 2007: 51).

This suggests, then, that rather than place hope or exert effort solely in the elaboration of large-scale liberation movements, it is necessary to furnish macropolitical endeavours with micropolitical gestures that question how we are drawn into 'games of truth', the ways in which we are obliged to accede to certain forms of subjectivity—to learn their habits, test their limits, and experiment with fresh styles of conduct, embodiment, and ways of relating the self to self and others with an ethos of care and engagement. These micropolitical gestures require sensitivity towards the inter-involvement of the ethical and the political, so that experimentations in ethical self-cultivation or the work of un-becoming may generate resonances which would hopefully modulate the effects of power reverberating through existing fields of knowledge and the types of normativity they authorise,

thereby opening an aleatoric space for multiplicities of relations. By the late 1970s Foucault had come to take the view that large-scale liberation movements are not sufficient to inaugurate radical social change and lasting political freedoms, insofar as their resistance to power still seeks recourse in the deployment of a transcendental subject of experience, leaving intact normative modes of subjectification by which relations of domination and control are maintained:

> Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics. They need an ethics, but they cannot find any other ethics than an ethics founded on so-called scientific knowledge of what the self is, what desire is, what the unconscious is, and so on (Foucault 1984b: 343).

What is needed, therefore, in contemporary struggles for justice and freedom is a critical and political task of cultivating new relations of self to self and others, of activating different forms of subjectivity and performing fresh ways of becoming. The search for and elaboration of a new ethics, on Foucault's account, is a path of transfiguration which the political movements of the left have failed to explore in any sustained manner. That is, the struggle for radical social change and lasting political freedoms has to persistently agitate for ways to allow prevailing deployments of the self-same and self-knowing authentic subject to become otherwise. This recognition of the need to redress the lack of alternative ethics in the struggle against regimes of domination is reflected in the development of the *History of Sexuality* project. Whilst the first volume of the project published in 1976, *The Will to Knowledge*, describes its task as an 'archaeology of psychoanalysis' that investigates the microphysics of power

suffusing sexual prohibitions and taboos, and the influence of the Christian confessional apparatus on the modern regime of truth about sexuality, the second and third volumes published eight years later in 1984, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of Self*, recast the project in terms of a genealogy of the subject/ethics. As Foucault explains, 'I'm writing a genealogy of ethics. The genealogy of the subject as a subject of ethical actions, or the genealogy of desire as an ethical problem' (Foucault 1984b: 356). This required Foucault to make a radical departure in the historical period of analysis, embarking on a long journey to Antiquity in order to investigate the 'forms and modalities of the relation to self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself as a subject' (Foucault 1990b: 6), and to discover what had been forgotten or excluded in the history of the relations between subjectivity and truth in their descent into a modern regime predicated on the hermeneutic of the self (Foucault 2005). Because the project seeks new ways to detach ourselves from the confessional, individualising injunction to decipher the innermost truth about ourselves as subjects of a 'sexuality', the guiding question becomes: 'how, why, and in what forms was sexuality constituted as a moral domain?' (Foucault 1990b: 10) In short, the history of sexuality investigates the *problematisation* of erotic acts and relations that are today constituted within the truth regime of 'sexuality' (see Chapter Five).

Although the question of the subject only moves to the centre stage of Foucault's work post-1976, its significance had been acknowledged from as early as *History of Madness*, but Foucault ostensibly needed time to develop the necessary methodological leverage to pose the question. It would therefore be inaccurate to describe the shift in analytical focus as a radical break. Yet, while the so-called 'ethical

turn' in Foucault's itinerary is widely noted, there is by and large no clear explanation of the motivation behind this transitional phase of his research. I am not implying that commentators have not been able to draw conceptual links between the different phases of Foucault's research. In fact, the foregoing section of this chapter has drawn on existing commentaries that link the 'ethical turn' to Foucault's progressive engagement with Nietzsche. But the 'Nietzschean legacy' only offers a partial, philosophical explanation that does not account for the immediate historical circumstances, the political background of this transitional period which spanned roughly the years 1977 to 1979. This could be due to a simple problem of the availability of resources. The English translation of the lectures at the Collège de France of 1978 and 1979, *Security, Territory, Population* (2007a) and *The Birth of Biopolitics* (2008b), were only published recently, and both are lending new perspectives to the analysis of (neo)liberal governmentality and reinvigorating debates about the Foucauldian understanding of power. But even this remains a partial explanation. For it is necessary also to take into account Foucault's involvement with a political crisis that occurred during this period of his intellectual life: the Iranian revolution. Foucault's writings on this political crisis have been dismissed by commentators and remain largely ignored today. But I argue for a reconsideration of this aspect of his work because it presents new trajectories for Foucauldian scholarship, and more pertinently for our purpose, because it sheds light on the function of 'political spirituality' in the Foucauldian corpus.

Foucault's 'Iranian experiment'

Foucault visited Iran twice in 1978, first in September (shortly after 'Black Friday' when the Shah's army fired into the crowd of protesters) and then again in November.

An Italian daily, *Corriere della Sera*, had asked him to write a column for them, but instead of commentaries on philosophical or cultural issues Foucault suggested something new: 'on-scene' investigations. The popular uprisings in Iran presented him with an opportunity to carry out what he called '*reportage d'idées*', the aim of which was to give witness to 'the birth of ideas', where an 'analysis of thought will be linked to an analysis of what is happening' (Eribon 1993: 282). The articles Foucault wrote in support of the uprisings in Iran attracted much criticism. With the eventual founding of an autocratic Islamist regime, these writings have on the whole been dismissed as, at best, indicative of infantile leftism, and at worst, a serious political error reminiscent of Heidegger's endorsement of Nazism. Such criticisms of Foucault's coverage of Iran, however, are unfair because, firstly, they speak with the benefit of hindsight that Foucault did not have, and secondly, they gloss over the specific purpose for which the articles were written.

To be sure, Foucault's writings on Iran do betray traces of Orientalism; his understanding of Islam and its role in Iranian history is also questionable (Stauth 1991; Leezenberg 2004). These are valid criticisms to raise and they ought to be kept in mind when engaging with this aspect of his work. What needs to be avoided, however, is the expectation that Foucault 'ought to know better', or the argument that his miscalculation is tantamount to complicity with the subsequent atrocities committed by the Khomeini regime. This criticism of Foucault is evident in Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson's book *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seduction of Islamism* (2005), which remains invaluable for making English translations of Foucault's writings on Iran available, even if it is arguable that its assessment of Foucault's work gives short shrift to the key tenets of his thinking.

Whilst Afary and Anderson explore the important question of gender not examined by Foucault, they fail to give due consideration to, and arguably even suppress, the stated aims and objectives of Foucault's 'Iranian experiment': to give witness to 'the birth of ideas', where an 'analysis of thought will be linked to an analysis of what is happening' (quoted in Eribon 1993: 282). By anchoring analysis in *what is happening,* Foucault was refusing to interpret the Iranian revolution as a teleological process. In other words, he sought to engage with *the event* in its *absolute singularity*: 'to be respectful when something singular arises, to be intransigent when power offends against the universal' (Foucault 1999: 134). In the broader context of his critico-political itinerary, Foucault remained consistent in rejecting the figure of a historian who could hypothesise a unity in social historical time, seeking instead to understand the collective will and aesthetics of action of the Iranian people in terms of an open, futural horizon of possibilities. Therefore, to assert, as Afary and Anderson have, that Foucault's refusal to apologise for his miscalculations is tantamount to complicity with the subsequent atrocities committed by the Khomeini regime, is to assume the very teleological mode of thinking that is being problematised. Their discourse, in other words, performs a decontextualised, unsympathetic misreading of Foucault's itinerary (see Lynch 2007).

Therefore, when engaging with his writings on Iran it is important to keep in mind that Foucault was not speculating on, much less intervening in, the political future of Iran as such. Consider what Foucault said in an interview given in Teheran where he was asked about the political role of an intellectual: 'I am, of course, only dealing with the society of which I am part' (quoted in Afary and Anderson 2005: 184). We could

then say that his journalistic investigation of the Iranian people's collective will represents yet another way of uncovering new vantage points to reflect more deeply on the dynamics of power in European history. If anything, Foucault's writings on Iran represent a thought experiment, or as Oksala (2012: 150) puts it in her book *Foucault, Politics, and Violence*, 'a philosophical exercise in thinking otherwise', and more precisely, 'an attempt to imagine the possibilities of a different political ontology for [the Western liberal context]'.

Again, Oksala's work connects with Carrette's, this time on the theme of 'political spirituality'. But should the two enter into a dialogue (in any event, I'm staging one between them), there may be at least one major point of disagreement. Where Carrette examines Foucault's writings on Iran and 'political spirituality' to shed light on the neglected religious subtext of the Foucauldian corpus, Oksala (2012: 152) contends instead that 'to understand his notion of political spirituality correctly we should place emphasis on *political* as opposed to *religious* spirituality'. Her argument is that Foucault 'does not refer to any dogmatic theology or religious belief and practice as such that would provide a unitary form and foundation for politics'; nor was Foucault 'putting forward a critique of secular culture and politics' or 'attempting to introduce religious ideas to politics in order to give it a deeper meaning [...] [P]olitical spirituality rather names an attempt to find new meaning in politics itself' (Oksala 2012: 153). I agree with her claim that 'political spirituality' represents an attempt to find new meaning in politics *itself*. However, and this is where I believe Carrette would raise a similar objection: why exclude a consideration of 'the religious' from politics *itself*? Does Oksala mean to imply that the political domain in the Western (neo)liberal

context emerges only when 'the religious' and 'the secular' are duly separated, or even that the former no longer operates as a category worth considering?

If it were possible to construct an impenetrable border between 'the religious' and 'the secular', it appears that Oksala would locate 'politics itself' on the 'correct' side of the wall, on the side of 'the secular'. But isn't this precisely what critical analyses of secularism have demonstrated to be a problematic, if not hubristic, Eurocentric presumption—that any such axiom of a dividing wall is false and cannot be maintained, that the analysis of the political domain today must question this very presumption and work reflexively with the religious substratum of Western 'secular' politics? (see, for example, Asad 2003; Connolly 1999; Scott and Hirschkind 2006; Warner, Van Antwerpen, and Calhoun 2010). At the start of the chapter, I noted how Foucault was mindful of this. Insofar as he constantly questioned the self-evidences of our historical circumstances, I would argue that Foucault was in fact developing ways to problematise secular culture and politics, even if he did not explicitly describe his work as a critique of secularism as such. As I have been arguing vis-à-vis Carrette's work, Foucault's critico-political project entails a constant reworking of theological themes and political categories, where received understandings of 'religion' and 'secularism' are critically suspended. To this extent, Oksala is at least partially correct to suggest that the aim of 'political spirituality' is not to introduce religious ideas *into* politics, since religious ideas are not regarded as supplementary, corrective elements that are lacking and which have to be readmitted into politics. However, it is incorrect to say that 'political spirituality' does not critique secular culture and politics, because what Foucault's work does is to fold 'religion' and 'politics', 'the secular' and 'the

religious' into one another, collapsing any simple or straightforward distinction between them.

Is 'political spirituality' religious or secular?

Has Oksala, in her commitment to a 'purely' secularist discourse, been blindsided to how Foucault's exploration of 'political spirituality' within the broader framework of governmentality in fact calls into question the hegemonic imperatives and conceits of secular culture and politics? We could explore this question by mapping the concept of 'political spirituality' against the analytical manoeuvres he was making at the time. Consider this chronology of events (with my added entry) presented in Alain Beaulieu's (2010: 802) essay, 'Towards a liberal Utopia: The connection between Foucault's reporting on the Iranian Revolution and the ethical turn':

1977

- Foucault on sabbatical

1978

- January to April: The *Security, Territory, Population* lectures at Collège de France
- 8 January: Beginning of the Iranian Revolution
- [20 May: At a round table Foucault introduced the notion of 'political spirituality']
- 27 May: The 'What is Critique?' lecture on Kant and the Enlightenment
- September and November: Two trips to Iran and nine articles in the *Corriere della Sera*

1979

- January to April: The *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures at the Collège de France
- February to March: Khomeini returns to Teheran; founding of an Islamic Republic

Using this chronology of events as a point of reference, I want to highlight some salient points from the lectures Foucault was giving during the course of the Iranian Revolution to show how the concept of 'political spirituality' cannot be unambiguously interpreted in secularist terms; that it in fact goes some way towards collapsing the distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular'. Starting with the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures of 1978, we find Foucault linking the analysis of modern governmentality to the history of the Christian pastorate:

> What the history of the pastorate involves, therefore, is the entire history of procedures of human individualization in the West. Let's say also that it involves the history of the subject. [...] [The Christian pastorate is] a prelude to governmentality through the constitution of a specific subject, of a subject whose merits are analytically identified, who is subjected in continuous networks of obedience, and who is subjectified [*subjectivé*] through the compulsory extraction of truth. (Foucault 2007a: 184–185)

The analysis of the Christian pastorate is linked with the question of subjectivity and the 'games of truth' that accompany it. It is within this analytical framework of governmentality that Foucault introduces the concept of 'political spirituality' at the round table of May 1978:

> How can one analyze the connection between ways of distinguishing true and false and ways of governing oneself and others? The search for a new foundation for each of these practices, in itself and relative to the other, the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false—this is what I would call "political *spiritualité*" (Foucault 1991c: 82).

Whilst he does not use the term 'political spirituality' as such, Foucault would effectively explore the same question articulated here in the lecture he gave a week later on 'What is Critique?', where he ponders the possibility of taking an 'opposite route' of writing a genealogy of the Enlightenment as the emergence of a 'critical attitude', a practice of 'critique akin to virtue' that would assume the responsibility of 'questioning knowledge on its limits or impasses' (Foucault 2007b [1978]: 66-67). What is meant by critique here is not simply an intellectual method but a practice of liberty, a form of counter-conduct (see Butler 2002). Foucault asserts that:

> [...] the history of the critical attitude, as it unfolds specifically in the West and in the modern Western world since the 15th-16th centuries must have its origin in the religious struggles and spiritual attitudes prevalent during the second half of the Middle Ages, precisely at the time when the problem was posed: how should one be governed, is one going to accept being governed like that? It is then that things are, at their most concrete level, the most historically determined: all the struggles around the pastoral during the second half of the Middle Ages prepared the way for the Reformation and, I think, were the kind

> of historical limit upon which the critical attitude developed (Foucault 2007b: 68).

In this lecture, he also says that the emergence of the art of government was concomitant with the emergence of 'the art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault 2007b: 45). The ideas raised in 'What is Critique?' would develop into the more well-known essay of 1984, 'What is Enlightenment?', where Foucault (1984a: 47) contends that the critical task for our times ought to entail 'the critical ontology of ourselves as a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings.' The critical ontology of ourselves, I want to argue, is another way of expressing the aims of 'political spirituality', which cannot be bracketed from an interrogation of the history of the Christian pastorate, the theological substratum of secular culture and politics which served as the precondition for the emergence of the modern art of government and the coterminous art of 'voluntary insubordination, that of reflected intractability' (Foucault 2007b: 47). We can see that this broader project of understanding the dynamics of modern (neo)liberal governmentality and of refusing the will to power of individualisation remains at the centre of Foucault's thinking, even as he pondered on the events he witnessed in Iran:

> For the people who inhabit this land, what is the point of searching, even at the cost of their own lives, for this thing whose possibility we have forgotten since the Renaissance and the great crisis of Christianity: a political spirituality (Foucault quoted in Afary and Anderson 2005: 209).

That the notion of 'political spirituality' cannot be read in purely secularist terms, since it involves a reconsideration of the ongoing influence of the Christian pastorate on secular culture and politics, is further evinced by lectures of the *Birth of Biopolitics* of 1979. In these lectures, Foucault shows how the Christian pastorate entailed the "art of conducting, directing, leading, guiding, taking in hand, and manipulating men [...] collectively and individually throughout their life and at each moment of their existence", and served as 'both 'background' and 'prelude' to modern governmentalities (Foucault 2008b: 165, 184). What occurred was not so much a 'massive, comprehensive transfer of pastoral functions from Church to state' (Foucault 2008b: 229), but the concomitant 'intensification, increase, and general proliferation' (Foucault 2008b: 231) of the question of how the subject ought to 'conduct oneself, one's children, and one's family' (Foucault 2008b: 230), and attendant 'techniques of conduct' (Foucault 2008b: 231). As a consequence, the sovereign was required to 'do more than purely and simply exercise his sovereignty'; the reorganisation of political space and social relations required an exercise of power that is 'more than' and 'supplementary in relation to sovereignty'—namely, government. The technologies of pastoralism thus 'multiply, overflow their hitherto strictly ecclesiastical economy, and begin to invest the field of political sovereignty' (Golder 2007: 167-168).

Situating Foucault's 'Iranian experiment' thus within the framework of governmentality, Beaulieu (2010: 802) contends that the idea of 'political spirituality' represents an attempt at the 'spiritualisation of the liberal tradition.' That Foucault was not seeking to intervene in the politics of Iran per se but exploring a new vantage point to interrogate the Western intellectual and political legacies he inherits, is

evident when he asks: 'what has happened in Iran that a whole lot of people, on the left and on the right, find somewhat irritating?' (Foucault 1988c: 211) Western intellectuals, he claims, have typically posited two conditions for revolution: 'the contradictions in that society, that of the class struggle or of social confrontations' and 'a vanguard [...] that carries the whole nation with it', both of which were absent in Iran (Foucault 1988c: 212-13). For Beaulieu (2010: 804), Foucault's hypothesis about 'political spirituality' mounts 'an implicit critique of the major modern revolutions in the western world: the English, French and Russian revolutions remained a-spiritual in that they occurred in the name of an immanent and materialistic view of reality (end of transcendences, dialectic materialism, etc.)'. Beaulieu (2010: 804) further asserts that what Foucault encountered in Iran convinced him to look for an alternative to prevailing models of revolutionary change in the West that, on the one hand, are predicated on such dualisms as 'immanence/transcendence, material/spiritual, freedom/power', but on the other, efface the determining role of the second term of the binary.

We are now in a better position to evaluate Oksala's contention. It would seem that Oksala shares Beaulieu's view that Foucault's hypothetical writings on 'political spirituality' represent an attempt at the spiritualisation of the liberal tradition. Given the themes of the *Security, Territory, Population* and *Birth of Biopolitics* lectures, there is indeed a strong case to be made for this hypothesis. However, I disagree with Oksala's claim that, 'correctly' understood, Foucault's hypothesis about 'political spirituality' does not entail a critique of secular culture or politics, I argue that Oksala is wrong to assume that the analytic of 'political spirituality' (and by extension Foucault's critic-political itinerary) must accord to a foundational secularism. Or at least, I want to

show that her claim about the priority of *political* as opposed to *religious* spirituality in Foucault's thinking, is not as self-evident as she makes it out to be. Foucault may not have articulated his project as a critique of the 'secular' as such, but even if we just limit ourselves to the lectures of 1978-9, and bracket a consideration of the inventive treatment of religious themes in the writings of his 'literary period' (as discussed in Part I), there is ample evidence to suggest that Foucault's work proceeds by uncovering the theological substratum of the Western (neo)liberal political domain. Oksala's claim—that in order to 'correctly' understand Foucault's experiment on 'political spirituality', emphasis should be placed on the political rather than the religious—thus becomes a superfluous assertion, since the line between the political and religious is blurred within the framework of governmentality. Compare Oksala's interpretation of 'political spirituality' with Carrette's below:

> Foucault appears to collapse the "spiritual", the "ethical" and "political" into a single trajectory of "truth", "subjectivity" and "power", a strategy which can only be appreciated by locating it within the original 1978 framework of "governmentality". The notion of "governmentality" holds together the "ethical", "spiritual" and "political" inside a single framework, outside of which the terms become dislocated and redundant by being fused together. Foucault's "political spirituality" is therefore part of a "problematisation of government", developed in terms of a politics of "subjectivity", which in its turn revolves on the dual meaning of the word "subject" as both "subject to someone else by control and dependence" and an "identity by a conscience or self-knowledge." [Foucault 1982a: 781] This play on the "subject", as Jambet notes in relation to spirituality, represents a fundamental union of the

> governance of self and the governance of others which in the process challenges the dualism at the heart of theology (Carrette 2000: 138).

Both Oksala's and Carrette's reading of Foucault's 'Iranian experiment' detect in the hypothetical writings on 'political spirituality' an attempt at exploring a different political imagination, a spiritualisation of the Western liberal political domain. But where they differ is that the former appears unwilling to admit into her discourse the inter-involvement of the 'secular' and the 'religious'. Carrette, on the other hand, foregrounds how Foucault's problematisation of government exposes the theological implications of politics and the political implications of theology: the religious substratum of the modern 'secular' liberal West. The above quote by Carrette underscores how it would be superfluous to claim that a 'correct' reading of 'political spirituality' must emphasise political rather than religious spirituality. For under Foucault's treatment 'the ceaselessly repeated question of the link between religion and politics, between mysticism and power, between the spiritual and the material world disappears' (quoted in Carrette 2000: 139). With the twin concepts 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality, Carrette says that the 'fusion of terms' not only entails a 'messing up' of the binary categories of the spiritual and the material, but more specifically of the Christian order of things, a reordering that effectively transforms the entire field of religion into the immanent process designated by governmentality: 'It challenges the entire understanding of religion. Foucault "problematises" religious language and experience in such a way as to make the body and the politics of the subject unavoidable issues in religious discourse' (Carrette 2000: 139).

Affirming the messianicity of a futural politics

Yet, despite Oksala's attempt to inoculate her secularist discourse, to keep it from being contaminated by any trace of the 'religious', this is precisely what happens. *Contamination*, in the deconstructive sense, is unavoidable when she makes the 'provocative claim' that Foucault's hypothetical writings on 'political spirituality' sought:

> [...] an explanation and recognition of the ontological structure of the messianic inherent in politics: the possible interruption of all previous history that opens up an unrealized future, a world yet to come. Politics is a realm of the messianic in the sense that it is a realm of necessary contingency—a realm in which anything is possible—and therefore a realm of hope and promise of a different world (Oksala 2012: 153).

The idea that Foucault's attempt at the spiritualisation of politics affirms ontological messianicity finds support in the final article he wrote on the Iran revolution, after which he would remain silent on the event. In 'Is it Useless to Revolt?' (Foucault 1999: 131-134) Foucault articulates an emotional response to his critics at the juncture when the prospect of an autocratic Islamist government appeared all but certain. Foucault begins by pondering how the 'enigma of revolt' may ultimately be irresolvable, since the fact of revolt will always remain irreducible—because no power has the means to make any such movements absolutely 'impossible'; because any such action 'is necessarily a tearing that breaks the thread of history and its long chains of reasons so that a man [sic] can genuinely give preference to the risk of death over the certitude of having to obey' (Foucault 1999: 131). He then reflects on how his search

not for the profound reasons behind the movement but for '*the manner in which it was being lived*', led him only to the observation that the 'hunger' and 'humiliation' of those who risked their lives, 'their hatred of the regime and their will to overthrow it were registered on the borders of heaven and earth in a history which was dreamt of as being *as much religious as political*' (Foucault 1999a: 132; emphasis added). Foucault (1999a: 132) further claims that the uprising of the Iranian people irrupted in such a way that stayed 'close to those old dreams which the West had known at another time, when it wanted to inscribe the figures of spirituality on the earth of politics.' That the revolution resulted in the installation of a brutal dictatorship and atrocities carried out against those who had risked their lives to say 'no' to power—these consequences should certainly be condemned. But it would be unacceptable to disqualify on this basis and in hindsight those who had made the decision to stand up before tanks and guns: 'One does not make the law for the person who risks his [sic] life before power' (Foucault 1999a: 133). As to the question of whether there is a reason to revolt, Foucault says that the question is perhaps best left open: 'There are revolts and that is a fact.' He adds:

> It is through revolt that subjectivity (not that of great men but that of whomever) introduces itself into history and gives it the breath of life. A delinquent puts his life into the balance against absurd punishments; a madman can no longer accept confinement and the forfeiture of his rights; a people reduces the regime which oppresses it. This does not make the rebel in the first case innocent, nor does it cure in the second, and it does not assure the third rebel of the promised tomorrow. One does not have to be in solidarity with them. One does not have to maintain that these confused voices

> sound better than the others and express the ultimate truth. For there to be a sense in listening to them and in searching for what they want to say, it is sufficient that they exist and that they have against them so much, which is set up to silence them. A question of morality? Perhaps. A question of reality. Certainly. All the disenchantments of history amount to nothing: it is due to such voices that the time of men does not take the form of an evolution, but precisely that of history [...] to be respectful when a singularity arises, and intransigent as soon as the state violates the universal [...] It is always necessary to watch out for something, a little beneath history, that breaks with it, that agitates it; it is necessary to look, a little behind politics, for that which is out to limit it, unconditionally. (Foucault 1999a: 133-134)

Picking up on Foucault's reflections, Oksala thus suggests that the inexplicable moment of revolt could be conceived as 'an event' with 'the structure of a promise', an event that 'escapes political history because it must condition it. It is the moment when anything is possible and as such it is a condition of possibility for the contingency of every political order: the enacted refutation of historical and political determinism' (Oksala 2012: 154; 155). I think Oksala is right to detect a messianic tone in Foucault's thinking and I wholeheartedly affirm her aim of using 'political spirituality' to usher a new 'political imagination', where instead of being constituted by 'mythic, lawmaking violence' the political find expression in and through 'the messianic contingency enacted by the people: a negative absolute, which promises nothing but the lack of all absolutes.' Foucault's exploration of 'political spirituality'—and I would add that it must remain twinned with 'spiritual corporality'—asks that we

relate to 'our collective future as radically open because it harbours the possibility of a world yet to come' (Oksala 2012: 155).

However, I wish also to affirm the 'religious' other whom Oksala's discourse tends to exclude. Oksala mentions Walter Benjamin in her reflections on the hopefulness of messianic politics. But her *profession of faith* (if I may be so bold as to name it so; for how else may we relate to the future as radically open?) also channels the deconstructive spirit of Derrida, whose spectral traces make an appearance in a footnote to Martin Hägglund's *Radical Atheism: Derrida and the Time of Life* (2008), a book that, contra the writings of deconstructive theologians, argues for a 'radical atheism' in Derrida's thinking on such impossible-possible aporias of unconditionality as hospitality, justice, and the gift—all of which are attempts to think messianicity without messianism. I will consider Hägglund's profession of faith in 'radical atheism' in Chapter Seven. For now, I draw attention to Oksala's evocation of the messianic and the spectral presence of Derrida in her discourse in order to further complicate her attempt to read 'political spirituality' solely in secular terms—because if anything, current debates about the 'messianic now' problematise the clear-cut distinction between the religious and the secular that she seeks to maintain. Oksala may not wish to speak of 'the religious' in her reading of the messianic hope in Foucault's spiritualisation of politics. However, to evoke the title of John D. Caputo's (1997a) book on Derrida, the voice of the Other rebounds off the border of her book in the 'prayers and tears' of the self-described 'little black and very Arab Jew' (Bennington and Derrida 1993: 58), who, together with Foucault, is an acknowledged atheist; yet both are neither coy nor embarrassed about admitting the influence of religious ideas in their work, even if they sought at every turn to question them, to subvert them,

and even to resurrect them in novel ways. Consider, for instance, what Foucault said at a discussion with theologians, held at Berkeley in 1983:

> Despair and hopelessness are one thing; suspicion is another. And if you are suspicious, it is because, of course, you have a certain hope. The problem is to know which kind of hope you have, and which kind of hope it is reasonable to have in order to avoid what I would call not 'the pessimistic circle' you speak of, but the political circle which reintroduces in your hopes, and through your hopes, the things you want to avoid by these hopes (quoted in Bernauer 2004: 93).

A participant at the discussion remarked that these comments sounded 'very Christian', to which Foucault replied: 'Yes, I have a very strong Christian, Catholic background, and I am not ashamed' (quoted in Bernauer 2004: 93). We could further note that in the wake of a wave of hostile reactions to his coverage of Iran, Foucault, who was already upset about the ostensibly poor critical reception to the first volume of *History of Sexuality*, 'launched an immense new undertaking: interpreting the literature of early Christianity' (Eribon 1991: 291). According to Didier Eribon's biography of Foucault, at the invitation of the director of the Dominican order in Paris (the same monk who would give the homily at the religious service that Foucault insisted on for his own funeral), Foucault found in the Bibliothèque du Saulchoir a conducive environment to continue his work, spending 'entire days in that tiny reading room ensconced next to one of the bay windows opening onto a square courtyard' poring over old manuscripts (Eribon 1991: 292). I wonder what Oksala might say about how Foucault both accepts the hospitality of religion and extends

hospitality towards it, even he never went so far as to say he 'believes' in religion or Christianity as such. In any event, my point is that an analysis of 'political spirituality' ought to perhaps extend intellectual hospitality towards Foucault's longstanding curiosity about religion, even if this 'religious question' remains for the most part a subtextual concern of his oeuvre.

Conclusion

In examining the neglected, subtextual 'religious question' in the Foucauldian corpus, this chapter has articulated a detailed response to Barcan and Johnston's (2005) question of whether the Foucauldian schema could be reconfigured to redress the 'foundational secularism' of cultural studies. In particular, this chapter has taken up the challenge of rethinking 'pessimistic' accounts of selfhood that draw on Foucault's thinking, and moreover, attempted to do so in a way that does not diminish its critique of normalising power. The 'religious question' threading through Foucault's oeuvre is anchored on the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality'. Part I articulated an account of the role of 'experience' in Foucault's itinerary and highlighted the possibility of the body as a space for transformative 'limit-experience'. Evoking Foucault's thinking on transgression, I explicated how 'spiritual corporality' collapses the dualism of body/spirit or materiality/intelligibility. 'Spiritual corporality' offers an analytical schema for interrogating the silencing power of religion, and for understanding how the body may be animated by religious ideals as a productive technology of self. Part II considered briefly the philosophical reasons for (i.e. the Nietzschean influence on) Foucault's 'ethical turn' and examined in some detail the historical circumstances and analytical conundrums that prompted him to articulate the notion of 'political

spirituality'. Evoking his 1978 and 1979 lectures on governmentality, I explicated how 'political spirituality' suspends the dualism of the secular/religious and offers an analytical schema for interrogating the dynamics of pastoral power suffusing modern governmentalities.

This chapter has shown how Foucault was always working reflexively with the theological substratum of the Western tradition. To insist that Foucault's itinerary does not entail a critique of secular culture and politics is therefore to risk blunting the critical edge of this thinking. By paying attention to the roles of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' in the Foucauldian corpus, we can begin to see that a critical ontology of ourselves has to be reflexive about the mutual implication of 'the religious' and 'the secular', and of the inter-involvement of 'the spiritual', 'ethics', 'truth' and 'politics'. If a critical ontology of ourselves entails a historico-practical work of testing the limits that we may go beyond, a work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings (or as Foucault also puts it, a question of 'who we are', of 'what is it that I'm doing at the moment I am doing it'), then, as I have argued vis-à-vis Oksala, we could say that Foucault's itinerary affirms, if only implicitly, the ontological structure of the messianic in politics. To reiterate, the messianic represents not so much disavowal of the here-and-now as a way to expose the utter contingency of every form of social, political, and epistemological organisation in the present, and of prevailing modes of subjectivity or relations of self to self and others. We might even go so far as to say that Foucault himself professes in the name of the messianic when he says that the work of critique is akin to 'virtue in general' and 'only exists in relation to something other than itself [...] [A] means for a

future or a truth that it will not know nor happen to be, it oversees a domain it would not want to police and is unable to regulate' (Foucault 2004b: 42).

We reconnect thus with the theme of hospitality—of intellectual hospitality and a more generalised absolute hospitality towards the unforeseeable future to come—*unconditional uncondtionality unconditionally*. In its treatment of Foucault's subtextual 'religious question', this chapter has staged at several points a critical exchange between Oksala's and Carrette's writings on Foucault's thoughts on corporality, spirituality, and governmentality. At times, I have inserted my own voice into this conversation in a manner that may be seen as rather inhospitable, since none of these interlocutors have the means to respond to any possible misinterpretation on my part in the assessment of their writings. But if this problematic of (mis)interpretation is immanent to scholarly work (and indeed, reading in general), then perhaps, as I have been trying to illustrate, this underscores the productiveness of foregrounding questions of (intellectual) hospitality and (good) faith as themes for collective reflection in our shared pursuit of an academic profession. To this end, I would like to close this chapter with a gesture of intellectual hospitality and good faith by suggesting that, their diverging opinions about Foucault's spiritualisation of politics notwithstanding, Oksala and Carrette nevertheless stand very close together, alongside Foucault and Derrida, in pledging commitment to keep the future radically open: a profession of faith?

Having elucidated the subtextual 'religious question' in Foucault's genealogies of experience, the task for the next chapter in this profession of faith is to locate the arguments for the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' in

the context of Vipassana and its model of Buddhist spirituality as an art of living. Since 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' point to the need to consider the embodied dimensions of the Foucauldian itinerary of becoming otherwise than before—or in a word, desubjectification—this will bring us to the crux of the question about the ethical and political significance of meditation practice and the transformative (messianic?) potential of meditative experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Care of Self, Vipassana, and a Buddhist Art of Living

New Year's Eve 2006—a broiling, 40°C summer day. About fifty people sit cross-legged in a poorly ventilated cabin in Woori Yallock, a small rural town in the state of Victoria, Australia. It is day five of a ten-day Vipassana meditation course. He is trying not to react to the pain in his knees but to observe the sensation with equanimity. What had begun as a block of dull numbness had—over the past half an hour? it has to be at least that—morphed into what feels like a swarm of fire ants, biting away on the inside of his kneecap. 'Your body needs a break', the mind rationalises. He opens his eyes, gently uncrosses his legs, and with a quiet sigh of relief allows the pain and numbness to slowly dissipate from his sweat-soaked limbs. He is seated at the back of the left-hand side of the room, where the male students are placed. The women sit on the right-hand side, separated from the men by a pathway that leads to the elevated seat of the assistant teacher who sits facing them, eyes shut in deep meditation (or were they half opened?). Surveying the backs of his fellow meditators, he muses, 'Good thing I'm seated back here. I can watch others without them seeing me. Even the assistant teacher can't see me.' But as the so-called 'monkey mind' is wont to do, an inner monologue quickly ensues.

'How can you be sure? The assistant teacher could very well have been looking at you a moment ago. Anyone could have cast a glance your way without your knowing, when you shut your eyes. You could very well be under the watchful eyes of another as others are under your watchful eyes.

There's something Foucauldian about this panopticon-like scene, the observation of the self by self ... Didn't he talk about the ideal of an art of living in his late work? The Buddha's teaching is described here as the art of living too. Maybe Goenka read Foucault!'

> I am very interested in Buddhist philosophy. But, this time, I didn't come for this. What interests me the most is life itself in a Zen temple, that is to say, the practice of Zen, its exercises and rules. For I believe that a totally different mentality to our own is formed through the practice and exercises of a Zen temple [...] With so little experience, if I have been able to feel something through the body's posture in Zen meditation, namely the correct position of the body, then that something has been new relationships which can exist between the mind and the body, and moreover, new relationships between the body and the external world.
>
> —Foucault, Japan, April 1978
>
> (Foucault 1999: 110, 112-113)

To date, there has been scarcely any mention of Foucault's interest in Buddhism in the enormous body of literature on his life and work. During a visit to Japan in April 1978, Foucault stayed at a Zen temple and experimented with meditation practice. With respect to the timeline delineated in the previous chapter, the visit to Japan occurred between the *Security, Territory, Population* lectures (January-February) and the roundtable of May 1978 (published as 'Questions of Method'; Foucault 1991c). So it was upon his return from Japan (noted in the opening remarks of 'What is Critique?', the lecture that followed the roundtable) that Foucault introduced the idea of 'political spirituality'. His gnomic remarks about the possibilities of Buddhist

meditation thus prefigure the hypothesis about 'political spirituality' as 'the will to discover a different way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false' (Foucault 1991c: 82); his remarks also underscore the bodily dimensions of such a task. Foucault effectively twins 'political spirituality' with 'spiritual corporality', even if he did not formulate the latter concept as such. I am not suggesting that the ideas Foucault was developing at the time were directly influenced by his 'Zen experiment'. But it does appear that he had detected certain affinities between Buddhist practice and his own critico-political itinerary; or at any rate, his remarks invite such speculation. This chapter will therefore stage a dialogue between Foucault's research on the Ancient Greek ideal of the arts of existence/the care of self and a Buddhist art of living as articulated in Vipassana. Building on the preceding account of Foucault's subtextual 'religious question', encapsulated by the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality', this chapter investigates the transformative potential of meditative experience.

Part I clarifies how Foucault's research on the sexual ethics of Antiquity is not limited to the domain of 'sexuality', but rather opens up a broader project of developing contemporary arts of living. The 'what', 'why', 'how' and 'ends' of a contemporary art of living will be explicated with reference to Foucault's fourfold analysis of ethics. This will show how the cultivation of an art of living requires a reconsideration of the relationship between the Ancient Greek maxims of 'the care of self' and 'know thyself'. I will discuss the implications of this aspect of the Foucauldian corpus on cultural studies work, and more specifically a spiritually-engaged cultural studies that would 'speak personally' to work productively with the tensions between the two maxims.

Part II cross-reads Vipassana and its understanding of a Buddhist art of living with this Foucauldian schema to explore the ethical and political possibilities of meditation practice. The analysis is predicated on the Foucauldian understanding of experience as both structuring historical conditions and transformative force. It will suspend the 'supramundane' postulations of Awakening to work with the constructivist understanding of the historical and cultural forces that constitute subjectivity, whilst remaining open and amenable to the Buddhist sacred claim of an unmediated or unconditioned awareness of phenomenal reality. The chapter thus lays the groundwork for a different pathway of inquiry beyond the critical impasse that has stalled around the question of meditative experience (see Chapter Three), setting the stage for more hospitable encounters between Buddhism and critical theory.

PART I: THE PRAXIS-IDEAL OF AN ART OF LIVING

The work of problematisation and the arts of existence

If there is a 'religious question' threading through the Foucauldian corpus, it is in effect a 'problematisation' of religion that 'jolted the safe paradigms of religious understanding by questioning the very constitution of the "religious space"' (Carrette 2000: 131). The critical force of 'problematisation', nascent in the first volume of the *History of Sexuality* project, gained momentum with Foucault's 'ethical turn' in the late 1970s. The notion of problematisation was foregrounded by Foucault in an article of 1983 that became the introduction to the second and third volumes, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of Self*, which describes the project as a 'history of the *ways* in which pleasures, desires, and sexual behaviour were problematised' (1988d: 256). By this late

stage of his intellectual life, Foucault (1988d: 257) came to regard 'problematisation' as applicable to all his work since *History of Madness*, explaining that the overarching trajectory of his work involves a 'genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*', though he admits that he 'never isolated this notion sufficiently.' 'Problematisation' thus functions as a corollary to the concept of 'experience' or 'limit-experience', in that they both address the co-constitutive dynamics of 'objective' historical forces and 'subjective' ethical relations of self-other-truth:

> Problematization refers both to the way in which specific historical practices give rise to or condition the emergence of objects of analysis, which themselves will be an amalgam of experiences (such as madness or sexuality), discourses (such as psychiatry or sexology), practices (such as confinement or surveillance) and institutions (such as asylums or confessionals), as well as to the ways in which genealogy and genealogists are able to transform a "given" into a question and, in so doing, require the rethinking of politics, philosophy, and ethics (Deacon 2000: 140).

Like 'experience' or 'limit-experience', 'problematisation' is both an object and objective of the Foucauldian critico-political itinerary. Hence, with the so-called 'ethical turn' the *History of Sexuality* project becomes at once a 'history of the *way* in which pleasures, desires, and sexual behaviour were problematised' and a 'history of the experience of sexuality, where experience is understood as the correlation between fields of knowledge, types of normativity, and forms of subjectivity in a particular culture' (Foucault 1990b: 29). Foucault's research on the sexual ethics of Antiquity describes how acts and relations of erotic pleasure were problematised, not

because they were subject to social prohibition or religious control, or because they constituted a field in which the truth of an individual's desires could be discovered, but because they were recognised as a domain of conduct by which one could cultivate the art of transforming one's life into a work. The problematisation of acts and relations of erotic pleasure was inextricably linked to the arts of existence. Foucault defines these arts as:

> those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria (1990b: 10-11).

The arts of existence, also called the aesthetics of existence or the art of living, entailed a different modality of self-relation, and hence offers a counterpoint to the hermeneutics of self consolidated by the Christian confessional apparatus, which, as illustrated by Rose's interrogation of the 'psy disciplines' for example, continues to sustain the pastoral power suffusing neoliberal governmentality. According to O'Leary (2002: 37), Foucault reads in the arts of existence 'a critical indictment of our modern modes of self-relation: in the comparison between the two it is the ancient model which, for all its faults, triumphs'. Christopher Yates (2010: 81; emphasis added) similarly suggests that in the Ancient Greek praxis-ideal of an art of living 'the self-governance of the self ultimately furnishes a model that may, in effect, restore even to modern subjects an impetus for *vigilance and action* in an age otherwise caught up in the coercive structures of power and governmentality'. Whilst Foucault saw certain potentials in the ancient attitude towards an art of living, he neither valorises the acts

and relations of erotic practices performed in Antiquity nor suggests that we could directly transplant from the past a solution to our contemporary problems. He states unequivocally that one cannot expect to 'find the solution of a problem in the solution of another problem raised at another moment by other people' (Foucault 1984b: 343). It is clear from Foucault's research that Greco-Roman sexual ethics were articulated in a social milieu structured by multiple hierarchies that primarily served the interests of men, 'a virile society with slaves, in which women were underdogs whose pleasure had no importance, whose sexual life had to be only oriented toward, determined by, their status as wives, and so on' (Foucault 1984b: 344). And while much attention was given to ethicising the erotic acitivities between men, on the whole, these relations of pleasure lack reciprocity. Hence, when asked what he thought of the Greeks, Foucault (1988b: 244) says, 'not very much'.

What interests Foucault about the Greco-Roman world, then, is not the specific content of their sexual ethics but the orienting praxis-ideal of an art of living. He explains that he wanted to address a time when 'the effects of scientific knowledge and the complexity of normative systems were less, and in order eventually to make out forms of relation to the self different from those characterizing sexuality', a time when the arts of existence were accorded greater 'importance' and 'autonomy' (Foucault 1990b: 11). This accords with the aims of a 'history of the present', the task of problematisation, in that it seeks neither to pursue a history of Ancient Greek philosophy nor to discover its 'true' meaning, but rather to describe how a particular domain of experience becomes a 'problem', so as to discover new vantage points and tactics for a critical ontology of ourselves—to probe the limits imposed by a present problem, to turn what is 'given' into a question. When asked about the relation

between modern practices of self and those in Antiquity, Foucault (1988b: 247) says that it is important 'to point out the proximity and the difference, and, through their interplay, to show how the same advice given by ancient morality can function differently in a contemporary style of morality'.

My argument, therefore, is that Foucault's research into Greco-Roman ethics should be read as an invitation to us to rearticulate the praxis-ideal of an art of living in a contemporary context. This is a possibility to be pursued by experimenting with the 'cultural inventions of mankind', which offer 'a treasury of devices, techniques, ideas, procedures' that may help to constitute 'a certain point of view which can be very useful as a tool for analyzing what's going on now—and to change it' (Foucault 1984b: 349-50).

Foucault's fourfold analysis of ethics and the care of self

The pathways signposted by Foucault's research on an art of living are paved upon the distinction he makes between 'moral code' and 'ethics'. Moral code refers to the 'prescriptive ensemble' gathering together 'a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies [family, education institutions, church, etc]'. On Foucault's account, values and rules may be articulated in terms of a coherent doctrine or explicit teaching, or 'transmitted in a diffused manner, so that far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain points, thus providing for compromise or loopholes' (Foucault 1990b: 25). Ethics, on the other hand, refers to 'the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in

reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code' (Foucault 1990b: 26). Ethics, in this sense, describes the *rapport à soi* or relation of self to self involving four interrelated dimensions: 1.) the ethical substance, the part of oneself that serves as the prime material for the cultivation of moral conduct; 2.) the mode of subjection, the rationale or justification according to which a person chooses to relate, and is obliged to honour, the rules and values set forth in any given moral code; 3.) the ethical work, the activity a person engages in to align one's conduct with the given rules and values, and transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's actions; 4.) the *telos*, or the mode of being that is the aim of one's ethical work. These four dimensions could be summarised as the 'what', 'why', 'how', and 'goal' of ethics.

For Foucault, moral codes remain relatively stable from one historical and cultural context to another, whilst ethics are much more susceptible to modification and rearticulation. Consider, for instance, how a similar moral code 'One shall not sleep with boys' could be found in Classical Greece and a later period when Christianity took hold in Europe; but the ways in which a person constitutes herself or himseld as an ethical subject in relation to this moral code differ. For the Greeks, the *ethical substance* was pleasure, because a lack of restraint and failure to exercise moderation in erotic acts and relations with boys present the dangers of hubris and disrepute; whilst for the Christians, the *ethical substance* was desire or concupiscence, because any such erotic yearning, for boys or otherwise, was a sign of the first sin. Accordingly, the *mode of subjection* for the Christians was divine law, a juridico-religious injunction which they had to obey; whilst for the Greeks, it was an aesthetico-political decision to transform one's life into a work, the expression of beautiful conduct. The *ethical work* for the Greeks, then, entailed personal and social

duties and techniques of the body that would allow one to cultivate a healthy asceticism towards oneself in loving boys and greater responsibility in the use of pleasure. For the Christians, on the other hand, it entailed the constant examination of hidden desires and of bringing them to light with self-renouncing confessional practices. The *telos* for the Christians was thus the goal of purity, salvation, or immortality; whilst for the Greeks, it was the goal of achieving mastery over oneself.

By showing the proximity, distance, and interplay in the problematisations of different historical periods, Foucault's research into Antiquity thus questions the extent to which the 'what', 'why', 'how', and 'goal' of ethics at any given juncture may be modified and rearticulated. More specifically, in pondering whether 'our problem nowadays is not, in a way, similar to [the Greeks'], since most of us no longer believe that ethics is founded in religion, nor do we want a legal system to intervene in our moral, personal, private life' (Foucault 1984b: 343), Foucault's genealogy of ethics/the subject invites us to consider how a Nietzschean vision of freeing ourselves from historically contingent modes of subjectivity sustaining existing regimes of domination, might be actualised with a contemporary art of living. This is what Timothy O'Leary explores in *Foucault and the Art of Ethics* (2002). I want to adapt his reading of Foucault's fourfold analysis of ethics, and refract it through the reciprocal itineraries of a spiritually-engaged cultural studies and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, to analyse Vipassana and a Buddhist art of living.

O'Leary makes following proposals for a contemporary art of living. Firstly, insofar as Foucault's 'critical attitude' regards the subject as no more than a 'fictitious unity', much like how 'sex' is no more than an 'ideal point' consolidated by the discourses of

sexuality (Foucault 1990a: 154-155), what ought to be adopted as the ethical substance for a contemporary art of living is the self, or more precisely, the forces of becoming or processes of the body-mind by which selfhood is formed.. Secondly, if the self is not a pre-given, not a product but a process, the mode of subjection or justification for refusing the transcendental subject is the recognition that the unknown, open-endedness of existence has to be embraced with an attitude that treats life as an art of ongoing crafting, which may involve, but is not limited to, the expression of beauty. Thirdly, insofar as Foucault's critico-political itinerary aims 'to prise open the relations of truth-power-subjectivity which makes us the kind of individual that we are' (O'Leary 2002: 153), one could craft one's life by performing ethical work involving practices of desubjectification that would defuse the generative habits of prevailing, normative forms of subjectivity. Fourthly, if the task of critique or critical attitude, as understood by Foucault, aims not to eliminate constraint or domination but to continuously open up possibilities for new sociopolitical choices and relations, the *telos* of an art of living is the goal of freedom, conceived not as a historical constant or ideal state but as constituted by relations, as the capacity to say no to a certain identity or to being governed a certain way: the freedom to always become otherwise, the freedom of unbecoming.

Together with the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality', this fourfold schema for a contemporary art of living provides an analytical grid to investigate the ethical and political implications of meditation practice and its transformative possibilities. But before we turn to Vipassana, I want to consider more closely the ethos of the care of self informing O'Leary's reading of Foucault's itinerary, so as to reconnect with the consonant aims of a spiritually-engaged cultural studies

and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. Insofar as the ethical work (the 'how') for a contemporary art of living requires technologies of the self, O'Leary (2002: 137-153) proposes the practice of philosophy-as-a-way-of-life as one such technology. This understanding of philosophy-as-a-way-of-life (see also Hadot 1995) turns on Foucault's (2005) re-evaluation of the Ancient Greek precept of 'the care of self' (*epimeleia heautou*) and its relation to the more famous maxim of 'know thyself' (*gnōthi seauton*). Foucault claims that throughout Antiquity the philosophical question of 'how to have access to truth' was always twinned with the spiritual question of 'what transformations in the being of the subject are necessary for access to truth', even if the specific content and configuration of the spiritual aims and techniques of philosophy-as-a-way-of-life differed from one context to another. There are, on Foucault's reading, three requisites of the *epimeleia heautou* that oriented the *gnōthi seauton*.

Firstly, the care of self required the adoption of a 'general standpoint, of a certain way of considering things, of behaving in the world, undertaking actions, and having relations with others'—the *epimeleia heautou* thus expressed 'an attitude towards the self, others, and the world' based on care and concern (Foucault 2005: 10). Secondly, the care of self required a form of attention turned towards 'oneself'—the *epimeleia heautou* thus entailed 'a certain way of attending to what we think and what takes place in our thought' (Foucault 2005: 11; Foucault also notes that '*epimeleia*' is related to '*meletē*', which means both exercise and meditation). Thirdly, the care of self did not merely refer to an attitude or a form of attention turned on the self, it also designated 'a number of actions exercised on the self by the self, actions by which one takes responsibility for oneself and by which one changes, purifies, transforms, and

transfigures oneself'—the *epimeleia heautou* must therefore be *performed and cultivated* with various practices and exercises, such as 'techniques of meditation, of memorization of the past, of examination of conscience, of checking representations which appear in the mind, and so on' (Foucault 2005: 11). But why, Foucault asks, has the care of self been effaced by the Western philosophical tradition in the telling of its own history:

> How did it come about that we accorded so much privilege, value, and intensity to the "know yourself" and omitted [and] left in the shadow, this notion of care of the self, that, in actual fact, historically [...] seems to have supported an extremely rich and dense set of notions, practices, ways of being, forms of existence, and so on? (Foucault 2005: 12)

Whilst the displacement occurred gradually over the centuries, Foucault identifies the 'Cartesian moment' as the main reason for the displacement of the care of self from the Western philosophical tradition. In the Cartesian approach, the self-evidence of the subject's existence, placed at the source of its own being, figures as the origin and point of departure of the philosophical method. Where knowledge of oneself formerly entailed the testing of self-evidence in order to transform the ground of existence of the subject, the Cartesian approach proceeds by first establishing the impossibility of doubting one's existence as subject. The *gnōthi seauton* now takes the knowledge of oneself as a fundamental means to access truth and by the same gesture precludes the *epimeleia heautou* from the field of philosophical thought. Henceforth, Foucault (2005: 15) argues that a line could be drawn between, on the one hand, 'philosophy' or 'the form of thought that asks what it is that enables the subject to have access to the

truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to truth'; and on the other, 'spirituality' or 'the search, practice, and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself [sic] in order to have access to the truth', such as articulated in the pursuits of 'purification, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc.'

The double articulation of the self in spiritually-engaged cultural studies

My point in dwelling on Foucault's discussion of the care of self and its relation to knowing the self is to draw attention to how cultural studies work that inserts the researcher's own voice and experience into its discourse inhabits the tensions between these two precepts. This is what Elspeth Probyn has argued in *Sexing the Self* (1993), which engages with Foucault's rethinking of the care of self to explore from a feminist perspective the possibilities of new enunciative practices in cultural studies. As Foucault's research reveals, one way to care for the self is the activity of writing: 'taking care of oneself became linked to a constant writing activity. The self is something to write about, a theme or object (subject) of writing activity' (Foucault 1988e: 27); 'the self is an object of care, an element for reflection' (Foucault 1984a: 30). For Probyn (1993: 114; emphasis added), Foucault's late work furnishes cultural studies with 'a model of self which operates at both *ontological and epistemological* levels in order to construct various modalities of the self'. Insofar as Foucault's critical and political itinerary aims to show how the 'habitual' orders that people enjoy or suffer under 'are the result of very precise historical changes'—that is, to intervene in the present to think the historical possibilities of change, of becoming otherwise—his research on the arts of existence and the guiding precept of care of self adds a new

vector to this overall project by inviting us to consider how technologies of the self could be (re)deployed as 'a way of analysing the self's different levels and its work in the historical arrangement of the present' (Probyn 1993: 115). In the context of cultural studies, what emerges from the concern with the self is a way of formulating enunciative positions 'in the interstices of self/social relations', enunciative positions that 'emerge in different and localized articulations of practices and problematizations' and which may be 'mobilized in diverse ways' (Probyn 1993: 115).

This thesis has been working along the lines proposed by Probyn. I have aligned this study with discourses on media fandom and subcultural formations that narrativise the authoring-I's experience with/as an analysis of its historical and cultural embeddedness. By foregrounding the struggles selves have with themselves in order to say something about others and the world we share, these cultural studies discourses are arguably engaging in a continual process in which the self is practised and problematised. In this regard, Probyn cites Dick Hebdige's essay 'Some Sons and Their Fathers' (1985) as exemplary for the way it interweaves fragments of self, place and space, moving from his own breakdown to the actual historical situation in Britain, to the death of a friend, to the public mourning of Diana Dors, to his own father. This use of self-writing-analysis to work the tensions between the care of self and knowing thyself performs a double articulation:

> [O]n the one hand, to speak of and to one's self thereby transforming the self, and on the other, to put forward voices and selves in relation to a theoretical and actual horizon, thereby transforming the practices which constrict the selves as well as the horizon itself [...] Lodged in specific situations and

> conditions, the self must be used epistemologically to reveal the nature of the articulation, and ontologically to acknowledge the affectivity of the articulation [...] The work of technologies of the self both describes the location of the self in everyday practices and the capacity of the self as a theoretical articulation, as an analytic tool, to 'cut into the real'. This *double articulation of the self* then provides the necessary basis for, and the beginning of an elaboration of, an enunciative practice in cultural studies (Probyn 1993: 116, 118; emphasis added).

Inasmuch as this critico-political task of reworking the relation of self to self and others (i.e. the relation between subjectivity and truth) is guided by the ethic of the care of self, then, given the link Foucault makes between the *epimeleia heautou* and the work of spiritual *askēsis*—'the work that one performs on oneself in order to transform oneself or make the self appear which, happily, one never attains', Foucault (1997b: 137) says—can we then describe this enunciative practice already at work in the archive of cultural studies as 'spiritually-engaged'? Or perhaps, might we not suppose that a willingness to acknowledge the 'spirituality' that could be operationalised in the name of cultural studies, a willingness to speak from a spiritually-engaged position, could serve the tactical purpose of defusing the secularist intellectual conceits that may dissuade cultural studies practitioners from taking seriously the claims of self-transformation posited by various knowledge-practices (directly 'religious' or otherwise)?

An enunciative position thus opens up, from which the spiritually-engaged practitioner-scholar could intervene in the present trend towards individualist and

capitalist forms of spirituality by problematising, vis-à-vis the researching self's spirituality, the neoliberal mode of subjectification these hegemonic forms of spirituality normalise. Probyn (1993: 118) says that whilst we cannot guarantee the politics of individual voices, 'we can work to elaborate a speaking position that is formulated through and stitched into the larger political articulations of feminism and socialism.' In the case of this thesis, the speaking position of this Buddhist authoring-I is formulated through and stitched into the larger political articulations of engaged Buddhism, which may cross-fertilise the soteriological aims of Buddhism with the objectives of feminism, socialism, and/or other sociopolitical and intellectual movements—hence, the thesis's adoption of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection as a methodology; hence, an opening for and an alliance with a spiritually-engaged cultural studies; hence, the staging of dialogical encounters between the Buddhist and Foucauldian itineraries (as well as deconstruction).

As shown in Chapter One's discussion of Thich Nhat Hanh's model of engaged Buddhism, 'healing' and 'resistance' are interlinked such that the care for the spiritual wellbeing of oneself flips over into sociopolitical awareness and compassion for others. As a generalised precept for ethical self-transformation, the care of self can be located as a guiding ethos (its condition of possibility, even) of Buddhist spirituality too, since the first and necessary step for the path towards Awakening must begin with the First Noble Truth of *dukkha*, the acceptance of the fact of one's existential condition, dissatisfactoriness, suffering, mortality. The Buddha's response in the *Rājan Sutta* of the Pali Canon illustrates the foundational role of the care of self in Buddhist soteriology. It recounts an exchange between King Pasenadi and Queen Mallikā, who

both came to the realisation, 'There is no one dearer to me than myself.' Puzzled by the seeming narcissism, they sought the counsel of the Buddha, who proclaimed:

> Searching all directions
> with your awareness,
> you find no one dearer
> than yourself.
> In the same way, others
> are thickly dear to themselves.
> So you shouldn't hurt others
> if you love yourself.
> (Thānissaro 2012)

One can see how such sentiments could easily be appropriated by individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality, if they are divorced from the ethical precepts of Buddhism and its central doctrine of *anattā* or not-self (explicated below). But if Buddhist spirituality begins with a concern for the self, it does not, as Žižek claims, seeks solace or retreat into an Inner Self. For Buddhism there is no such enduring Inner Self; the relinquishment of craving for and attachment to this metaphysical comfort of enduring self-presence is precisely the obstacle to overcome. There is thus a certain *double articulation* of the self in Buddhism: the self, or the underlying conditions of the self, is both the material to work with and the tool for 'cutting' into its own illusory ground of self-presence. To lead into the analysis of how this is cultivated in Vipassana, I want to fold onto O'Leary's proposal for a contemporary art of living Probyn's interpretation of the care of self:

> We need to manipulate and bend our selves but this is not inward action conducted in the hallucinations of self-supremacy. This task is one of folding the outside and the inside together so that we can better intervene in the outside. The point is not to include the outside with the inside in such a way that overwhelming pain renders us only able to inhabit the inside. Folding the line reconstitutes us in another form of subjectification' (Probyn 1993: 113).

This interpretation of the self with the metaphor of the 'fold' derives from Deleuze's reading of Foucault's work. For Deleuze (1990: 151), the idea of '*le pli*' (the 'pleat', the 'fold', the 'doubling up') can be found throughout the Foucauldian corpus but is amplified in his late work, where we find the fold 'as the operation of the art of living'. He reads in Foucault's fourfold delineation of ethics:

1. the ethical substance - the material part of ourselves, surrounded and enfolded (e.g. the body and pleasure for the Greeks, the flesh and desire for the Christians)
2. the mode of subjection - the fold of the relations between forces, a rule (natural, divine, rational, aesthetic, etc) that the relation between forces is bent back to become a relation to oneself
3. ethical work - the fold of knowledge or truth as that which constitutes our being in relation to truth
4. telos - the fold of the outside itself, or what Deleuze evoking Blanchot describes as an 'interiority of expectation' from which one awaits the promise of immortality, salvation, freedom from attachment, etc. (Deleuze 2006: 86)

Probyn (1993: 113) contends that 'the concept of folding the self scrambles any dichotomy of interior self and exterior social'; or as Foucault (1988e: 26) says: '[b]eing occupied with oneself and political activities are linked'. With Deleuze's reading of the folds in Foucault's fourfold account of ethics, we thus pleat another fold onto O'Leary's fourfold schema for a contemporary art of living, which I had earlier enfolded with the previous chapter's account of Foucault's subtextual 'religious question': the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality'. Having clarified the role of the care of self in the enunciative practice of cultural studies—or as I am arguing, a spiritually-engaged cultural studies—we are now in a position to investigate the ethico-political significance of Buddhist meditation and the transformative possibilities of meditative experience with this fourfold schema for an art of living. My interpretation of Buddhist sacred teachings in the following analysis is informed by my ongoing pursuit of the Buddhist path; it may not be in accord with Buddhist 'orthodoxy' even though I am engaging with canonical discourses, since my experience of Buddhism and the practice of Vipassana have always been informed by my practice of cultural theory. Whatever insights or understanding I may have garnered through meditative experience or Buddhist spirituality more generally, they are made intelligible through both the frameworks of Buddhism and poststructuralist thinking. In articulating this analysis of my sacred-scholarly pursuit, what the following elaborates is an enunciative position from which the Buddhist cultural studies self-in-the-making may be used 'epistemologically to reveal the nature of the articulation, and ontologically to acknowledge the affectivity of the articulation' (Probyn 1993: 116).

PART II: VIPASSANA AND A BUDDHIST ART OF LIVING

This analysis of a Buddhist art of living will draw on contemporary translations of and commentaries on the Pali Canon informing Vipassana,[1] the main point of reference being the instructions and expositions of the doctrinal principles of practice given by the head teacher S.N. Goenka (via video and audio recordings) at introductory ten-day courses. These teachings are summarised in *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka* (Hart 1987; henceforth, I cite Hart as a proxy for Goenka's discourse). Using O'Leary's reading of Foucault's fourfold ethics as thematic headings, I address this overarching question: in what ways is a Buddhist model of an art of living consonant with a Foucauldian model?

Mindfulness of bodily sensation (ethical substance/the material fold)

At introductory ten-day Vipassana courses, participants spend the first three days cultivating mindfulness (or non-grasping attentive awareness) of the natural movement of the breath as it passes through the area around the nostrils. On the fourth day they are given instructions to contemplate on *vedanā* throughout the body.[2] The term *vedanā* is usually translated with the shorthand 'feeling' or 'bare

[1] Vipassana is based on the *Satipatthāna Sutta*, or *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*, a discourse in the Pali Canon that is regarded today as a key treatise that delineates the key principles and techniques by which mindfulness of the processes of the body-mind could be cultivated as a 'direct path' to Awakening (see Anālayo 2007). On this note, I acknowledge that Goenka's approach only represents one (and moreover, contestable) interpretation of this discourse. Seated meditation and the contemplation of sensation are not the only ways to cultivate mindfulness. There are other techniques like walking meditation and the contemplation of the process of dying; the latter is perhaps analogous with what is known in the Western tradition as *meletē thanatou* (meditation on death).

[2] Meditative exercises in Buddhism are grouped under two categories: *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā* (the suffix connotes 'cultivation/practice' and derives from *bhāva*, 'to become/becoming'). The principal function of *samatha-bhāvanā* is to discipline in/attentiveness by resting conscious attention on the uncontrived movement of breathing to calm the body-mind, so as to gather awareness into a one-pointed state of absorption; whilst for *vipassanā-bhāvanā* it is to apply attention in a discerning

feeling', but according to Goenka it also encompasses the correlate of 'sensation'. The next chapter will consider the notion of *vedanā* as 'bare feeling' in terms of current understandings in affect theory. The present analysis deals with Goenka's preferred interpretation of 'bodily sensation'. While Vipassana prioritises bodily sensation as the primary object of meditation, the practice does *not* seek to manipulate the experience of sensations as such. While feelings of joy and bliss and correlating physical sensations of pleasantness may arise in the course of the practice, the purpose of Vipassana is not to induce pleasurable experiences, which, if sought after, would contravene the principles of the practice (Hart 1987: 122). Rather, the purpose of contemplating bodily sensations is to cultivate insight into the Three Marks of Existence: the coterminous doctrines of *dukkha*, *anicca*, and *anattā*. The Three Marks of Existence refract the Four Noble Truths: 1.) the human condition of existential

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manner to the chosen object of contemplation (i.e the body, feelings, mindstates, and conceptual patterns) by using Buddhist doctrinal principles as a frame of reference, so as to develop insight about phenomenal reality-selfhood 'as it really is'. Some lineages of practice emphasise the necessity of developing deep concentration before applying mindfulness to the processes of the body-mind. Others advocate a more fluid, contingent approach that alternates between or combines aspects of these modalities, tweaking the modality of 'becoming-as-practice-as-cultivation' according to circumstances. Goenka's instructions appear closer to the first. He explains that the everyday untrained, restless attention is unable to clearly perceive or contemplate the subtle processes of the body-mind in a penetrating and sustained manner; though he also advises students to rest attention on the breath, whenever the body-mind is too restless or agitated to maintain mindfulness and equanimity.

I acknowledge this because it is important that I do not gloss over the specificities of Buddhist teachings. Such as it is, the functions and interrelations between *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā* are subjects of debates within contemporary Buddhist formations. But more importantly, I want to underscore that the cultivation of insight requires at least a degree of concentration-attentional training, which by itself may not generate understanding of Buddhist truth claims, even if it may generate feelings of calm and even bliss. Likewise, without concentration-attentional training, one is unlikely to sustain mindfulness or even perceive the subtle process of the body-mind not usually present to conscious awareness. In any case, the fruitful *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā* must be mutually supported by the cultivation of ethical conduct, the minimal requisites of which are designated by the Five Precepts (see note 2 in Chapter One). As part of an ecology of practice (see the following note), Buddhist mediation entails a certain work of becoming, which, as we shall see, is aimed at effecting unbecoming.

dissatisfactoriness or suffering (*dukkha*) in the face of impermanence or inevitable change (*anicca*); 2.) *craving* for the delusory metaphysical comfort of fixity and self-presence—or inversely, *aversion* towards the reality of not-self (*anattā*)—as the generative condition of existential dissatisfactoriness; 3.) the possibility of Awakening (*nibbāna*) to the cessation of existential dissatisfactoriness; 4.) the Eightfold Noble Path (involving the cultivation of ethical conduct, concentration and attentional training, and development of wisdom and compassion) leading to the cessation of existential dissatisfactoriness.[3] In short, the clear comprehension of the Three Marks of Existence and complete understanding of the Four Noble Truths actualises Awakening, which, it is claimed, involves an unmediated or unconditioned awareness of phenomenal reality and the penultimate liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

For the purpose of this analysis, I will suspend this 'supramundane' interpretation of Awakening by working with a 'mundane' understanding of the objective of a Buddhist

[3] The Noble Eightfold Path: Right View, Right Intention, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. These eight components are mutually enabling; though, as appropriate to individual circumstances, some components may be given more primacy or developed in sequence, so as to address any imbalance or to strengthen conviction and progress on the path. At the ten-day Vipassana course, for instance, Goenka guides newcomers through the practice by beginning with Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood, which fall under the category of ethical conduct (*śīla*). Goenka explains that by first establishing a strong foundation in ethical conduct—at the course this is facilitated by the students' seclusion from the outside world, and their keeping of a vow of 'noble silence' and abstinence from all reading or writing activity for nine of the ten days—one's mental state would be more inclined towards calmness and composure during concentration and attentional training (*samādhi*), which is developed with Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Supported by ethical conduct, concentration and attentional training develop the necessary quality of non-grasping awareness for the cultivation of Right Intention and Right View, which fall under the category of wisdom (*paññā*). But to reiterate, even though Goenka explicates these three modalities of the Noble Eightfold Path in sequence, they are in fact mutually supportive and enhancing—e.g. concentration and attentional training would enhance the calmness and composure that allows one to refine ethical conduct, which is itself wisdom in action; and the flourishing of wisdom fosters a deeper appreciation of and conviction in the continuing pursuit of the Eightfold Path.

art of living as the movement of transfiguration, whereby the subject strives to effect the process of becoming otherwise or unbecoming. This analytical manoeuvre remains hospitable to the Buddhist sacred claim, in that it interprets the task of unbecoming as a praxis-ideal of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*: a profession of faith, a pledge of commitment and utter response-ability, to relinquish attachment to foreknowledge and shatter every horizon of expectation, whatever it may be, whenever it may be, to expose awareness to the outside of thought, to invite im-possibility and welcome the wholly other that goes by the promise of Awakening (I examine more closely the tension between immanence and transcendence in Chapter Seven).

Implicit in the Three Marks of Existence and the Four Noble Truths is the principle of conditionality discussed in Chapter Three: co-dependent origination or dependent co-arising. Dependent co-arising also informs what is called the Five Khandhas (Sanskrit: skandhas) or the Five Aggregates constituting the experience of phenomenal reality and selfhood. The American monk and eminent translator of the Pali Canon, Bhikkhu Bodhi, delineates the Five Aggregates thus:

> (1) form (rūpa), the physical component of experience; (2) feeling (vedanā), the "affective tone" of experience—either pleasant, painful, or neutral; (3) perception (saññā), the identification of things through their distinctive marks and features; (4) volitional formations (sankhāra), a term for the multifarious mental factors involving volition, choice, and intention; and (5) consciousness (viññana), cognition arisen through any of the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind (Bodhi 2005a: 305).

The Five Aggregates articulate a framework for understanding how the confluence of material and immaterial forces, physical and mental processes, give rise to human experience. So for instance, an experience of the sound of breaking glass as indicative of possible danger and the concomitant self-perception of someone who dislikes or is easily startled by sudden loud noises, arise dependently upon the confluence of: *rupā*, both 'external' and 'internal' matter such as a breaking glass and a human body with sense organs; *viññana*, the consciousness that registers the contact between aural vibrations and the sense faculty of hearing; *vedanā*, the affective tone of 'bare feelings' and correlating physical sensations, which in this instance would be registered as unpleasant or displeasing; *saññ*a, the perception that cognises the marks and features of the sound as 'breaking glass'; and *sankharā*, the volitional formations involving a complex interplay of, emotions like fright, conceptual thoughts like the notion of danger, and the intention and decision to investigate the noise, reprimand others for their carelessness, and so forth. The crucial point, as per the principle of dependent co-arising, is that the five aggregates are *mutually constitutive* with no determinate order or hierarchy between them.

While I began the above illustration with the aggregate of form (*rupā)*, the 'external' matter of breaking glass and 'internal' matter of a body that hears and reacts are experienced as phenomenal entities only with the co-arising of a consciousness (*viññana*). Consciousness registers sensory contact through the faculty of hearing, which only becomes active when aural vibrations enter into a relation with a body with the sense organ for hearing. What coheres between aural vibrations and the sensing body with the capacity to hear is a relation of ear-sound, but with other

sensory stimuli there could be other relations like eye-visibility, nose-odour, tongue-taste, body-touch, or mind-thought. Depending on the momentary predominance of any particular sensory stimulus, each of these different force relations animating the human sensorium would prime perception and colour consciousness a certain way. But they are never self-contained as such. Unless impaired by physical disability, these different aspects of the human sensorium cannot be sharply distinguished. The contact between aural vibration and the sense faculty of hearing that gives rise to ear-sound consciousness, would be co-constituted by the arising of mind-thought consciousness, which conceptualises the sensory contact between the 'internal' body and 'external' stimuli a certain way. Accordingly, the *perception* of the sound as 'breaking glass', the *affective tone* and correlating *physical sensation* of unpleasantness, and the *volitional formations* mobilising certain predispositions to think and/or act with fright or respond to perceived danger—the dynamics of these aggregates should likewise be regarded as non-linear, mutually constituted, dependently co-arisen. The Five Aggregates thus elucidate how the experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood emerges as the effect of cross-modulating forces, which have no enduring presence or inherent existence in themselves. What the Five Aggregates articulate, in effect, is an account of human experience *in potentia*, the self as a virtuality whose potential only ever becomes actualised in a thoroughly contingent manner. Given the interplay of form (*rupā*), consciousness (*viññana*), affective tone and correlating physical sensations (*vedanā*), perception (*saññа*), and volitional formations (*sankhāra*)—all shifting and changing from one moment to the next—there is then no essential or unitary necessity for their emergence. It is thus futile to crave for or cling onto the image and sensation of a momentary subjectivity formed in passing as indicative of a transcendental or Inner Self; to do so is to perpetuate sensory-perceptual ignorance

(*avijjā*) about the contingent and open-endedness of the experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood.

The adoption of *vedanā* as an object of meditation in Vipassana—or to evoke the language of the Foucauldian schema we are working with, the ethical substance or material fold in a Buddhist art of living—has to be understood with recourse to the doctrinal frameworks of the Five Aggregates, the Three Marks of Existence and the Four Noble Truths. As will become clear in the next section, bodily sensation offers a palpable, material anchor for the contemplative investigation of the Five Aggregates, the dynamics of which are too quick, subtle and indeterminate to be grasped by the intellect alone—or at any rate, not by an intellect un-forged and un-purified by ethical conduct, concentration-attentional training, and discerning wisdom-compassion—since the exercise of rational thought is already a contraction of these subtle forces. The contemplation of *vedanā* offers a way to investigate these forces via the process of embodiment. To develop an embodied understanding of the workings of the Five Aggregates is to gain insight into the ephemerality or impermanence (*anicca*) of the psychosomatic forces that constitute the experience of phenomenal reality and selfhood. This is also an embodiment of the doctrine of not-self (*anattā*), since the self is revealed to be no more than the interplay of contingent relations of forces. One then begins to understand the nature of existential dissatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) and detach oneself from the feelings of suffering that invariably arise with the attachment to and reification of the experience of selfhood. Consonant with the Foucauldian itinerary of refusing the transcendental self, *vedanā* or bodily sensation is the ethical substance that one works on to care for oneself in a Buddhist art of living, the

material fold by which one cultivates a different relation of self to self—or rather, not-self—and others.

The decision to 'let go' (mode of subjection/the fold of relations between forces)

At the preliminary stage of Vipassana, meditators rest attention on the natural, uncontrived movement of breathing, allowing the undulating rhythm of the breath, along with whatever thoughts that may be present to awareness, to arise and pass away of their own accord. Sustained effort at mindfulness of breathing calms and collects the body-mind. The meditator then turns the now sharpened and concentrated faculty of awareness towards the observation of bodily sensation. Moving attention systematically from the top of the head to the tip of the toes and back again, the meditator observes whatever physical sensations there may be. Whether it be a tightly knotted cramp in the abdomen, a soothing tingle on the nape of the neck, or the seeming neutrality or absence of sensation in any part of the body, the meditator simply observes, seeking neither to cling onto what is perceived as pleasant nor push away what is perceived as unpleasant—nor even to become complacent about what is perceived as neutral feeling or the absence of sensation. As awareness suffuses the body, the meditator may come to observe with increasing clarity how some sensations become fainter or more intense; how pleasantness may change into unpleasantness and vice versa; or how an entirely unexpected sensation may arise around an area previously perceived as neutral or devoid of feeling. Whether it be the sensation of heaviness, lightness, hotness, coolness, itchiness, numbness, or any other type of sensation, one endeavours to simply give witness to its arising and passing without reacting to it.

The principal aim in observing sensation is to cultivate a direct, visceral understanding of 'the nature of arising', 'the nature of passing away', and 'the nature of both arising and passing away'(Analāyo 2007: 103). In so doing, the meditator embodies insight about the reality of change or impermanence (*anicca*). Working thus, one begins to develop wisdom (*paññā)* about the Three Marks of Existence, the Five Aggregates, and the Four Noble Truths. In order to actualise this potential, it is crucial that the meditator repeatedly makes the decision to always relate to the body-mind with *equanimity*, the decision to always 'let go' rather than assert control over the processes of the body-mind. Goenka constantly reminds students to remain patient and equanimous when observing the movement of breathing or sensations. The conditioning of the body-mind is such that distraction, restlessness, discomfort, and pain (physical, mental, or both) are unavoidable, not least because at the ten-day courses twelve hours of the day are timetabled for seated meditation. A pragmatic, productive attitude, then, is to accept unavoidable discomfort and unpleasantness as a part of the practice. To harbour *aversion* towards discomfort and unpleasantness or to *crave* for the alternative of comfort and pleasantness is counterproductive, because it simply perpetuates the old habits of craving and clinging (the Second Noble Truth or the generative condition of *dukkha*), thereby reinforcing sensory-perceptual ignorance about the ephemeral, insubstantial nature of the experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood. Goenka thus urges students to always 'start again', repeating this advice like a mantra to encourage them to develop the quality of equanimity. It bears repetition that the seeds of transformation are germinated not by the movement of breathing or physical sensation in themselves, but from the decision to always return to non-grasping attentiveness without indulging in frustration or expectation, no matter how frequently or how long one is distracted from the task at hand. The

repeated decision to 'let go', the ongoing movement to always 'start again', thus serves to undercut the tendency towards craving-aversion and clinging, and to defuse the habit of appropriating or identifying with the ephemeral, contingent processes of the body-mind as 'I', 'me', or 'mine'.

In the language of the Foucauldian schema of an art of living, the decision to always 'let go' and 'start again' functions as the mode of subjection by which one accepts the reason for acting upon oneself in a certain way, the fold of relations between forces by which a rule of conduct is bent back to become a relation to oneself. In this instance the rule would be the Four Noble Truths, since in making the effort to be equanimous towards the flow of bodily sensation (i.e. to accept that pleasantness and unpleasantness are both impermanent and not of the self) the meditator is: 1.) embodying the reality of existential dissatisfactoriness; 2.) recognising that the tendency towards craving-aversion and clinging is the underlying cause for existential dissatisfactoriness; 3.) actualising the potential for the cessation of existential dissatisfactoriness by putting into practice the path of ethical conduct and mental training; 4.) developing wisdom-compassion leading to Awakening. That the movement of Awakening could be rendered in 'mundane' terms as the process of desubjectification or becoming otherwise, is illustrated by Goenka's explication of the role of the aggregate of *sankhāra* (volitional formations) in generating *dukkha* (existential dissatisfactoriness).

For Goenka, *viññana* (consciousness) designates the 'undifferentiating, non-discriminating' aspect of human experience, the function of which is 'merely to register that contact [between sense faculties and their objects] has occurred in the

mind.' The aggregate of *saññа* (perception) functions as the 'discriminative' aspect which 'draws on the store of past experiences in order to evaluate and categorize any new phenomenon', such that past reactions become the points of reference by which we understand any given experience—that is to say, 'we judge and classify it in accordance with our past *sankhāras'* (Hart 1987: 106), volitional formations or habitual conditionings of reactive thought and action. And since the arising of *sankhāras* (as well as all the other aggregates) is co-dependent on the arising of *vedanā,* the degree to which one is mindful of the sensations that arise at any given moment and the way one relates to them, would impact on the force and influence of past conditionings:

> Our perception of the world outside and of the world within are distorted and blurred by our past conditioning, our preferences and prejudices. In accordance with the distorted perception, an essentially neutral sensation [*vedāna*] immediately becomes pleasant or unpleasant. To this sensation we again react, creating fresh conditioning which distorts our perception further. In this way each reaction becomes the cause of future reactions, all conditioned by the past and conditioning the future in return (Hart 1987: 106)

The contemplation of sensation—or more precisely, the sustained effort to relate to all sensations with equanimity rather than habitually react to them with craving or aversion—functions to defuse past conditionings. Insofar as the Five Aggregates are co-constituted, each cross-modulating the other, past conditionings or volitional formations (*sankhāras*) of aversion may arise and manifest as unpleasant burning sensations gathering around the knees, for example. According to Goenka's interpretation of the Five Aggregates, if one reacts to this sensation with dislike (e.g.

'Why won't this stupid pain go away?!'), fresh *sankhāras* of aversion would be generated. Likewise, conditionings of craving may arise and manifest as pleasant tingling sensations that suffuse the scalp, for example. If one reacts to these sensations with liking (e.g. by relishing, 'Yes, this must be a sign of spiritual progress. I want more!'), fresh s*ankhāras* of craving would be generated. However, if regardless of the sensations that arise, one does not react, then, 'no new *sankhāras* are created. The *sankhāra* that has arisen from the old stock passes away. In the next moment, another past *sankhāra* arises as sensation. Again, if one does not react, it passes away' (Hart 1987: 109).

Sensations provide a palpable anchor for defusing *sankhāras*, which being the conditionings of a complex interplay of thought, emotion, and reactive motivations, are neither easily perceived nor easily defused solely with the intellect. By harnessing the movement of *vedanā* as an object of meditation, the defusing of habitual conditionings in Vipassana is cultivated by way of a 'spiritual corporality', whereby the experience of phenomenal reality and selfhood is revealed to be an open-ended movement of becoming and unbecoming: we could even say, *becoming-as-unbecoming*. The contemplation of *vedanā* entails a mode of subjection by which existence is embraced with an attitude that treats life as a work-in-progress, an ongoing task of crafting, of becoming otherwise. The self, life itself, is arguably embodied as 'art', in the way that Foucault understood it: the self as an ongoing work of crafting. In describing the Buddhist path as an art of living and repeatedly urging students to work tirelessly for their liberation from *dukkha*, I think Goenka would perhaps not be unsympathetic to this Nietzschean inspired praxis-ideal of *autopoiesis* orienting a Foucauldian model of an art of living (O'Leary 2002: 133-138).

Dissolving the habits of the self (ethical work/the fold of truth)

This interpretation of Vipassana, as a practice that can potentially dissolve congealed *habits* of the self, raises the question of how habit is accumulated and formed and the extent to which the force of habit might be harnessed against itself to effect desubjectification. The essay 'Becoming and Un-Becoming: The Theory and Practice of *Anatta*' by Clare Carlisle (2006) sketches an instructive blueprint (informed by her scholarly pursuit of philosophy and sacred practice of Buddhism) for analysing the workings of habit in the context of Buddhist spirituality. She begins with the premise that *anattā* is not, strictly speaking, a doctrine about the non-existence of self, but a strategy for denying that the 'I' really exists. As with any sacred doctrine, there are competing interpretations of *anattā*. The interpretation suggested by Carlisle is merely one pragmatic way to engage with the doctrine, one with the added heuristic value of enabling new dialogues between Buddhism and Western philosophical understandings of the role of habit in the experience of selfhood. If *anattā* is not a statement about the non-existence of self per se, then, 'the challenge is not to argue or to prove that there is no such thing as a distinct, enduring self—in any case, the truth of *anattā* only becomes meaningful (i.e. liberating) in practice, when it is experienced—but to account for the phenomenon of selfhood' (Carlisle 2006: 75). This echoes the views of Thānissaro Bhikkhu, an American monk and translator of the Pali Canon who contends that, despite attempts by some contemporary commentators to elaborate a Buddhist answer to the question of the existence/non-existence of the self, one would not find in the earliest extant records of the Buddha's teachings any determinate or straightforward answer. What can be found instead is an account of

the Buddha remaining silent when asked point-blank, 'Is there a self? Is there no self?' Responding to a disciple who queried his silence, the Buddha says:

> [...] if I—being asked by Vacchagotta the wanderer if there is a self—were to answer that there is a self, that would be conforming with those brahmans and contemplatives who are exponents of eternalism [the view that there is an eternal, unchanging soul]. If I [...] were to answer that there is no self, that would be conforming with those brahmans and contemplatives who are exponents of annihilationism [the view that death is the annihilation of consciousness]. If I [...] were to answer that there is a self, would that be in keeping with the arising of knowledge that all phenomena are not-self? And if I [...] were to answer that there is no self, the bewildered Vacchagotta would become even more bewildered: "Does the self I used to have now not exist?" (Thānissaro 2004)

In remaining silent about the question of whether the self exists or not, it would seem that the Buddha is steadfastly committed to refusing what could be described in Derridean terminology as a metaphysics of presence. The question of 'what is'—or more precisely, the *origin* of the world or cosmos—is regarded in Buddhism as 'unconjecturable' (Thānissaro 1997e), a question to be 'set aside' because it is not conducive to Awakening (Thānissaro 1997f). On Thānissaro Bhikkhu's (2001) account *anattā* ought not be rendered as 'no-self', as it is sometimes translated, because what is at stake is more precisely the question of whether the experience of phenomenal reality, of mortality, change, and finitude, may be identifiable with or appropriated by an enduring self. Accordingly, given the aim of liberation from *dukkha*, a Buddhist life-

practice is arguably ill-served by the questions 'Is there a self? What is my self?'. The more productive questions would be: 'Am I suffering stress because I'm holding onto this particular phenomenon? Is it really me, myself, or mine? If it's stressful but not really me or mine, why hold on?' This pragmatic interpretation of *anattã* finds support in the discourses of the Pali Canon that recount many scenarios in which the Buddha responds to queries about specific concepts or practices with recourse to the Four Noble Truths—that is to say, the Buddha neither confirms nor denies the existence of self but repeatedly underscores that the question of (not)self is meaningful only in relation to the practical work of cultivating Awakening or the cessation of *dukkha*. Any inquiry into the theory and practice of *anattā* (not-self) with Western philosophical understandings must therefore be mindful of the Buddhist soteriological imperative, which, as I am claiming, could be read in a 'mundane' manner as a movement of becoming otherwise or unbecoming.

From this perspective, Carlisle considers the question of selfhood in terms of habit, enlisting the help of Hume, Spinoza, William James, Proust, but above all, Deleuze, to investigate the questions: 'What is this 'I' who, it seems, experiences and remembers things; worries, loves, hopes, suffers, grows old; seeks wisdom; practices Buddhism, and so on? How does a Buddhist philosopher account for the continuity, consistency, and stability of a human being through time, without recourse to concepts such as substance and essence?' (Carlisle 2006: 75) I too am curious about refracting Buddhist understandings through Deleuze's (1991: x) suggestion that 'we are habits, nothing but habits', partly because my cultivation of a Buddhist art of living with Vipassana has helped me to come to terms with certain habits which had jeopardised my own wellbeing and relationships with others, and partly because Deleuzian ideas

articulated in recent thinking on the body, affect, and subjectivity offer resources to enrich an emergent Buddhist social theory (Chapter Six).

Whilst I am attempting to think how the force of habit turned back on itself by the self performs the ethical work (or the fold of truth by which a subject is constituted as being in relation to truth) in a Buddhist art of living, neither Carlisle nor I are claiming that the notion of habit can settle the question of selfhood. Rather, the purpose is merely to sketch 'a provisional determination of the self', so as to explore 'the possibility that the human being is not exhausted by the self, that there other ways of living available to each of us' (Carlisle 2006: 76). The aim is to show that the very workings of habit provide the condition of possibility for their own unbecoming. Habit accumulates through repetition. Yet it is precisely through repeated effort in refraining from certain actions, the accumulative force of the commitment to acting and thinking otherwise, that habit may be defused.

There are three dimensions of habit identified by Carlisle: action, repetition, and shape or form. Habit is at once the effect of and vehicle for action, which from a Buddhist perspective, includes all mental, physical, and vocal activity. Repeated action accumulates habit; habit persists as the accumulation of repeated action. It is not difficult to observe the reciprocity between habit and action in the rhythms of everyday life. For example, a generally harmless habitual activity like reading the newspapers or checking one's Facebook updates to start the day; or a riskier habitual activity like the consumption of mood-enhancing substances at social gatherings, from tobacco to alcohol to cannabis to ecstasy pills. These quotidian activities are testament to the force of habit. 'Good' or 'bad', habit depends upon repetition and vice

versa; habit is inseparable from repetition. A principle of continuity that is itself temporal could be drawn from the repetitive nature of habit, 'since repetition is unthinkable without time' (Carlisle 2006: 77). This rethinking of repetition-temporality is what Deleuze and Derrida address with their respective critical vocabularies (of deterritorialisation-reterritorialisation and *différance*, for instance). Their work articulates consonant ways to affirm the continual, open-ended *becomings* of existence (see, for example, Patton 2003; Gilson 2007), whereby things 'stay the same' only if they are repeatedly renewed, 'only by virtue of movement and difference' (Carlisle 2006: 77). This is not to say that nothing changes, but more precisely, that nothing is simply present to itself. Hence, habit 'is essentially dynamic, but also essentially conservative; it has, or rather *is*, a self-perpetuating force, its own momentum' (Carlisle 2006: 77).

From this perspective, Deleuze's suggestion that the 'most striking answer to the problem of the self' is that we are 'nothing but habits—that habit of saying "I"'—represents a way to explain the experience of selfhood without having to appeal to any originary essence or enduring presence: 'Habit is the constitutive root of the subject, and the subject, at root, is the synthesis of time—the synthesis of the present and the past in light of the future'—a synthesis that 'posits the past as a rule for the future' (Deleuze 1991: 92-93). Building on Deleuze's suggestions with the observation that habit presupposes both a capacity to accumulate action and a capacity to be formed by repetition, Carlisle posits four transcendental conditions of habit: retention and synthesis (corresponding to the accumulative force of habit), affectivity and plasticity (corresponding to the formative effect of habit). With these two sets of transcendental conditions for habit, she then draws Deleuze's description of the

subject's contractile power as 'contemplative' or a 'passive synthesis', together with Spinoza's understanding of the body's capacity to affect and be affected:

> We are shaped by what we suffer, and these sufferings affect us precisely in so far as we are able to receive and retain impressions, and to be modified by them. We speak of being "scarred" by traumatic experiences, but it is more important to recognise that we are scarred or formed, in however slight a way, *by our own actions* (mental, vocal, or physical) [...] we see that subjectivity is dynamic: we are continuously forming—whether re-forming or re-affirming—our selves (Carlisle 2006: 78).

The conceptualisation of habit articulated by Deleuze serves as a focalising lens for Carlisle to refract the Four Noble Truths, and particularly the potential of Buddhist meditation practice for defusing habitual tendencies. In the concluding section of her essay, Carlisle reflects on her experience at a ten-day meditation retreat (it appears to be a vipassana retreat, though not one organised by Goenka's Vipassana network). Her reflections on meditation turn on this particular argument: 'Habit requires the retention of past actions, but it does not require memory; indeed the more deeply habitual an action, the less likely we are to remember performing it' (Carlisle 2006: 78). This point is reiterated in light of William James's (1977: 12-14) claim that 'habit depends on sensations not attended to'. Given that the accumulated repeated action of habit may play a role in easing the burden on conscious attention, Carlisle (2006: 79) is led to think that '[r]epetition tends to have a numbing effect: the more we become used to something, the less we notice and question it.'

The analysis of Vipassana I am performing could be folded onto this argument that habit is inter-involved with attentive awareness (or lack thereof), accumulated through retention and synthesis, and by the same movement of temporality, formed as the affectivity and plasticity of the body's capacity. As we have seen, the crux to unravelling habitual tendencies is to first cultivate mindfulness or non-grasping attentive awareness. What becomes apparent as soon as one attempts to rest attention on the natural movement of breathing is that the mind is extremely restless, unwilling and resistant, as it were, to simply stay with the breath, to be content with the present moment. That is, a very stubborn habit of the mind to repeatedly project itself into the past or the future, either to revisit events which had occurred or anticipate what may or may not occur. Goenka appropriates the language of psychoanalysis to speak of this as the influence of the unconscious. But as I wish to develop an account of meditative experience and spirituality without seeking recourse to the frames of reference of the 'psy' paradigm (Chapter Two), it could be better rendered in terms of Deleuze's understanding of the subject's contractile power, a passive synthesis that posits the past as the rule for the future.

In observing the processes by which a sense of self is formed without any conscious intention of the will—*processes by which time is experienced as time; movement as movement*—the meditator also begins to experience hitherto unrecognised conditionings of the body-mind.

By repeatedly returning attention to the movement of breathing, the meditator harnesses the same force of repetition and accumulation against these conditionings, replacing one habit sustaining craving-aversion and clinging with another habit sustaining equanimity. The same applies when the meditator moves on to the next

stage of contemplating bodily sensation: one sustains awareness of the body by moving attention across the entire field of the body, repeatedly refusing to hold on to or push away any particular experience of pleasantness or unpleasantness, returning attention over and over again to the task at hand, if and whenever it takes flight to the past or the future. In so doing, the meditator gradually learns that the affective tone of sensations cross-modulates the habitual tendencies of the mind and emotional states. By investigating with penetrating awareness and mindfulness the extent to which one's experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood is precipitated by non-conscious and/or autonomic processes of the body-mind, the meditator allows the affectivity and plasticity of the body-mind to de-form a habit of self driven by craving-aversion, forming instead a different habit of self guided by equanimity and non-attachment.

To reconnect this analysis of habit with the Foucauldian critico-political itinerary: could it be said that the practice of refusing and defusing the habitual self holds the potential for the disruption of modes of subjectivity that pin individuals down to certain identities and ways of being, the types of normativity that work to enforce answers to the question 'Who am I?' on others? (Caputo 2003) What I'm positing, in other words, is consonance between the aim of Buddhist soteriology and a critical ontology of ourselves, between the Buddhist meditative stance and the Foucauldian understanding of critique—which is performed through the interrelated activities of 'problematisation', the art of voluntary insubordination, and the willingness to expose oneself as subject (Lemke 2011). For Foucault, critique (1982b: 33) entails 'seeing what kinds of self-evidences, liberties, acquired and non-reflective modes of thought, the practices we accept rest on.' He also says, 'Criticism consists in driving this thought

out of hiding and trying to change it: showing that things are not as obvious as we might believe, doing it in such a way that what we accept as going without saying no longer goes without saying' (1982b: 34). As we have seen in the previous chapter, Foucault regards critique as akin to virtue; and according to Butler (2001) it is not just an intellectual activity but a generalised practice, a form of counter-conduct. What is rendered difficult to go without saying by the critical activity of an art of living, to paraphrase Deleuze, would be the habit of saying 'I', the notion of an unchanging 'I'.

As a technology of the self for a Buddhist art of living, Vipassana enables practitioners to detach themselves from habitual conditionings that may otherwise pass as some unitary necessity of a transcendental subject of experience. Through a process of embodiment, habitual ways of feeling, thinking and behaving are revealed to be thoroughly insubstantial. In recognising that the psychosomatic forces constituting the experience of phenomenal reality and selfhood are impermanent (*anicca*) and not of the self (*anattā*), the subject also begins to recognise the extent to which existential dissatisfactoriness (*dukkha*) is generated by the tendency to crave for the fixity of self-presence. The practice of Vipassana thus opens up a space for the subject to become otherwise than before, functioning as a technology of the self by which the fold of knowledge, the fold of sacred teachings like the Three Marks of Existence and the Five Aggregates, constitute the subject's being in relation to the Four Noble Truths proclaimed by the Buddha's Awakening.

Limit-experience and the body as event (telos/the fold of the outside)

This fourth section of the analysis explores a way to account for the goal of Awakening in 'mundane' terms as an ongoing work of desubjectification, whilst

remaining hospitable to the 'supramundane' claims of an unmediated or unconditioned awareness of reality, and even the claim that Awakening entails liberation from the cycle of rebirth. For Foucault, the work of desubjectification ought to effect what he describes as *se déprendre de soi-même*, variously translated as 'to take distance from oneself', 'getting rid of oneself', and 'detaching the self from itself.' Of particular interest here is David Couzens Hoy's (2004: 90) suggestion that it could be rendered as 'dissolving oneself'. This coincides with Vipassana where it is said that with finely honed mindfulness and equanimity, the perceived solidity of the body would dissolve into a boundless field of vibrations: a direct intuition of *anicca* and *anattā* that would radically re-orientate one's subjectivity. The experience of the dissolution of the body-mind is known as *bhanga* or *bhanga-nana* (knowledge of dissolution). This represents an important stage of insight where the meditator would have 'penetrated beyond the integrated patterns to perceive the underlying phenomena of which they are composed, the subatomic particles of which all matter is composed' (Hart 1987: 120). To reach the stage of *bhanga* is to 'experience directly the ephemeral nature of these particles, continually arising and vanishing', such that whatever is observed, 'whether blood or bone, solid, liquid, or gaseous, whether ugly or beautiful, we perceive only as a mass of vibrations that cannot be differentiated' (Hart 1987: 121). Goenka says, 'At last the process of drawing distinctions and assigning labels ceases. We have experienced within the framework of our own bodies the ultimate truth about matter: that it is constantly in flux, arising and passing away' (Hart 1987: 121). *Bhanga*, in other words, designates an indexical experience of Awakening, a moment of unmediated awareness of phenomenal reality 'as it is' (what the Pali term '*vipassanā*' connotes generally).

It is beyond the scope of the thesis to consider whether one in fact perceives actual 'subatomic particles' during the experience of dissolution. Given the difficulty of verifying in an objective manner claims about subjective states of consciousness, Goenka's use of scientific terminology to describe the process of *bhanga* (along with his tendency to depict the Buddha as a 'scientist of the mind') ought to perhaps be read critically as reflective of the secularist hegemonic imperatives circumscribing detraditionalised and demythologised interpretations of Buddhist doctrine and practice (see Chapter Two). This, however, does not invalidate the claim of the potential for the experience of dissolution. Nor does it prevent us from experimenting with the notion of *bhanga* as a conceptual tool to investigate the bodily dimensions of desubjectification, since as we have seen in Butler's (1993: 9) reading of Foucault's implicit reworking of the Aristotelean account of the soul as a schema for the body, *conceptuality and materiality shape one another* (see Chapter Four). In other words, we could fold onto the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' an analysis of *bhanga*, so as to understand how the work of Buddhist spirituality might entail 'a process of shaping matter, of making bodies that matter' (Carrette 2000: 125). I propose that the potential experience of *bhanga* and the possibilities it ushers be examined in terms of Foucault's understanding of limit-experience—that is, to theorise the body as a space for transgression, or as Oksala (2004) suggests, *the body as event*. Insofar as *bhanga* designates an indexical experience of Awakening, by locating it within the body as event, this line of thinking would be hospitable to the broader sacred claims of Buddhism, since the Buddha likewise identifies the body and its capacity to affect and be affected—the fact of one's mortality—as the condition of possibility for liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth:

> I tell you, friend, that it is not possible by traveling to know or see or reach a far end of the cosmos where one does not take birth, age, die, pass away, or reappear. But at the same time, I tell you that there is no making an end of suffering & stress without reaching the end of the cosmos. Yet it is just *within this fathom-long body*, with its perception & intellect, that I declare that there is the cosmos, the origination of the cosmos, the cessation of the cosmos, and the path of practice leading to the cessation of the cosmos (Thānissaro 1997d).

To my reading, the Buddha's proclamation suggests that the acknowledging of the limits of the body (that it will invariably die) is at once its capacity for the transgression of those limits. This interpretation is inspired by Foucault's essay 'A Preface to Transgression', which we have touched on previously. Linking language, sexuality, and the death of God, Foucault (1999: 59) claims that we inhabit a world 'totally exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by that excess which transgresses it.' Limit and transgression are thus portrayed as interdependent, or to evoke Buddhist terminology, transgression and limit are *dependently co-arisen*: 'Transgression is an action, which involves the limit, the narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin'; transgression and limit 'depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows' (Foucault 1999: 60). Transgression and limit are held in a relationship of mutual reliance and refusal, where one remains intractable only to the extent the other remains inexhaustible, such that they recall, announce and affirm all at once, limitedness and limitlessness. Inasmuch as the movement of transgression marks a

limit with a line by crossing it, transgression 'reaffirms limited being, whilst also momentarily opening up a zone of limitlessness to existence' (Oksala 2004: 107)

That the relation between transgression and limit ought not be regarded 'as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open space of a building to its enclosed spaces', but rather like 'a spiral that no simple infraction can exhaust' (Foucault 1999: 61), attests to the fact that experience exceeds teleology. Experience may never be given or bound to any determinate content or horizon. If the crossing of a limit by transgression announces and momentarily opens existence to limitlessness whilst also reaffirming in the same movement limitedness, then perhaps we could say that transgression holds onto nothing, possesses nothing, contains nothing negative or positive: 'Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division; but only in so far as division is not understood to mean a cutting gesture, or the establishment of a separation or the measuring of a distance, retaining in it only that which may designate the existence of difference' (Foucault 1999: 61). Or perhaps, to again cross-read this with Buddhist understandings, transgression spirals forth inexhaustibly because it is always 'letting go' and 'starting again', a movement that accepts the impermanence (*anicca*) and finitude of existence (*dukkha*) to welcome the limitlessness of difference which exceeds the self (*anattā*) and any attempt at appropriation or identification.

For Oksala, Foucault's understanding of limit-transgression offers a way to think the experiential body that is charged with the potential for resistance against normalising power: 'The experiential body is a locus of resistance in the sense that it forms the *spiral* of limits and transgressions. Power inscribes the limits of normal bodily

experiences, but it is exactly the existence of these limits that makes transgression possible'; and moreover, if, like Bataille, Foucault was curious about the limits of language, the 'experiential body thus also contests the limit between the intelligibility and unintelligibility of experiences' (Oksala 2004: 108). The possibility of the experiential body as a locus of resistance, as the space for limit-experience, finds support in Foucault's discussion of the transgressive capacity of pleasure. Foucault says that he is curious about pleasure because it appears to escape the medical and naturalistic connotation inherent in the notion of desire'. For Foucault, there is 'no "pathology" of pleasure, no "abnormal" pleasure. Whilst desire 'has been used as a tool, as a grid of intelligibility [...] a basis onto which that psychologico-medical armature can attach itself', pleasure is 'almost devoid of meaning [...] It is an event "outside the subject", or at the limit of the subject, taking place in something which is neither of the body or the soul, which is neither inside nor outside—in short, a notion neither assigned nor assignable' (quoted in Halperin 1995, 93–94).

Situating these ideas in an 'axial' reading of the Foucauldian corpus, Oksala posits that the experiential body's capacity for pleasure holds the potential for limit-experiences, which may transgress the limits constituted on the *axis of power* between the normal and abnormal, and on the *axis of knowledge* between intelligibility and unintelligibility. As for how the experiential body might transgress the limit constituted on the third *axis of subjectivity* between normalising modes of subjectification and self-reflexive forms of (de)subjectification, this is what her essay invites further consideration of, by suggesting that Foucault's late work offers a way to investigate how 'experience has the function of wrenching the subject from itself, of seeing to it that the subject is no

longer itself, or that it is brought to its annihilation or its dissolution. This is a project of desubjectivation [what I have rendered as 'desubjectification']' (Oksala 2004: 112).

I have interpreted a Buddhist art of living as a project of desubjectification, and the practice of Vipassana as a technology of the self that functions to effect the dissolution of the subject. We can accordingly understand the *telos* of Awakening awaiting this open-ended task by cross-reading these arguments about the body as event—the body's capacity for pleasure as that which exposes it to limit-experiences—with the claims about *bhanga*. When *bhanga* is attained the perceived solidity of the body is said to dissolve into a boundless field of subtle vibrations, such that the limits between the inside and outside are transgressed, one dissolving into the other. Goenka says that when *bhanga* arises, it 'is certainly very pleasant. All the aches and pains have dissolved, all the areas without sensation have disappeared. One feels peaceful, happy, blissful' (Hart 1987: 122). He quotes the Buddha:

> Whenever one experiences
> the arising and passing away of the mental-physical processes,
> he [sic] enjoys bliss and delight.
> He [sic] attains the deathless, as realized by the wise.
>
> (quoted in Hart 1987: 122)

Inasmuch as *bhanga* evokes feelings of bliss and is extremely pleasant, it could arguably be interpreted along the lines charted by Oksala: that the experiential body's capacity for pleasure holds the potential for limit-experiences. During the state of *bhanga*, the spiralling movement of unbecoming crosses the lines between body and

mind, materiality and immateriality, inside and outside. The limit-experience of dissolution transgresses not only the limits (on the axis of power) between the normal and abnormal and (on the axis of knowledge) between intelligibility and unintelligibility, but also the limits (on the axis of subjectivity) between normalising modes of subjectification and self-reflexive forms of desubjectification. We could imagine that such an experience would radically expose the meditator to the utter arbitrariness of what is usually perceived as the 'normal' constancy of everyday reality, and consequently, instil a deep conviction about the possibility of reorienting one's subjectivity, of relinquishing the habitual self and of becoming otherwise and radically different than before—since there never was self-sameness, constancy, solidity in the first place.

Whilst I am interpreting *bhanga* (or even less intense moments of meditative absorption) as a limit-experience enabled by the body's capacity for pleasure, it is important to stress yet again that Vipassana (or Buddhist spirituality generally) *does not* seek pleasure as such. To harbour the expectation that meditation practice must lead to pleasurable or blissful states of consciousness, is to circumscribe the movement of unbecoming within a determinate horizon rather than allow it to shatter one's horizon of expectation. Hence, the need to always 'let go' and Goenka's repeated advice to always 'start again'. To reach the state of *bhanga*, Goenka says 'the meditator need do nothing but develop awareness and equanimity' (Hart 1987: 121). And while '[b]liss is bound to arise [...] when the apparent solidity of mind and body has been dissolved', one should never mistake this intense pleasurable experience as 'the final goal' (Hart 1987: 122). Rather, any such experience has to be regarded as no more than 'a way-station. From this point we proceed further to experience the

ultimate truth *beyond* mind and matter, to attain total freedom from suffering' (Hart 1987: 122). Goenka further explains:

> Penetrating from apparent to subtle reality, we begin to enjoy the flow of vibrations throughout the body. Then suddenly the flow is gone. Again we experience intense, unpleasant sensations in some parts, and perhaps no sensation in other parts. Again we experience intense emotion in the mind. If we start feeling aversion toward this new situation and craving for the flow to return, we have not understood Vipassana. We have turned it into a game in which the goal is to achieve pleasant experiences and to avoid or overcome unpleasant ones. This is the game that we have played throughout our life—the unending round of push and pull, of attraction and repulsion, which leads to nothing but misery (Hart 1987: 122).

Whatever it may be, *bhanga* must be accepted in its *absolute singularity* as an incalculable *event* whose arrival cannot be anticipated, even as it is posited in advance as an important stage along the path towards Awakening; if it can be anticipated, it wouldn't arrive. However pleasurable or blissful it may be, if the experience of the dissolution of the body-mind is not recognised and accepted as a moment-in-passing with no unitary necessity for its arrival than any other moment that had come to pass, there would only be a circular looping, the recursion of the self-incarcerating habits of the body-mind, and *not* the crossing of its limit. Hence, one can only ever 'start again', since the transgressive and transformative potential of *the body as event* is actualised only to the extent that it allows itself to be surprised anew from one moment to the next: absolute hospitality towards incalculable alterity. We return

once again to *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*, embodied here not just as an ethos of intellectual hospitality (although this is certainly indispensable if one hopes to welcome limit-experiences beyond the comfortable, habitual reach of the intellect), but also an *ontological stance* to welcome the most radical change *un*imaginable. Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally: the *telos* of a Buddhist art of living as an ongoing task of freedom. Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally: the cessation of *dukkha* and liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally: the fold of the outside itself. One only ever *awaits* Awakening.

Conclusion

> It is true that we have to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge of what may constitute our historical limits. And from this point of view the theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits and of the possibility of moving beyond them is always limited and determined; thus we are always in the position of *beginning again* (Foucault 1984a: 47; emphasis added).

The foregoing analysis has examined the Buddhist sacred claim of Awakening with the Foucauldian understanding of 'transgression', but I must clarify that the term as such, as far as I am aware, is not used in Buddhist discourses to explain the transformative potential of meditation practice. As Mabbett (2006; see Chapter Two) has suggested about the comparison of Buddhism and deconstruction (or any sets of knowledge-practices from vastly different historical and cultural contexts), I have

performed this cross-reading of Buddhist understandings with the Foucauldian critico-political itinerary as a *jeu d'esprit*. The notion of transgression—understood not simply in the conventional sense as the violation of law or taboo but the *crossing* of the limits of normativity, intelligibility, and consciousness—offers a way to locate the Buddhist spiritual pursuit of the question 'What is Awakening?' within the critical ontology of ourselves that responds to the question 'What is Enlightenment?', as Foucault (1984a) puts it in his essay of the same title. The essay ponders how we might relate to the legacy of the Enlightenment, to envisage modernity not as an epoch but as an attitude towards the present: 'by "attitude", I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of *thinking and feeling*; a way, too, of *acting and behaving* that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task.' This is a 'limit-attitude' that seeks 'to move beyond the outside-inside alternative [...] a practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression', a form of critique that will separate out 'from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think.' The critical ontology of ourselves entails 'a historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings' (Foucault 1984a: 47).

This chapter's analysis of Vipassana has demonstrated the consonant ways in which the Buddhist and Foucauldian arts of living affirm the utter contingency of the present and experiment with the possibility of transforming our relation to the present, both harnessing the ongoing movement of change in order to become otherwise than before: the process of becoming as the force for unbecoming. I want to conclude with some remarks about the translation of 'transgression' in 'What is

Enlightenment?' from the French '*franchissement*', which reads literally as 'crossing'. The use of 'crossing' to illustrate the limit-attitude and historico-practical critique necessary for the work of freedom is consistent with Foucault's earlier essay 'A Preface to Transgression', where he says that 'a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit composed of illusions and shadows' (Foucault 1999: 60). This notion of transgression as the *crossing* of limits is consonant with the parable of the raft used by the Buddha to illustrate the appropriate way to honour his teachings. The parable narrates the predicament of a man who encounters 'a vast expanse of water of which this shore is perilous and fearful, while the other shore is safe and free from danger.' Finding neither bridge nor ferry for crossing, the man crafts a raft from the reeds, sticks, branches, and foliage, and using the raft 'crosses over to the other shore.' Having arrived at the other shore, he wonders if he ought to bring the raft with him wherever he goes. The Buddha asks his followers if in acting thus, the man would do 'what should be done with the raft?', to which they reply in the negative. The Buddha then explains that the sensible thing to do is to leave the raft at the shore and continue on one's journey: 'In the same way, monks, have I shown to you the Teaching's similitude to a raft: as having the purpose of crossing over, not the purpose of being clung to' (Nyanaponika 2006).

Whilst this parable (like any parable) is open to multiple interpretations, it would seem that the principal message is not to be drawn from the object of the raft but from the work of *crossing*. Whatever sacred teachings (like the Four Noble Truths, or meditation practice, or the goal of Awakening) may be, they are only meaningful and helpful to the extent that they are *put to use* for crossing the limits of the habitual

orders that one enjoys or suffers under, *experimented* with as the means for crossing the limits that circumscribe one's experience of the immediate present. Foucault's play on the connotations of 'experiment' or 'test' in the French word *expérience* is instructive here (see Chapter Four). Paraphrasing Foucault, we could even say that until one cultivates the *expérience* of putting the raft to the test for the work of crossing, whatever limit there may be would not be recognised or transgressed as limit. The transgression or crossing of limit—the movement from one shore to the other, the movement from limitedness to limitlessness, the movement of freedom, the movement of Awakening—is thus necessarily an ongoing process, a ceaseless task. And in order for the movement to be a movement, the raft must not be clung to. I read in the parable an advice about the need to always 'let go'. This is cultivated in Vipassana by learning to relate to the flux of sensation and accompanying processes of the body-mind with mindful equanimity rather than the habitual tendencies of craving-aversion, clinging, or self-identification. The art of living, Buddhist or Foucauldian, requires one to relinquish its goal, even as one aspires to the unconditional promise of Awakening, or to fresh ways of thinking and feeling, acting and behaving for a radically different future to come. Foucault says we are always in the position of 'beginning again'; Goenka says, 'Start again'. If the goal of freedom, Awakening, is only ever to be awaited, it is not with passive indifference but rather, as Foucault (1984a: 50) puts it, 'a patient labor of giving form to our impatience for liberty' that always retakes the decision to welcome what it unconditionally awaits.

Rather than pit a Buddhist art of living against a Foucauldian one to evaluate the 'efficacy' of one over the other—as has been attempted with Buddhism and deconstruction (Loy 1987, 1992, 1993)—this chapter has performed a hospitable cross-

reading of the two. The aim is not to effect some unitary fusion but the mutual disclosure and enhancement of their consonant aims, methods, and objectives. This exercise of intellectual hospitality has elaborated a detailed response to the question of meditative experience (and particularly, Žižek's criticism of Buddhism) by demonstrating that the meditative stance of Buddhist spirituality does not entail a retreat to an Inner Self. It thus paves a way for new dialogical exchange by elucidating how the Foucauldian itinerary joins Buddhism and deconstruction in cultivating an ontological orientation of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. Folding my sacred and scholarly experience over each other, this chapter has performed a double articulation of the self that at once develops a Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and a spiritually-engaged cultural studies—a working of the hyphen (see Chapter Two). The next chapter will continue to work the hyphen by mapping some specific lines of inquiry between an emergent Buddhist social theory, and current scholarship on the affective, visceral registers of a micropolitics of (un)becoming.

CHAPTER SIX

Buddhist Social Theory and a n Affective Micropolitics of (Un)Becoming

This chapter demonstrates the contribution of my analysis of Vipassana to the aims of engaged Buddhism by staging a conversation between an emergent Buddhist social theory and current thinking on the micropolitics of affect and becoming. The purpose of this chapter is to weave the thesis's multiple threads of inquiry—the challenges confronting 'Western Buddhism' and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection; the politics of spirituality and subjectivity; Foucault's 'religious question' and the contemporary re-activation of the care of self—into a prolegomenon of sorts to the next phase of research in my pursuit of a sacred-scholarly profession. The arguments raised in this chapter are thus necessarily suggestive rather than comprehensive, hypothetical rather than determinative. It begins with an overview of the key problematics of Buddhist social theory, followed by a consideration of how they invite the modes of analysis developed in this thesis. Insofar as engaged Buddhism is predicated on the understanding that the modulation of embodied, ethical sensibilities on a personal register could generate reverberations on a collective register to induce social change, this chapter elucidates how Buddhist social theory could facilitate the aims of engaged Buddhism and better articulate the role of Buddhist spirituality in the contemporary world. I will refract Foucauldian perspectives through the critical lenses developed by research across the humanities, philosophy, and the sciences on the affective and visceral registers of experience. Then, taking William Connolly's *A World of Becoming* (2011) as an indexical discourse of this so-called 'affective turn' in contemporary radical thought, I will chart some

trajectories of inquiry for the reciprocal development of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and a spiritually-engaged cultural studies. The chapter formulates four broad hypotheses—about the influence of mindfulness training on the affective dynamics of perception—that may be developed through dialogical exchanges between Buddhist social theory and multidisciplinary research on a micropolitics of (un)becoming.

An emergent Buddhist social theory

Buddhist social theory represents one mode of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection that cross-fertilises Buddhist understandings with critical theory to support the objectives of engaged Buddhism. It proceeds from the understanding that the diverse forms of Buddhism, and especially those taking root in the West, must engage with the sociopolitical challenges of the day if they are to sustain their vitality. Ken Jones (2003: 35), one of the first to propose the idea of Buddhist social theory, begins with the premise that what is 'strikingly absent in received Buddhism is any social explanation that enlarges the [Buddhist sacred] insight into the predicament of the individual person.' Buddhist scholars, he contends, need to pursue a task of 'selecting and employing contemporary social theory that is complementary to Buddhist teachings' (Jones 2003: 35), and which would enhance the engaged Buddhist's capacity to understand and harness the relations of forces between the self, other and world for spiritual-social transformation. For Jones, a Buddhist approach would avoid the 'social fallacy' of prevailing social theory, which, he claims, has yet to adequately question its own post-Enlightenment secularist conceits: 'It is a commonplace mentality that has grown up over the past five hundred years with our increasing mastery over the objective world and the decline in religious belief. It is the belief

that most afflictions can sooner or later be fixed "out there"' (Jones 2003: 40). This habit of 'sociologism', as Robert Hattam contends in *Awakening-Struggle: Towards a Buddhist Critical Theory* (2004), has arguably influenced critical theory in such a way that it thinks only half of the self-society dialectic. Hattam questions the tendency to narrowly frame decisions about what it means to be an ethico-political actor in terms of the development of socially transformative projects: 'At the crucial moment, critical theory abandons the self and only looks at what we could change outside of ourselves' (2004: 244). Hattam thus envisions Buddhist social theory as a critical compass for an 'awakening-struggle', where 'awakening' entails the transformation of personal habits vis-à-vis social forces of oppression, whilst 'struggle' involves the refusal and defusal of prevailing regimes of power and mechanisms of normativity. What awakening-struggle necessitates is a redefinition of:

> [...] the subject of politics and the very notion of politics itself. Awakening-struggle demands that politics be considered not as always "out there, outside of self, exterior", but that politics be simultaneously about both inner and outer transformation, both about self and society, both mind and social structure (Hattam 2004: 275).

This praxis-ideal of 'awakening-struggle' echoes David Loy's proposals in *The Great Awakening: A Buddhist Social Theory* (2003). Drawing on Buddhist accounts of the manifest habits of *dukkha* described as the Three Poisons of *greed*, *ill-will*, and *delusion*, Loy reformulates these soteriological ideas in political terms as *social dukkha* and *institutionalised greed*, *institutionalised ill-will*, and *institutionalised delusion*, so as to explore how 'the process of individual transformation [could] be generalized for

collective transformation' (2003: 35). The notion of social *dukkha* allows Buddhist social theory to investigate the ways in which the sacred, transformative postulations of Buddhism could be actualised across both the individual and collective registers. So if existential dissatisfactoriness (the first Noble Truth) is a manifestation of a stubborn refusal to accept (because of sensory-perceptual ignorance of) the utter contingency of phenomenal reality-selfhood, then social *dukkha* understands this to be conditioned as much by social forces as they are by personal habits. To deal with social *dukkha*, habitual tendencies rooted in craving for fixity and enduring self-presence (the second Noble Truth) and its correlates of aversion towards contingency and ignorant attachment to metaphysical comfort, have to be identified and redressed in the constitutive sociopolitical environment too. In other words, Buddhist social theory recognises that the habitual manifestations of the Three Poisons are as much a matter of institutionalised, normative knowledge-practices as they are private, personal ones. In their writings, Jones and Loy locate institutionalised greed in the neoliberal culture of corporatism, institutionalised ill-will in military-industrial complexes that profit from the perpetuation of armed conflicts, and institutionalised delusion in the practices of transnational media conglomerates that 'spin' the manufacturing of consent (Loy 2003; 2008; Jones 2003: 29-67).

Loy envisions the social implications of the cessation of *dukkha* (the Third Noble Truth) as the flourishing of a culture of awakening, in which individuals and constituencies would not regard themselves as separate or alienated from one another, but recognise that the cultivation of personal wellbeing is inter-involved with collective participation in social engagement. The aim, he says, 'is not some new situation to be created in the future, but something to be uncovered about the nature

of the present moment when we experience our lives in the world without the three poisons' (Loy 2003: 33-34). What is at stake, therefore, is an immanent task of un-becoming—becoming-as-unbecoming—a work of immanence and belonging in/to the utterly contingent spatiotemporality of the 'messianic now'. A Buddhist social theory supports the ongoing pursuit of freedom that endeavours to actualise the potential for becoming otherwise, the potential for a different sociopolitical reality, here-and-now. Spiritual praxis (the necessary path of cultivation proclaimed in the Fourth Noble Truth) is conceived as inseparable from social praxis: a *spiritual-social* praxis. Like the engaged Buddhist movement of Thich Nhat Hanh surveyed in Chapter One, Loy too evokes the basic Five Precepts as guidelines of conduct (2003: 37-39). Loy's, Jones's, and Hattam's proposals for Buddhist social theory could be extended upon in several ways. In particular, I want to underscore and develop Hattam's suggestion that Buddhist social theory be mindful of Foucault's observation that large-scale liberation movements are:

> [...] not sufficient to establish the practices of liberty that later on will be necessary for this people, this society and those individuals to decide upon receivable and acceptable forms of existence or political society. That is why I insist on the practices of freedom rather than the processes which indeed have their place, but which by themselves, do not seem to me to be able to decide all the practical forms of liberty (Foucault 1988f: 2-3).

To shift the emphasis from 'liberation' to 'practices of freedom' means that freedom ought not be conceived as an 'endpoint', but a 'mode of living' to be cultivated with 'ongoing practice' (Hattam 2004: 53). As shown in Chapter Three, to refuse and defuse

prevailing regimes of power, it is necessary to cultivate fresh ways of becoming, or as Foucault (1984b: 343) puts it, 'the elaboration of a new ethics'. Buddhist social theory is predicated on the understanding that Buddhist ethical guidelines for spiritual self-cultivation must anchor engaged Buddhism's pursuit of sociopolitical change. We see in the following that Loy effectively echoes Foucault's views, recalling in particular Foucault's point in the preface to *Anti-Oedipus* about the 'major enemy' and 'strategic adversary' of the fascism in everyday behaviour that causes us to crave the power that dominates us (Foucault 1983: xiii):

> For those who see the necessity of radical change, the first implication of Buddhist social praxis is the obvious need to work on ourselves as well as the social system. If we have not begun to transform our own greed, ill will, and delusion, our efforts to address their institutionalised forms are likely to be useless, or worse. We may have some success in challenging the sociopolitical order, but that will not lead to an awakened society. Recent history provides us with many examples of revolutionary leaders, often well intentioned, who eventually reproduced the evils they fought against. In the end, one gang of thugs has been replaced by another (Loy 2003: 35).

To demonstrate the contribution of my analysis of a Buddhist art of living to the development of Buddhist social theory, I want to question the ways in which Loy's discourse still tends towards macropolitical accounts of power, despite his positioning of ethics as the bedrock of Buddhist spiritual-social praxis. Adrian Konik (2009: 131) has observed that prevailing forms of engaged Buddhism are 'oriented largely around, on the one hand, the establishment of the connection between local crises and global

politico-economic dynamics, and, on the other hand, the exertion of remedial effort at the level of such local social crises, in the interest of effecting incremental change at the level of such global politico-economic dynamics.' This is reflected in the examples of engaged Buddhism outlined in Chapter One. Despite their attempts to draw 'spirituality' together with 'the political' to foreground the importance of ethical self-cultivation, such as they are, engaged Buddhist movements like the Tzu Chi Foundation, Triratna Buddhist Community, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and Thich Nhat Hanh's Order of Interbeing still articulate their spiritual-social praxis with macropolitical economic accounts of power (globalisation, consumerism, transnational corporatism, development, etc.). In other words, the project of engaged Buddhism could be better furnished with a micropolitical account of the affective dynamics of ethical self-cultivation, and more specifically, the affective dynamics of meditative experience and its impact on spiritual-social praxis.

A similar criticism could be made about Loy's proposals for Buddhist social theory. I argue that he doesn't quite follow through with the suggestion about Buddhism's unique contribution to sociocultural analysis: namely, to elucidate from the standpoint of ethical self-cultivation how spiritual praxis may generate resonances that modulate the dynamics of power suffusing broader social formations. Consider for instance his criticism of corporations as a manifestation of institutionalised greed. Loy argues that corporations (which derive from the legal process of becoming 'incorporated'; from the Latin *corpus*, *corporis*, 'body') are not, strictly speaking, things but processes. Despite not having physical bodies, 'corporations are dissipative systems', in that they need to absorb and expand energy to exist: 'In order to continue "living" indefinitely, [a corporation's] income must not be less than its expenditures

[...] and as with organic beings, this process is subject to the law of entropy' (Loy 2003: 97-98). He thus draws a parallel between corporations and human beings, in that our biological bodies are likewise dissipative systems that need to absorb and expand energy to perform activities. Evoking the doctrine of *anattā* (not-self), he asserts that corporations like humans are 'constructions' that are not separate from the constitutive forces of the world. Inasmuch as corporations and people are both 'dissipative yet integrated constructs', the question arises as to whether they are 'subject to the same type of problems. According to the second noble truth of the Buddha, the primary cause of human dissatisfaction is *tanha*, or craving; sometimes ignorance is emphasized as well. Is this also the problem with corporations?' (Loy 2003: 98)

Despite the parallels, Loy (2003: 98) argues that a crucial difference between human beings and corporations is that the latter are essentially 'ungrounded to the earth and its creatures, to the pleasures and responsibilities that derive from being manifestations of the earth's biosphere'. He also contends that what is most concerning about corporations and the associated hegemonic imperatives of globalisation is that they are driven by and sustain an economic system erected on the basis of greed. Where Buddhism is committed to mastering, and ultimately, relinquishing greed, corporations 'rationalise' and 'naturalise' the 'constant desire for more than we already have' (Loy 2003: 99). He says: 'The problem with greed magnifies when it is institutionalized in an impersonal corporation that functions quite independently of the values of the people employed by it [...] The result is that a modern corporation tends to function as a socially constructed vehicle of

institutionalized greed' (Loy 2003: 99). Who or what, then, is responsible for the rampant expansion of global corporatism, institutionalised greed?

> The system has attained a life of its own. We all participate in this process, as workers, employers, consumers, and investors, yet with little or no personal sense of moral responsibility for what happens, because such responsibility has been diffused so completely that it is lost in the impersonality of the corporate economic system (Loy 2003: 100).

For Loy, the existence of socially or environmentally responsible corporations in itself does not refute the intolerableness of the institution of the corporation. If the very institution itself is problematic, then, the problems generated by transnational corporatism cannot be solved merely by addressing the conduct of any particular corporation. He asks instead whether the entire institution could be reformed in 'some fundamental way—perhaps by rewriting corporate charters, their social umbilical cords—or whether they should be replaced by other economic and political institutions, ones that are more responsible to the communities they function in and are motivated by service to the earth and the beings who dwell on it' (Loy 2003: 101). New corporate charters, Loy suggests, could include clauses of social and environmental responsibility and be subject to regular reviews by a board composed of public citizens and state officials. Or an alternative is 'to promote the public good with smaller, more localized economic institutions that are more easily regulated' (Loy 2003: 101).

The claim that the institution of the corporation is *innately* problematic remains debatable, but a consideration of this question would take us too far afield. For the purpose of this thesis, I simply want to highlight the inconsistency in Loy's criticism. In all his writings, Loy disavows dualistic thinking, taking the view that Buddhist spirituality affords practitioners a way to embrace the utter contingency and groundlessness of our existential condition. Yet, doesn't the argument that corporations are essentially 'ungrounded' to the earth and its creatures rely on precisely an appeal to grounded-ness and even a natural/artificial dualism? In a discussion elsewhere, Loy rejects the 'absolute claim' by a Chinese Buddhist organisation that genetically modified food does not accord with Buddhist teaching; because Buddhism, he asserts, 'does not valorize nature or "being natural" in the way that the West has often done' (2008: 118). Rather, Buddhism has a non-normative understanding of 'nature' and does not posit an absolute standard that must be observed: 'Our distinctively Western ambivalence between infatuation with technological progress, and romanticist nostalgia for a return-to-nature, is un-Buddhist, because Buddhism does not assume such a duality between them' (Loy 2008: 118-119). Yet, isn't such an un-Buddhist valorisation of the 'natural' over the 'artificial' precisely what Loy implies when he argues that corporations, by virtue of their inorganic constructedness, are unable to participate in the pleasures and responsibilities that derive from being manifestations of the earth's biosphere?

The inconsistency of Loy's criticism notwithstanding, the challenges he identifies as stemming from the neoliberal economic system and transnational corporatism are very real. In this regard, *Great Awakening* presents a compelling case as to why engaged Buddhist spiritual-social praxis cannot ignore these challenges. Loy's

mapping of the underlying logic (i.e. dependent co-arising) of the Buddhist doctrine of *anattā* or not-self onto the social forces sustaining corporate activity, paves a way for further research on the interrelation between personal conditionings and their collective manifestations. The point he makes about how a corporation evolves a life of its own by virtue of our participation is especially pertinent. However, Loy doesn't follow through with this line of questioning. Instead of anchoring his analysis in the micropolitical domain to investigate how spiritual experimentations with modes of perception and ways of feeling conditioned by broader sociopolitical patterns may feed back onto and modulate these patterns themselves, he offers a macropolitical account of alternative corporate charters and small-scale economic formations. Perhaps this is what prompted Konik's (2009: 125) claim that Loy espouses a form of anarcho-syndicalism, a claim that also finds support in the latter's reliance on the propaganda model of media analysis articulated by Noam Chomsky, a self-described anarcho-syndicalist. I remain undecided as to whether I agree with Konik on this point, but I share the view that Loy's writings on Buddhist social theory are largely confined to the generality of macropolitical economic accounts of power.

Therefore, I question the extent to which approaches that overdetermine macropolitical economic forces of exploitation and domination are sensitive to the dual modalities of 'subjectivity', i.e. involving both subjectification and subjectivation (Foucault 1982a: 781). My point in questioning these approaches of engaged Buddhism and Buddhist social theory is not to suggest that they are unhelpful or 'wrong'. To push for collective activism or social reform against political economic domination—this does not in itself imply that engaged Buddhist movements like The Order of Interbeing or Buddhist theorists like Loy forget the importance of spiritual self-

cultivation. But this is precisely why I raise a critique: the macropolitical objectives of their engaged Buddhist commitment need to be complemented with more detailed, micropolitical accounts of the desubjectifying, ethico-political force of Buddhist spirituality, and in particular the transformative potential of meditation practice. My contention is that Foucault's work, augmented by current thinking on the affective and visceral registers of experience, could help Buddhist social theory articulate a stronger account of the ethical, desubjectifying movements of power to support the aims of engaged Buddhism. To chart the pathways of research signposted but unexplored by Loy, I want to develop a Foucauldian-inflected micropolitical account of the interrelationship between personal and social or institutionalised conditionings. Discourses on affective politics offer navigational tools to steer the analyses of the preceding chapters into this orbit. If a central task of 'awakening-struggle' is to redefine the subject of politics and the very notion of politics itself, I argue that a fruitful dialogue awaits between Buddhist accounts of selfhood and current thinking on the affective forces of a world of becoming, which turns on the recognition 'that political attitudes and statements are partly conditioned by intense autonomic bodily reactions that do not simply reproduce the trace of a political "intention" and cannot be wholly recuperated within an ideological regime of truth' (Spinks 2001: 23). To develop this hypothesis, we will need to first consider how Foucauldian understandings of biopower bridge the aims of engaged Buddhism and the politics of affect.

Affect and biopower

Affect can be broadly understood as the 'aleatory dynamics of lived experience', or what Nigel Thrift characterises as the 'push' of life (Anderson 2011: 28; Thrift 2004:

64). Also described as the 'in-betweenness' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010) of the movements of everyday experience, the notion of affect is not easy to pin down in any determinate way—nor should it be if openness and fluidity are what give the concept its critical edge. There are several ways of conceiving affect, but for our purposes I shall work with Spinozan-Deleuzian thinking, which conceives of affect as broad tendencies and lines of force (Bruno 2002; see Thrift 2004: 60), and as a pre-reflective, non-conscious capacity of the body-mind. From this perspective, affect could be described as the intensity of an autonomous (Massumi 2002: 23-45) and emergent force reverberating through 'biocultural' formations (Connolly 2011: 82). Such an understanding relates to Foucault's critico-political itinerary, even though the concept of 'affect' itself does not figure prominently in the Foucauldian corpus—hence, Thrift's (2007: 54) comment that Foucault harboured a 'seeming aversion to discussing affect explicitly'. It is true that Foucault did not engage with the concept of affect in any sustained manner. But as Ben Anderson shows in 'Affect and Biopower: Towards A Politics of Life' (2011), Foucault's use of 'biopower' to analyse the 'object-targets' of liberal governmentalities, does in fact go some way towards elucidating the extent to which individual and collective affective capacities are targeted in a form of power that has 'taken control of life in general—with the body as one pole and the population as the other' (Foucault 2004: 253).

The two poles of biopower, designated by 'discipline' and 'biopolitics' respectively, describe 'a strategic coordination of the multiplicity of forces that make up "life" or "living beings"' (Anderson 2011: 30; Foucault 2008b: 15-16; 1991a: 250-303). The first pole engages in 'anatomopolitics' to shape *actions*, working on what a body can, will, or may do (Foucault 1990a: 139). The 'object-target' of an anatomopolitics of discipline

is 'the natural body, the bearer of forces and the seat of duration' (Foucault 1979: 166). Techniques of discipline 'individualise affect, acting on the individual as an affective being who can "control" unruly passions through physical action'; bodily reactions are subject to a 'continuous entraining of sequences of actions' such that they become 'automated' (Anderson 2011: 31). This is illustrated by the descriptions in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1979) of how prison routine and military training shape 'docile bodies'. Or to evoke the example of Fordist factory labour (see Woodward and Lea 2010), techniques of discipline simultaneously 'increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (on political terms of obedience)' (Foucault 1979: 138). Recalling the Spinozan understanding of the body in terms of its capacity to affect and be affected, we could say that the 'object-target' of disciplinary technologies is *bodily capacities*.

The second pole of biopower, biopolitics, operates on a different register as it is directed at 'man-as-living-being [sic]' (Foucault 2004: 242). Biopolitics is concerned with 'population', which is not understood merely as the grouping of individuals under the jurisdiction of the state, since the notion of biopower was coined to examine a different set of relations than those constituted by sovereign power. Rather, 'population' is conceived as a set of aleatory processes and events that form a 'many-headed' collective whole (Foucault 2007a). The 'regulatory mechanisms' of biopolitics are deployed for the purpose of 'regulating the overall conditions of life and naming threats to the balance or equilibrium of that life' (Anderson 2011: 32). What figure as the 'object-targets' of biopolitical imperatives are *collective affective lives*, which are subject to examination, classification, aggregation, and segmented into differentiated affective publics. Examples of biopolitical mechanisms include the

implementation of a 'happiness index' to measure 'national wellbeing' alongside traditional GDP metrics, and techniques such as opinion polls and political campaigns that aim to anticipate, sway, or amplify public moods. In sum, apparatuses of discipline and biopolitics 'aim for a homeostasis by acting over multiplicities via the force of norms', which are enacted through 'efficient and continuous calculations of alterity' (Nealon 2008: 51; Anderson 2011: 32). Therefore, even if Foucault did not engage with the concept of affect as such, his research on biopower remains pertinent to scholarship on the affective registers of everyday experience, in that it provides a contextual account of the shifting dynamics of power in contemporary sociopolitical life. The central concerns of this thesis, *the politics of spirituality and subjectivity*, are inter-involved with three mutually enabling shifts towards a *politics of affect*.

First, the shift in contemporary sociopolitical activity towards 'agencies of choice' and 'mixed-action repertoires' (Thrift 2004: 64-65). This is reflective of the subsumption of more and more domains of life by the injunction to be enterprising in the exercise of 'free choice'; the adaptation of 'spirituality' across personal and professional contexts represents one aspect of this trend. A second development is the mediatisation of politics and life in general. This is manifested most clearly in the ubiquity of the screen; in a media saturated environment, it has become difficult to avoid its seductive glow and unwavering gaze. The mediatisation of everyday life has led to the prioritisation of the performative principle (in late capitalist, postindustrial societies, at any rate), such that the performance of emotion becomes an index of credibility and a means of political legitimation (Thrift 2004: 66). These modes of presentation, enshrined by 'free choice' and predicated on the performative principle, reinforce and are reinforced by the 'therapeutic culture of the self', which I have examined in

relation to Nikolas Rose's (1989, 1996) work. The discussion of neoliberal governmentality in Chapter One connects with Thrift's observation that these developments of affective politics indicate a 'new "disaggregated" mode of discipline, an emergent stratum of power and knowledge' that contours 'a new minute landscape of manipulation', and which provides 'a new means of creating 'fractal' subjects challenged to perform across a series of different situations in a way which demands not so much openness as controlled flexibility.' (Thrift 2004: 66). The third development interfacing with the trends of mediatisation and performance knowledges is new ways of acting upon *sensory registers* that were not previously deemed 'political'. With advancements in techniques of imaging, measurement and associated 'micro' bodily practices, 'small spaces and times, upon which affect thrives and out of which it is often constituted, have become visible and are able to be enlarged so that they can be knowingly operated upon' (Thrift 2004: 66). A new *structure of attention* emerges to render visible and perceptible what was formerly invisible or imperceptible, such that the micro-registers of life—'anticipation, improvisation and intuition, all those things which by drawing on the second-to-second resourcefulness of the body, make for *artful conduct*' (Thrift 2004: 67)—these become the subject of new knowledge-practices (see also Crary 1999).

By situating the Spinozan-Deleuzian understanding of the body in terms of capacities within a Foucauldian analytic of biopower, it becomes clear how '[a]ffect is the driving force in the collectivization and singularization of bodies' (Woodward and Lea 2010: 156). The sociopolitical challenges of today confront us with unprecedented modes of control that function via increasingly subtle and insidious ways to modulate affect and tweak spatiotemporality, challenges which are constituted by new forms of

struggles (or better, awakening-struggles) over modes of perception, ways of feelings, and habits of embodiment. But this is not to paint a bleak picture. For the contingent play of the affective forces suffusing everyday experience always exceed themselves: 'If there were no escape, no excess or remainder, no fade-out to infinity, the universe would be without potential, pure entropy, death' (Massumi 2002: 35). Therefore, control is never complete. The very same forces that serve as the 'object-target' of biopower hold the potential for the resistance of mechanisms of manipulation and relations of domination. Affect, or its concept, presents itself also as the 'object-target' of the critico-political task of thinking and actualising new modes of bodily composibility and relationality. This calls for new cartographies of bodies, capacities, and fields of possibilities: the mapping of lines of flight and capture that may dis/enable relational connections and blockages. Such a task can be performed via the coterminous development of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and spiritually-engaged cultural studies, and by bringing Buddhist social theory into dialogue with current thinking on affect and the micropolitics of becoming.

One benefit to be garnered from this dialogical exchange is a way to work around the binary conceptualisation of human/non-human or natural/artificial that still colours existing discourses on Buddhist social theory, like Loy's critique of the institutionalised greed of corporate 'bodies', for example. By investigating the ways in which the multiplicities of the material world are 'processually enacted through coagulations of the human, inhuman, more than human, and non-human', affective accounts of social production, becoming and the taking-place of life 're-interrogate the very "subject" of the social' and 'problematize the human as a self-explanatory unit of analysis.' Inasmuch as studies on affect take the view that the material world is

'animated by continuous *doings*' (Woodward and Lea 158; emphasis added), 'the personal' and 'the social' are accordingly folded one over the other as a complex of cross-modulating forces: 'nervous system, hormones, hands, love letters, screens, crowds, money' (Anderson and Harrison 2006: 334). Woodward and Lea write:

> The affective register arranges the social as a symphony of interacting bodies, inspiring pragmatic, grounded inquiries into how materialities are created through practice, how matter enrols bodies, and, more generally, what differences the realm of affect-imbued materiality makes in how we live. As such, it makes considerable ethical and political claims upon us, reminding us that we are always participants–sometimes unwillingly, sometimes unknowingly—in the continuous unmaking and remaking of the world (Woodward and Lea 2010: 158).

What, then, are some specific lines of inquiry for a dialogical exchange between affect theory and Buddhist social theory, which likewise makes considerable ethical and political claims upon us, enjoining contemporary Buddhists in particular to recognise that they are always participating in the continuous unmaking and remaking of the world, and moreover to transform the extent to which they may be doing so unknowingly or unwillingly? Consider the following claims by Brian Massumi about the autonomy of affect. I shall quote him at length, as there are several points here that underlie the discussion to follow:

> Affects are virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of

affect is [...] its openness. Affect is autonomous to the degree to which it escapes confinement in the particular body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. *Formed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. Emotion is the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture—and of the fact that something has always and again escaped. Something remains unactualised, inseparable from but unassimilable to any particular, functionally anchored perspective* [...] *Actually existing, structured things live in and through that which escapes them. Their autonomy is the autonomy of affect.*

The escape of affect cannot but be perceived, alongside the perceptions that are its capture. This side-perception may be punctual, localised in an event [...] When it is punctual, it is usually described in negative terms, as a form of shock (the sudden interruption of functions of connection). *But it is also continuous, like a background perception that accompanies every event, however quotidian.* When the continuity of affective escape is put into words, it tends to take on positive connotations. *For it is nothing less than the perception of one's own vitality, one's sense of aliv-ness, of changeability (often described as 'freedom'). One's 'sense of aliveness' is a continuous nonconscious self-perception (unconscious self-reflection or self-referentiality). It is the perception of this self-perception, its naming and making conscious, that allows affect to be effectively analyzed* – as long as a vocabulary can be found for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived, as long as one is alive (Massumi 2002: 35-36; emphasis added).

The thoroughly contingent interrelationships between affect, perception, cognition, emotion, and embodiment—the autonomous movement of affect as that which suffuses a sense of aliveness, sustaining yet exceeding life and any attempt at calculation—these point to a fecund ground for Buddhist critical-constructive reflection engaging in sociocultural critique to cross-fertilise Buddhist theories of the body-mind-self with affect theories. Engaged Buddhism participates in what Thrift describes as 'attempts to form new political intensities' that are generating 'expressive potential and hope' around the fields of contestation outlined above. These attempts at fostering ethical sensibilities are 'receptive practices', forms of embodiment that cultivate 'skilful comportment which allows us to be open to receiving new affectively charged disclosive spaces' (Thrift 2004: 70). Referring to the work of theoretical biologist and Tibetan Buddhist practitioner, the late Francisco Varela (see Varela 2013), Thrift argues that it is possible to 'learn to be open through a combination of institutional transformation and body trainings which use the half-second delay to act into a situation with good judgement' (Thrift 2004: 70).

The half-second delay, meditative awareness, and a micropolitics of perception

The 'half-second delay' describes the findings of neuroscientist Benjamin Libet's experiments, which, by measuring the minimal perceivable lapse between electrical pulses administered to brain receptors and the skin, showed that sensation involves a backward referral in time. Or as Massumi (2002: 28) glosses it, 'sensation is organized recursively before being linearized, before it is redirected outwardly to take its part in a conscious chain of actions and reactions'. Libet himself postulates that 'we may exert free will not by initiating intentions but by vetoing, acceding or otherwise responding to them after they arise' (quoted in Massumi 2002: 29). Or to put it another

way, 'the brain makes us ready for action, then we have the experience of acting' (Gray 2002: 66). The half-second delay could therefore be glossed as the point of condensation of the relations of forces within and between the human sensorium and the stimuli environment: the point of condensation of the affective forces of micropolitical contestations.

To engage in a micropolitics that is mindful of the half-second delay is to recognise that 'consciousness takes a relatively long time to build, and any experience of it being instantaneous must be a backdated illusion' (McCrone 1999: 131). This raises the question of the possibility of narrowing the gap between the autonomic, non-conscious visceral processes of affective capture and conscious attention-action. Or at least, we could ask if the cultivation of a focussed, sharpened, and non-grasping spacious awareness (as cultivated in Vipassana, for example) could bring into the light of mindfulness the lapses and feedback circuits animating this 'constantly moving preconscious frontier' (Thrift 2004: 67), the surge and flow of which unfold at once as possibilities for subjectification and desubjectification, for both social manipulation and self-experimentation. Hence, Thrift's (2004: 71) suggestion that this form of (micro)politics could adopt as its motto Nietzsche's claim: 'Between two thoughts all kinds of affects play their game; but their motions are too fast, therefore we fail to recognise them'. Informed by the same outlooks, Connolly (2002: 45) asserts that political concepts and beliefs ought not be reduced to 'disembodied tokens of argumentation', because '[c]ulture has multiple layers, with each layer marked by distinctive speeds, capacities and levels of linguistic complexity.' Referring to Connolly's work, Thrift thus argues for the development of:

> [...] a microbiopolitics of the subliminal, much of which operates in the half-second delay between action and cognition, a microbiopolitics which understands the kind of biological-cum-cultural gymnastics that takes place in this realm which is increasingly susceptible to new and sometimes threatening knowledges and technologies that operate upon it in ways that produce effective outcomes, even when the exact reasons may be opaque, a microbiopolitics which understands the insufficiency of argument to political life without, however, denying its pertinence (Thrift 2004: 71-72).

A micropolitics that is mindful of the sensation of the body-mind-in-action—a micropolitics that constantly attunes itself across multiple registers of intensities, rather than overdetermining the discursive register of intelligibility—such a micropolitics would entail 'arts of the self', an 'ethic of cultivation', and attention to 'how new forms of space and time are being constituted' (Thrift 2004: 72). My analysis of Vipassana and a Buddhist art of living pushes towards the trajectory of inquiry articulated by the likes of Massumi, Thrift, and Connolly. This body of scholarship has faced criticisms by commentators like Nikolas Rose, who questions Libet's 'highly simplistic laboratory set-up' and 'bizarre reasoning' for his claims about the implications of the half-second delay on the notion of free will (2012: 8). Rose is thus sceptical about the claims of Thrift and Massumi and even questions their 'intellectual honesty', since they do not appear to have interrogated the premises of Libet's experiment or engaged with the life sciences in a sustained, systematic manner (as Rose himself has). The objections raised by Rose warrant further investigation and should indeed be part of the broader inquiry on affective politics. It is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis to pursue this. Research on the affective dynamics of

experience is one vector along which my work is heading. Hence, I am as yet unable to evaluate Rose's objections or the debates surrounding Libet's work in an informed manner. My aim in this chapter is to pave the way for future work that could participate in these debates. As I show below, emergent Buddhist social theory could benefit from dialogical exchanges with these discourses on the micropolitics of perception and becoming (Rose's remarks about the need to engage with the life sciences also indicates an opening for other forms of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, such as neuroscientific research on meditation, to participate in the broader conversation).

With this overview of affect and biopower and the general objectives of a micropolitics of becoming as a backdrop, I shall draw on my Foucauldian analysis of Vipassana and a Buddhist art of living to propose four conversational topics between Buddhist social theory and William Connolly's (2011) ideas about a micropolitics of perception (or what Thrift glosses as a microbiopolitics of the subliminal): the intersensory dynamics of perception; the anticipatory triggers of perception; the influence of discipline on perceptual processes; and the ethico-political fecundity of dwelling in moments of duration.

The intersensory dynamics of perception

For Connolly, the contestations of a world of becoming place greater demands on us to pay attention to the micropolitics of perception. He begins with the premise that perception involves 'a complex mixing—during the half-second delay between the reception of sensory experience and the formation of an image—of language, affect, feeling, touch, and anticipation' (Connolly 2011: 46). Perception, in other words, is

always *intersensory* rather than self-contained. Citing Laura Marks's discussion of how a film scene composed of voice and grainy visuals was able to evoke a daughter's tactile memory of her deceased mother's skin, Connolly (2011: 47) asserts that the 'tactile and the visual are interwoven, in that my history of touching objects similar to the one in question is interwoven into my current vision of it'. My analysis of Vipassana has elucidated how the Buddhist analytic of the Five Aggregates articulates a dynamic, open-ended and non-linear account of the relations of forces animating the sensory-perceptual processes. The aggregate translated as 'perception' is *saññа*, which is typically explained as the aspect of consciousness that identifies and recognises the distinguishing features of sensory stimuli. In the case of visual perception, the relations of forces that cohere between a visual stimulus and the human sensorium—both of which fall under the aggregate of *rūpa* or form—generates the conditions for the arising of *viññana* or consciousness (in this instance, eye-consciousness) which simply registers the sensory contact. However, unlike the conventional understanding of the five senses, Buddhist understandings delineate the human sensorium into six sense spheres. The faculty of the mind is regarded as one of them, and it encompasses not only intellectual reflection but *all* mental phenomena. Hence, the relations of forces activating eye-consciousness are not self-contained but are cross-modulated by the relations of forces co-activating mind-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, etc.

Whenever sensory contact co-activates consciousness, *vedanā* co-arises. The previous chapter prioritised Goenka's interpretation of *vedanā* as physical sensation, but the broader sense of 'bare feeling' or 'affective tone' (Bhikkhu 2005: 305) is crucial here. According to the Spinozan-Deleuzian understanding of affect informing the present

discussion, affect is not understood to be perceivable in and of itself, but conceptualised in terms of capacities, tendencies, or lines of force. As Massumi (2002: 35) says, '[f]ormed, qualified, situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect', with emotion being 'the most intense (most contracted) expression of that capture.' For Buddhism, what is designated by *vedanā* should similarly not be understood as emotion; hence, its translation as 'bare feeling'. This is why I had previously offered a tentative translation of *vedanā* as 'affective tone and its correlating bodily sensations', so as to anticipate a dialogical exchange with the Spinozan-Deleuzian understanding of affect.

Buddhism understands that in relation to *vedanā*—which could be experienced as either pleasant, unpleasant or neutral—arises *sankhāra*, a word that encompasses a range of meanings: volitional formations, habitual conditionings, and so forth (emotion would fall under this aggregate). In the case of visual perception, we could imagine *sankhāra* manifesting as thought, emotion, and/or behaviour that relate to the visual stimuli as a warning sign. For example, the amber light of a traffic signal, in relation to which a driver may react by accelerating or decelerating the vehicle without so much as a glance at their surrounding environment; or they may instead refocus attention on the traffic conditions. I have thus far worked with a translation of *sankhāra* as a complex interplay of intention, decision, and action. However, this is only a partial explanation of the term. As Bhikkhu Bodhi (2005b) explains, the term *sankhāra* 'is derived from the prefix *sam,* meaning "together", joined to the noun *kara,* "doing, making." *Sankhāras* are thus "co-doings," things that act in concert with other things, or things that are made by a combination of other things.' Following Bhikkhu Bodhi, I had rendered it as 'volitional formations', but as Carlisle (2006: 80) also notes,

the term has been variously translated as 'mental formations, dispositions, reactions; conditioned phenomena; subliminal impressions; karmic impulses; inherited forces; constructing activities; habitual potencies; habits or tendencies.' We could further note that *sankhāra* is also used in a passive or 'objective' sense to designate whatever is 'conditioned, constructed, or compounded', including 'external objects and situations such as mountains, fields and forests; town and cities; food and drink; jewellery, cars, and computers' (Bodhi 2005b). Given Buddhist social theory's rendering of *dukkha* as social *dukkha*, and the habitual forces of the Three Poisons as institutionalised greed, ill-will, and delusion, what if it likewise experiments with an expanded interpretation of *sankhāra* as the co-doings of force relations *within and between* the body and its environment, the co-doings of force relations *within and between* the 'subjective' and 'objective' dimensions of phenomenal reality-selfhood? More on this shortly.

For now, my point is that the Buddhist analytic of the Five Aggregates may offer a way to further clarify and even enhance Connolly's arguments about the intersensory dynamics of perception. Reviewing the ideas of Merleau-Ponty in light of recent neuroscientific research, this is what Connolly says: 'Perception could not function without a rich history of inter-involvements among embodiment, movement, body image, touch, sight, smell, language, affect, and colour' (Connolly 2011: 49). These different aspects of experience, I contend, could be accounted for with the framework of the Five Aggregates. Granted, it is difficult to find direct correspondence between these overlapping categories and Buddhist ones like *rūpa*, *saññā*, *vedanā*, *sankhāra*, and *viññana*—not to mention that Buddhist concepts are in translation and subject to ongoing clarification. But this is precisely why I contend that a productive

conversation potentially awaits Buddhist understandings and the multidisciplinary research informing Connolly's discourse. One question that stands out from the foregoing discussion is: what new perspective might the Buddhist understanding of the mind as *one of the six sense faculties* of the human sensorium bring to conventional understandings that posit only five senses?

The anticipatory triggers of perception

That the mind is conceived as a sense faculty is reflective of the Buddhist meditative stance, which posits the possibility of developing a different relationship to the processes of the body-mind by cultivating mindfulness or non-grasping attentive awareness. Another question inviting dialogue would thus be the question of whether meditative training in focussed quiescence and equanimous awareness could allow one to become more attuned to the intersensory dynamics of perception, and perhaps even 'reroute' the *anticipatory triggers* of perception:

> Perception not only has multiple layers of intersensory memory folded into it, it is suffused with anticipation. This does not mean merely that you anticipate a result and then test it against the effect of experience. It means that perception expresses a set of anticipatory expectations that help to constitute what it actually becomes (Connolly 2011: 48).

Merleau-Ponty had already pointed to this in *Phenomenology of Perception*, where in considering how the perception of the word 'hard' may be accompanied by a stiffening of the back or neck, he suggested that even 'before becoming the indication of a concept the word is first an event which grips my body, and this grip

circumscribes the area of significance to which it has reference' (1995: 235). These observations are supported by a recent neuroscientific experiment, which measured the body-brain patterns of participants who were asked to follow a series of images that moved, first from left to right, then from right to left. The images moved in such a way that what initially appears to be the sight of a man's bare head shifts to that of a woman's naked body. On the first viewing, the point at which the gestalt switch occurred varied amongst the participants. On the second viewing, almost all the participants identified the shift in perception at a much later point in the trial. What this indicated to the researchers is that the 'brain is a self-organizing, pattern-forming system that operates close to instability points, thereby allowing it to switch flexibly and spontaneously from one coherent state to another' (quoted in Connolly 2011: 49). We could connect these ideas with the following scenario portrayed by Goenka to illustrate how training in mindfulness of the breath and sensation could help the practitioner deal with a difficult situation:

> Suppose that I employ a private secretary, so that whenever anger arises he says to me, "Look, anger is starting!" Since I cannot know when this anger will start, I'll need to hire three private secretaries for three shifts, around the clock! Let's say I can afford it, and anger begins to arise. At once my secretary tells me, "Oh look—anger has started!" The first thing I'll do is rebuke him: "You fool! You think you're paid to teach me?" I'm so overpowered by anger that good advice won't help.
>
> Suppose wisdom does prevail and I don't scold him. Instead, I say, "Thank you very much. Now I must sit down and observe my anger." Yet, is it possible? As

> soon as I close my eyes and try to observe anger, the object of the anger immediately comes into my mind—the person or incident which initiated the anger. Then I'm not observing the anger itself; I'm merely observing the external stimulus of that emotion. This will only serve to multiply the anger, and is therefore no solution. It is very difficult to observe any abstract negativity, abstract emotion, divorced from the external object which originally caused it to arise.
>
> However, someone who reached the ultimate truth found a real solution. He discovered that whenever any impurity arises in the mind, physically two things start happening simultaneously. One is that the breath loses its normal rhythm. We start breathing harder whenever negativity comes into the mind. This is easy to observe. At a subtler level, a biochemical reaction starts in the body, resulting in some sensation [once again, Goenka's use of scientific language ought to be read reflexively]. Every impurity [i.e. afflictive habits] will generate some sensation or the other within the body (Vipassana Meditation: undated.)

By making the effort to be mindful of mutualising force relations between external stimuli (e.g. words and gestures), intersensory perception (e.g. the recognition of words and gestures as 'abusive') and the affective tone of bodily sensations that arise (e.g. 'unpleasant' heat suffusing the back of the neck)—this could serve to defuse the force of self-organising habitual conditionings (e.g. that belligerence warrants responses of equal or greater measures of belligerence), liberating conscious awareness in such a way that one feels less encumbered by the flurry of thoughts,

emotions, sensations, predispositions and habitual reactions arising in the heat of the moment. To paraphrase the researchers of the experiment cited above, what I am suggesting is that equanimous, attentive awareness potentially allows one to recognise how the body-mind is a self-organising, pattern-forming system that operates close to instability points, and how it may switch flexibly and spontaneously from one coherent state to another. Or to paraphrase Connolly (2011: 48), mindfulness of the moment-to-moment movements of the body-mind could serve to modulate the 'set of anticipatory expectations that help to constitute what [perception] actually becomes.'

Even without exposure to formal mindfulness training, I believe it is not difficult to imagine or recall analogous experiences to what I'm describing, such as this story fondly retold by my partner about her younger brother. He was around five years of age and had angered his bad-tempered father. Facing the prospect of severe punishment (in Asian cultures this is usually corporal punishment), he burst into tears and with utmost sincerity screamed for divine intervention, 'Help me, Jesus!' His father, who up till that point was boiling over with anger, burst into laughter. The body-mind, operating close to instability points, flips over unexpectedly from a closed, bounded 'system' of anger to a more open, receptive 'system' of good humour. In unexpected, affectively charged encounters such as these, the movements and relations of forces between consciousness, modes of perception, habitual conditionings, ways of thinking, acting, and feeling become especially palpable and unstable. To further illustrate the possibility of training awareness to become more receptive to such shifts and also tease out the implications it may have on our heavily mediatised experience of everyday life, I want to take a slight detour, by way of a post

I wrote on my blog, through Massumi's Bergsonian-inflected account of the inter-involvement of perception, thought, and sensation.

> The following has become painfully pertinent to me because I'm grappling with a severe flare-up of atopic dermatitis. Over and over again—even when I recently attended a meditation retreat, an environment conducive for sustaining mindfulness—I kept catching myself scratching some part of my body absentmindedly, especially when I read, wrote, or pondered on an idea. You may have experienced something similar—perhaps not scratching, but a habit like chewing on the tip of a pencil, snacking on cookies, or toggling back and forth between tumblr and Facebook even when there's nothing of interest. I believe I'm not the only one to grapple with the problem of in/attention? A problem that appears to gather some *intensity* whenever the body-mind is asked to detect and give expression to the subtle murmurings of incipient perceptions, thought, action... (Ng 2013).

> [...] There is no thought that is not accompanied by a physical sensation of effort or agitation (if only a knitting of the brows, a pursing of the lips, or a quickening of heartbeat). This sensation, which may be muscular (proprioceptive), tactile, or visceral is backgrounded. This doesn't mean it disappears into the background. It means that it appears as the background against which the conscious thought stands out: its felt environment. The accompanying sensation encompasses the thought that detaches itself from it. Reading, however cerebral it may be, does not entirely think out sensation. It is not purified of it. A knitting of the brows or pursing of the lips is a self-referential action. Its sensation is a turning in on itself

> of the body's activity, so that the action is not extended toward an object but knots at its point of emergence: rises and subsides into its own incipiency, in the same movement. The acts of attention performed during reading are forms of incipient action. It was asserted in the last chapter that action and perception are reciprocals of each other. If as Bergson argued a perception is an incipient action, then reciprocally an action is an incipient perception. Enfolded in the muscular, tactile, and visceral sensations of attention are incipient perceptions. When we read, we do not see the individual letters and words. That is what learning to read is all about: learning to stop seeing the letters so you can see through them. Through the letters, we directly experience fleeting vision-like sensations, inklings of sound, faint brushes of movement. The turning in on itself of the body, its self-referential short-circuiting of outward-projected activity, gives free rein to these incipient perceptions. In the experience of reading, conscious thought, sensation, and all the modalities of perception fold into and out of each other. Attention most twisted (Massumi 2002: 139).

If conscious perception-thought-action always manifests against a background of sensation not usually perceived, what Vipassana posits is that this 'background', or some aspects of it at least, could be 'foregrounded' by training concentration and attention so that awareness of the body-mind becomes more sensitive and expansive. Inasmuch as it suspends all outward-projected activity to cultivate mindfulness of the breath, posture, affective tone, sensation, mindstates and/or mental activity, it invites the question of whether such an approach to meditation represents a more direct and intense form of the self-referential short-circuiting process that Massumi exemplifies with reading. Whether it be reading or meditation, what is involved is the training of

attention, or to put it in the inverse, the disciplining of inattention. I have explained how the relationship between in-attention, sensation, and self-referential perception-thought-action becomes apparent very quickly to anyone who attempts to rest attention on the breath. 'Meditator' or not, anyone can experiment with this (right now, for instance, if we take a break from reading to observe the movement of breathing for a few minutes). It becomes apparent how easy it is to be distracted from the breath by thoughts, bodily discomfort or restlessness. At the aforementioned retreat, whenever I caught my attention distracted by thoughts (most of the time it was worry about the thesis), I would realise, as if awakening from a stupor, that I had begun to scratch at a part of my body that is affected by eczema. There were times when I even caught my hand in the midst of reaching out, just as I observed another narrative unfolding in the mind. An analogous experience would perhaps be when one is driving home from work only to suddenly find oneself pulling up the driveway, unable to recall the traffic conditions encountered en route, or feeling as if one had 'lost time'/was 'lost in time', because the mind was mulling over the affairs of the office. In other words, the question of how we might become more sensitive to the backgrounded, anticipatory triggers of intersensory perception pertains as much to distraction as attention:

> Distraction, too, is accompanied by characteristic, self-referential actions: scratching, fidgeting, eyes rolling up or around in their sockets as if they were endeavoring to look back in at the brain. Every predominantly visual activity is an economy of attention and distraction, often with a pronounced tendency toward one or the other pole. Television assumes and fosters a certain inattention, as the viewing body is invited to zap channels or slip relays to other

> activities into the commercial slots and slow patches. Watching movies and reading books command considerably more attention, and thus tend toward the other direction. Hypertext surfing combines both modes. Link after link, we click ourselves into a lull. But suddenly something else clicks in, and our attention awakens, perhaps even with a raised eyebrow. Surfing sets up a rhythm of attention and distraction. This means that it can fold into its own process a wider range of envelopments and reciprocities of sensation, incipient perception, and conscious reflection (Massumi 2002: 139).

The influence of discipline on perceptual processes

By taking this detour through Massumi's Bergsonian-inflected account, we can begin to draw the links between the anticipatory triggers of intersensory perception, the habits of in-attention and the influence of discipline on perceptual processes, and map them against the inquiries of Buddhist social theory. Consider for instance what Loy (2008: 96) asks about the danger of 'collective attention traps': 'How has the development of the modern/postmodern world affected human attention generally? Not only *what* we attend to, but *how* we attend to it'. He identifies four interrelated challenges: the fragmentation of attention, the commodification of attention, the control of attention, and the liberation of attention. To illustrate the fragmentation and commodification of attention, Loy (2008: 97) asks if the so-called 'IT revolution' has generated a problem of restless distraction that circumscribes our engagement with such entertainment technologies and practices as portable MP3 players, channel-surfing, 'one click' orders on Amazon, video games, and internet surfing. Restless distraction, he further claims, is a problem that is exacerbated by the pervasiveness of advertisements that not only grab our attention but exploit it: 'By

manipulating the gnawing sense of lack that haunts our insecure sense of self, the attention economy insinuates its basic message deep into our awareness: the solution to any discomfort we might have is consumption' (Loy 2008: 100).

I share Loy's ethico-political commitment to interrogate the ways in which the ever-proliferating networks of multinational media conglomerates function as a conduit of power. But I question the way his monolithic picture of 'top down' media power leaves little room for the active audience or consumer, and the multiplicity and malleability of media habits and patterns of consumption. The audience's ability to engage with entertainment and consumerist activities in creative, empowering, and even counter-hegemonic ways, ought not be effaced by ideological criticism of multinational media conglomerates and manipulative advertising or public relations practices. This has been the concern of cultural studies scholarship on popular culture, which articulates many counterpoints to Loy's stark 'ideological' or 'propagandic' assessment of our mediatised environment. If Buddhist critical-constructive reflection is to develop a social theory that is sensitive to the micropolitical dynamics of everyday life, whilst also remaining mindful of macropolitical regimes of power relations (but without overdetermining their constraining, controlling influence), it could enter into dialogue with this strand of cultural research and also studies on the affective, visceral dynamics of attention. In this respect, Massumi's observation above is instructive as it recognises the problem of in-attention circumscribing contemporary media habits, without losing sight of the potential for new openings of conscious reflection. This mode of micropolitical thinking could plug the gaps in Loy's account of the control of attention, which follows Chomskyan thinking to warn against the totalising, econo-political functions

of media conglomerates. To be sure, the 'spinning' of global political affairs and disinformation are challenges that need to be addressed. But I wonder to what extent a macropolitical account of the control of attention is able to shed light on what Loy asks about the liberation of collective attention:

> [...] it seems doubtful that any social protest movement could be successful without an alternative understanding of what our attention is and what alternative practices promote more liberated attention [...] [W]hat does it really mean for awareness to be here-and-now, deconditioned from attention traps both individual and collective? (Loy 2008: 102)

Loy's identification of this problematic of attentional discipline and control recalls Thrift's claims above about how a new structure of attention has emerged as an object-target of biopower in the shift towards affective politics, and hence, also enabling new space-time-material openings for the countervailing ethico-political work of artful conduct. My contention is that Connolly's multidisciplinary research on the influence of discipline on perceptual processes offers a better framework than the propaganda-ideological model utilised by Loy for understanding the affective force relations that de/condition awareness. To investigate the relationship between discipline and perception is, at base, to work with the understanding that '[p]ower is coded into perception' (Connolly 2011: 55). Although their work proceeds on different pathways, this is the general view shared by Foucault and Merleau-Ponty, both of whom 'see how perception requires a prior *disciplining* of the senses in which a rich history of sensory inter-involvement sets the stage for later experience' (Connolly 2011: 52). However, given that neither Foucault nor Merleau-Ponty were able to

anticipate the penetration of telematic devices into all domains of social life, it is necessary to update their ideas by refracting them through contemporary insights on the power of the media in shaping the modalities of perception. Because this 'ubiquitous force flows into the circuits of discipline, perception, self-awareness, and conduct', it would not suffice only to track the 'pattern of media ownership', but it is just as important 'to examine the methods through which it becomes insinuated into the shape and tone of perception' (Connolly 2011: 54).

To work with the understanding that power is coded into perception is by no means to adopt a monolithic, 'pessimistic' or 'top down' view of power. For in attending to the preconscious, affective dimensions of experience, Merleau-Ponty's writings 'convey an implicit sense of belonging to the world, while Foucault's often mobilize elements of tension, resistance, and disaffection circulating within modern modalities of experience' (Connolly 2011: 52). Focussing my interpretation on the latter's work, it seems to me that what Connolly is alluding to is that we keep in mind Foucault's point about how every assertion of power generates the condition for its resistance. If Foucault's writings on power before his so-called 'ethical turn' lend the impression that they omit a consideration of resistance, then his late work on ethical self-constitution and 'spirituality' should clear away any such misunderstanding—or at the very least, invite us to reconsider how the care of self and the arts of existence may allow us to re-channel and/or transduce the power coded into everyday perception towards individual and collective projects of desubjectification. So, to work with the understanding that power is coded into perception is as much a matter of interrogating the mechanisms of exploitation and relations of domination, as it is a matter of experimenting with new relations of self to (not-)self and others.

> Sensory inter-involvement, disciplinary processes, detailed modes of surveillance, media infiltration, congealed attractors, affective dispositions, self-regulation in response to future susceptibility—these elements participate in perpetual circuits of exchange, feedback, and re-entry, with each loop folding another variation and degree into its predecessor. The imbrications are so close that it is next to impossible to sort out each element from the other as they merge into a larger complex. The circuits fold, bend, and blend into each other, inflecting the shape and texture of political experience. Even as they are ubiquitous, however, there are numerous points of dissonance, variation, hesitation, and disturbance in them. These interruptions provide potential triggers to the pursuit of other spiritual possibilities, where the term *spirit* means a refined state of the body in an individual *and* existential dispositions embedded in institutional practices (Connolly 2011: 55-56).

Here, we see a re-conceptualisation of 'spirit' in terms of corporality and the strategic relations of power that both condition and are conditioned by it. This account of the forces that variously reverberate through, gravitate towards, and/or are re-channeled and transduced by the body's capacity to affect and be affected, dovetails with the twin analytic of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' in the Foucauldian subtextual 'religious question'. It adds another vector to the preceding chapters' elaboration of a response to the question of how cultural studies might refuse the presumption of any 'foundational secularism' to re-theorise the mind/body split and the nature of matter. If we fold onto my Foucauldian analysis of a Buddhist art of living, the above account of the role of 'spirit' (as the subtle corporal dimensions of

individual behaviour *and* existential dispositions embedded within social and political arrangements) in shaping everyday perception, the nexus between a micropolitics of becoming/perception and engaged Buddhism becomes clear: they both aim at new spiritual possibilities, refined embodied sensibilities, across both the individual and collective registers.

This 'micro' approach of investigating power relations and sociopolitical contestations could plug some of the gaps in Loy's proposals for a Buddhist social theory. What Connolly as well as others like Massumi and Thrift are working with, is more or less a topological, processual mode of thinking—one sensitive to the contingency of events and openness of any given system or set of relations. Connolly (2011: 5) evokes the metaphor of 'force-field' to refer to 'any energized pattern in slow or rapid motion periodically displaying a capacity to morph, such as a climate system, biological evolution, a political economy, or human thinking.' I have shown how Loy's critique of the institutionalised greed of corporation slips in through the back door, as it were, an essentialising (and perhaps, even anthropocentric) understanding of the human body informed by an implicit natural/artifical dualism. Perhaps one way for Buddhist social theory to undercut the persistence of binary thinking in its theorising of the self-society continuum is to adapt this concept of 'force-field'—or more generally speaking, to engage in dialogue with the multidisciplinary discourses that investigate the multimodal force relations of 'doings' and 'becomings' by which the challenges of the contemporary world are formed and contested.

Insofar as discourses on a world of becoming are predicated on an understanding of an open-ended, emergent causality and seek to disrupt binary conceptualisations of

subject/object, self/society, biology/culture, human/non-human, conceptuality/materiality, theory/practice and so forth; by thinking the body-mind and world *processually*, they appear to be commensurable with the Buddhist principle of dependent co-arising underlying the analytic of the Five Aggregates. One starting point for the dialogue with Buddhist social theory, for example, could be the aforementioned expanded interpretation of *sankhāra* as the 'co-doings' of the force relations within and between the 'subjective' and 'objective' dimensions of phenomenal reality-selfhood. I had suggested in the previous chapter that Vipassana could function to undercut habitual tendencies. It does not seem unreasonable, then, to experiment with this interpretation of *sankhāra* to investigate 'co-doings' of force relations within and between habit and habitat. Habits are repeated patterns of behaviour by which we negotiate the environment or the social world, which is itself accumulated and formed by repeated, differential patterns (seasonal changes, work/leisure routines, cultural customs, etc.). I believe we have all experienced ourselves how people can 'catch' habits from or 'pass' them on to others, or how incremental adjustments in personal habits or role performance by individuals can render a shared habitat more welcoming and hospitable: *co-doings*. As Carlisle suggests:

> Habit accomplishes a kind of compromise and adaptation between beings and their environment. We might regard habit as a fundamental mode of what Heidegger calls 'being-in-the-world': in this case, the close connection between habit and habitat resonates with Heidegger's predilection for the vocabulary of dwelling and abiding. The self's capacity to be affected and shaped by actions renders it irreducibly worldly, so that the distinction

> between one's habits and one's habitat is less clear than we might suppose. This is particularly true of linguistic habits: in order to communicate we must repeat words, phrases, gestures, and intonations already in circulation, already meaningful, and this mobile resource of signs is the habitat or 'house of being', which domesticates—renders familiar and orderly—the flux of sense experience. At the same time, habit individuates in so far as each being is a unique configuration of habits, a singular site of repetition (Carlisle 2006: 78).

To be clear, when *sankharā* is utilised in discussions of the Five Aggregates, the 'subjective' connotations of habitual conditionings, mental formations, habit, and so forth are emphasised. Nevertheless, without going so far as to conflate one with the other, I wonder if it would be helpful not to bracket the 'objective' connotations of *sankhāra*, so that we may remain mindful of circumstantial factors or the conditions of habitat that influence the action-oriented operations of the body-mind and vice versa. This flexible interpretation of *sankhāra* as the co-doings of force relations within and between the body and its environment (co-inhabited by non-human 'bodies' like corporations and other organisational formations) could be a way to defuse the obstinacy of binary thinking (e.g. human/non-human; natural/artificial) that still besets prevailing accounts of Buddhist social theory. An expanded, experimental reading of *sankhāra* as the co-doings of force relations opens a channel for mutual clarification and reciprocal learning between the ethico-political 'awakening-struggles' of engaged Buddhism and the ethico-political interventions of contemporary radical thought, particularly those adopting a Spinozan-Deleuzian perspective on affect to investigate and actualise the transformative potential of 'not

simply the *em*bodied, but the *trans*-bodied nature of collective doings and cooperative practices':

> Not the teleological outcome of aggregation—wherein some evolutionary goal of the collective is conceived and attained—the body is rather the gathering of *mutualizing force relations* that begin to work together in specific ways, their regular practices and processes transforming through routinization and variation in the environment. The affective and participatory *co-tendencies* of this multitude of bodies can thus be said to be indicative of a 'social body' characterized not by any formal, nominal, classed or categorized system, but rather by the question of ethics itself. The social becomes conditioned by its own situated localizations, the specific *doings-together* of bodies distributed like a series of freckles across a biologist's nose. Affect announces a social ethics of interrelation and interconnection, and as such it signals *an ontological-political linkage between ethics and the social*, where to frame a question in terms of one is literally and immediately to invoke the other (Woodward and Lea 2010: 160; emphasis added).

We could note in the above an apparent point of tension between the Buddhist conceptualisation of the Five Aggregates and affect theory's refusal to conceive of the body and/or collective participation in terms of 'aggregation', a word that implies the gathering or sum total of pre-existing, discrete phenomena into a mass or larger whole. The term 'aggregates' in Buddhist discourse is a translation of the Pali word *khandhas* (Sanskrit: *skandhas*), the literal meaning of which is 'heap', 'pile' 'bundle', or 'mass'. But as explained above and in the previous chapter, the Five Aggregates

articulate an account of phenomenal reality-selfhood *in potentia*, a virtuality that is only ever actualised in a thoroughly contingent manner. Insofar as *rūpa* (form), *viññana* (consciousness), *sañña* (perception), *vedanā* (bare feeling/sensation), and *sankhāra* (volitional formations) are dependently co-arisen (i.e. if A is present, B arises; if B is not present, A does not arise), these so-called 'aggregates' have no inherent existence and are not even discrete sets of 'bundlings', the literal meaning of '*khandhas*' notwithstanding.[1] If anything, the account of the Five Aggregates describes the interplay and confluence of mutualising force relations.

I do not have the expertise to say whether there could be a better, alternative translation of *khandhas* than the standard one of 'aggregates'. Though for the purpose of a cross-reading exercise, Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'assemblage' (implicit in the accounts of affective micropolitics surveyed above) invites comparison. But even if we were to articulate the Buddhist account of the *khandhas* in terms of 'assemblage', we would still brush up against a persistent problem of translation. The term that Deleuze and Guattari use in their work is not the French word '*assemblage*', which as per its English equivalent, connotes collection or combination. The French term Deleuze and Guattari use is '*agencement*', which in its ordinary usage, connotes design, schema, or layout. Hence, as Jasbir Paur (2006) notes in her reflections on

[1] According to Bhikkhu Thānissaro (2002), it is important to keep in mind that in the Buddha's very first sermon (the declaration of the Four Noble Truths), he turned the otherwise nondescript term, '*khandhas*', into a pedagogical device, rendering it as 'clinging-*khandhas*' to elucidate the generative conditions of *dukkha*. It is arguable, therefore, that the principal function of the analytic of the Five Aggregates is not so much to delineate or isolate the discrete, objective elements comprising the experience of phenomenal reality-selfhood. Rather, the Five Aggregates serve the pedagogical function of elucidating the futility of clinging onto the so-called 'aggregates' (whether it be a particular mode of thinking, feeling, or behaving) for metaphysical comfort, and the benefits to be garnered by relinquishing attachment to the belief that the body-mind's capacity to affect and be affected must derive from some enduring essence.

intersectionality, assemblage, and affective politics, in thinking 'assemblage' or '*agencement*' the focus ought not be 'on content but on relations, relations of patterns.' Or as John Phillips (2006: 108) explains in his critical review of the terms of translation: '*Agencement* designates the priority of neither the state of affairs nor the statement but of their connection'. In order to disrupt, re-channel, or transduce the relations of forces that inhibit or block the affective *connections* necessary for the actualising of a different sociopolitical reality, a micropolitics of (un)becoming has to be receptive towards the dis/enabling moments of dissonances that may irrupt within and across 'force-fields'.

The ethico-political fecundity of dwelling in moments of duration

> What are the dissonances? A past replete with religious ritual clashes with an alternative representation of God in a film, church, or school; an emergent practice of heterodox sexuality encourages you to question established habits in other domains; the interruption of a heretofore smooth career path disrupts previously submerged habits of anticipation; a trip abroad exposes you to disturbing news items and attitudes seldom finding popular expression in your own country; neurotherapy fosters a modest shift in your sensibility; a stock market crash disrupts assumptions about the self-stablizing tendencies of the market; a new religious experience shakes and energizes you; a terrorist attack folds an implacable desire for revenge into you; a devastating natural event shakes your faith in providence (Connolly 2011: 55-56).

Dissonances, in short, are generated when 'dominant tendencies of the day periodically bump into new events, minor dispositions, and submerged tendencies' Connolly 2011: 56). This thesis represents an attempt to work through the dissonances generated by the cultural, social, ethical, and political 'force-fields' enveloping my sacred-scholarly pursuit; I have sought to convey a sense of this from the start with an autoethnographic narrative-analysis of the tensions I grapple with as a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert, and also in the various anecdotal accounts layered throughout the thesis. A hypothesis I wish to formulate in relation to the idea that one could be receptive to, and even actively experiment with, dissonance, is that Buddhist meditation practice, as I have interpreted in the context of Vipassana, opens up what Connolly describes as 'a fecund moment of dwelling in duration that punctuates the secular time of everyday situations' (2011: 69). Secular time—or what Benjamin (2003) has described as the concept of 'homogenous empty time'—is what we today simply understand as 'time'. This is how Charles Taylor glosses it in *A Secular Age*:

> One thing happens after another, and when something is past, it's past. Time placings are consistently transitive. If A is before B and B before C, then A is before C. The same goes if we quantify these relations: if A is long before B, and B long before C, then A is very long before C (2008: 55).

For Taylor, in the pre-modern West there were 'higher times' (as against ordinary times), which were more readily admitted into everyday experience. Higher times 'introduce "warps" and seeming inconsistencies in profane time-ordering. Events which were far apart in profane time could nevertheless be closely linked' (Taylor

2008: 55). The point here is not to argue for a return to some pre-secular epoch, but merely that the modern understanding of ordinary 'secular' time does not have the last word on the truth of spatiotemporality. This is echoed by Connolly, who in reworking the Bergsonian concept of duration, challenges the tyranny of homogenous, empty time. To dwell in fecund moments of duration is to allow 'multiple layers of the past [to] resonate with things unfolding in the current situation, sometimes issuing in something new as if from nowhere.' During such moments, the new is 'ushered into being through a process that exceeds rational calculation or the derivation of practical implications from universal principles'; the underlying premise is that 'periodic dwelling in a fecund moment of duration can occasionally issue in a creative insight' (2011: 69, 70). Connolly thus distinguishes chrono- or clock-time from durational time: the former referring to 'the difference measured by a clock between, say, the length of a human life and that of a hurricane'; the latter referring to 'those periods of phase transition when reverberations between two force-fields set on different tiers of clock-time change something profoundly' (2011: 70).

Sitting cross-legged with eyes closed whilst resting attention on the natural rhythm of the breath or the arising and passing of bodily sensations—at all times the movements of the body-mind, whether they be thoughts of the past or future, feelings of hope or despair, are allowed to ebb and flow of their own accord—is this to dwell in fecund moments of duration? This question, I argue, invites further consideration, if Buddhist social theory is to better articulate the relationship between spiritual cultivation and social engagement. This is a question that could be pursued in conversation with such diverse thinkers as Bergson, Deleuze, Foucault, James,

Spinoza, Whitehead—all of whom, on Connolly's reading at least, 'emphasize the value of dwelling periodically in fecund moments of duration to usher a new idea, maxim, concept, faith, or intervention into being' (2011: 71). To dwell in fecund moments of duration is to suspend the action-oriented operations of the body-mind, whereby incipient thought and perception, feelings and sensations, memories of the past and hopes for the future, the 'subjective' and 'objective' co-doings of force relations, are allowed to blend, interfuse, and hopefully, precipitate fresh ways of becoming. The inventive, ethico-political possibilities of such an exercise may be investigated by Buddhist social theory as part of the conversation with prevailing interpretations of the half-second delay, which as I've suggested earlier, represents the point of condensation of the affective forces of micropolitical contestations.

One conclusion (that remains debatable) to be drawn from Libet's experiment is that human agency, or the will, consists in the capacity to veto a tendency to act that is already underway. The 'delay' of the half-second, in other words, is between the incipience of the processes of the body-mind and their consolidation as action-oriented operations. Connolly thus suggests that the will or human agency be conceived as the intermediate space between: 'incipient, ideationally imbued tendencies to action that well up as you respond to events; and a limited capacity to veto or redirect some of those tendencies as they approach the tipping point of action' (2011: 82). The crucial point is that these two vectors of the will are open to degrees of modification over time:

> You can adjust incipient tendencies, when reflection or the shock of new experience renders this advisable, by tactics of the self that work upon culturally

> imbued, embodied predispositions to action below the reach of intellectual command [...] You can also work on the capacity to exercise veto power by periodically re-engaging the relation between the specific situation in which you find yourself and presumptions of practical judgment already installed in your memory bank (Connolly 2011: 82-83).

Are engaged Buddhists movements and Buddhist social theory advocating a similar ethos of cultivation when they anchor social engagement in a commitment to, a profession of faith in, the transformative potential of, ethical conduct and mindfulness training? What Connolly offers with the help of continental philosophy, cultural theory, theoretical biology, complexity theory, and neuroscience, is a conception of the will as 'an *emergent*, biocultural formation; it bears traces of that from which it emerged but is irreducible to its precursors' (2011: 82). This understanding of human agency in non-exclusivist terms as 'biocultural' and always-in-formation develops Foucault's (1984b: 348) proposal that 'the *bios* [be adopted] as a material for an aesthetic piece of art', the material for an art of living. This is what I have explored with my analysis of Vipassana and a Buddhist art of living. In my view, and as this thesis has been arguing, the Buddhist doctrine of dependent co-arising underpinning the analytic Five Aggregates dovetails broadly with the logic of emergent causality underpinning the biocultural mode of thinking proposed by Connolly.

Perhaps, then, to paraphrase Connolly, we could say that Vipassana represents a technique of the self that allows awareness to be receptive to the subtle movements of the body-mind not usually perceived without concentration-attentional training; the

ethical cultivation of focussed quiescence and discerning mindfulness facilitates the tweaking of culturally imbued, embodied predispositions to action that lie below the reach of intellectual command. Such a tactic of the self, whereby the meditator dwells in fecund moments of duration, could potentially generate creative insights, and even concrete actions, that resonate across onto the collective, affective registers of social life. By recoiling back on the force relations between specific situations and presumptions of practical judgement already installed in the memory bank, one is sharpening the sensitivity of the will's capacity to veto action—and this could potentially foster a stronger ethos of care and response-ability towards the reverberations of one's decision, the consequences of which are never fully calculable or foreseeable: *undecidability*.

One of the possible benefits to be garnered from self-experimental tactics of dwelling in duration is illustrated by the scenario previously discussed, of how mindfulness of sensation could infuse our daily interactions in such a way as to help us maintain a degree of composure to make discerning decisions in difficult situations. Such an 'application' of meditative exercise is being explored outside a Buddhist context. For example, a recent news article reports that US Marine Corps officials are 'testing a series of brain calming exercises called "Mindfulness-Based Mind Fitness Training" that they believe could enhance the performance of troops, who are under mounting pressures from long deployments and looming budget cuts expected to slim down forces' (Watson 2013). My point here is not to suggest that adaptations of meditation discourse and practice outside of sacred contexts are inherently 'bad' or 'wrong'. But along with the examples of individualist and capitalist appropriations of meditative knowledge-practices surveyed in Chapter One, it does underscore the critical task of

investigating the ethicality (or lack thereof) of the manifold ways in which 'spirituality' is being adapted across the different domains of social and political life. To reiterate the importance of this question of 'spirituality' to the reciprocal development of Buddhist social theory and an affective micropolitics of (un)becoming, I highlight David Loy's recent attempt to articulate the problematics confronting Buddhist 'spirituality' as a part of broader public debates about the civic responsibilities of multinational corporations in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis. In an open letter to William George (a board member of Goldman Sachs and professor in Harvard's MBA program who has authored books on the importance of ethics in the marketplace and is an important figure in the 'mindfulness in business' movement), Loy writes:

> The debate within American Buddhism [and contemporary Buddhism more generally] focuses on how much is lost if mindfulness as a technique is separated from other important aspects of the Buddhist path, such as precepts, community practice, awakening, and living compassionately. Traditional Buddhism understands all these as essential parts of a spiritual path that leads to personal transformation. More recently, there is also concern about the social implications of Buddhist teachings, especially given our collective ecological and economic situation. The Buddha referred to the "three poisons" of greed, ill will, and delusion as unwholesome motivations that cause suffering, and some of my own writing argues that today those three poisons have become institutionalized, taking on a life of their own.

> I do not know how your meditation practice has affected your personal life, nor, for that matter, what type of meditation or mindfulness you practice. Given your unique position, my questions are: how has your practice influenced your understanding of the social responsibility of large corporations such as Goldman Sachs and Exxon Mobil? And what effects has your practice had personally on your advisory role within those corporations? (Loy 2012)

Conclusion

If the previous chapters show that the objectives of a politics of spirituality mutually reinforce the objectives of a politics of subjectivity, then this chapter shows that the two mutually reinforce the objectives of a micropolitics of affect or (un)becoming. I have explicated the latter by describing the ways in which apparatuses of control target the affective capacities of bodies and populations, and through the question of how Buddhist social theory could participate in debates on the micropolitics of affect and perception to better facilitate the objectives of engaged Buddhist spiritual-social praxis. Where systems of domination employ technologies of discipline and control to individualise affect and subject the aleatory forces of existence under calculative means, engaged Buddhism represents a countervailing 'awakening-struggle' that employs technologies of the self to harness the affective forces of a world of becoming for the spiritual-social pursuit of an art of living. A Buddhist social theory could better inform 'awakening-struggle' by investigating the 'co-doings' or mutualising force relations within and between the personal habits of the Three Poisons and their social manifestations as institutionalised practices and/or normative regimes. This chapter has proposed that Buddhist critical-constructive reflection fine-tune the emergent

Buddhist social theory by entering into conversation with multidisciplinary research on the affective and visceral registers.

Taking William Connolly's *A World of Becoming* as an indexical discourse of this 'affective turn' in contemporary radical thought, I plotted some ways to develop the lines of inquiry raised, but not followed through, by David Loy on the relationship between spiritual cultivation and social engagement. There are four hypotheses that could be developed by way of dialogical exchange: 1.) that the Buddhist analytic of the Five Aggregates could shed new light on the intersensory dynamics of perception; 2.) that meditative training in focussed quiescence and equanimous awareness potentially allows one to 'reroute' the anticipatory triggers of experience; 3.) that the insights of multidisciplinary research on the influence of discipline on the perceptual process could help to further clarify the ethico-political contributions of Buddhist spirituality; and 4.) that contemplative tactics of the self are means by which practitioners dwell in fecund moments of duration, where the cultivation of non-grasping awareness may enhance sensitivity towards incipient thought and perception, generate creative insights into culturally imbued, embodied predispositions to action, strengthen the will's veto power over the habitual tendencies of the body-mind, and even actualise the potential for new (un)becomings.

Threading through these hypotheses is the question of human agency, or more precisely, the possibility of acting on and from the preconscious frontier designated by the half-second delay, which I have characterised as the point of condensation of the affective forces of micropolitics. Therefore, with the caveat that the finding of the half-second delay be subject to ongoing clarification (as per Rose's critique), we could

formulate the foregoing discussion in terms of these overarching questions: Does Buddhism posit a refined awareness of the gap between sensory contact and conscious activity, the internal division indicated by the half-second delay, and if so, what ethical sensibilities and techniques are necessary for its cultivation? Implicit in these questions is a profession of faith in the Buddhist sacred truth claim of Awakening, which for lack of better words, posits an unmediated awareness of phenomenal reality. It would be possible, as I have demonstrated in this thesis, to pursue the question with an operational definition or 'mundane' reading of Awakening as a life-practice of becoming otherwise or unbecoming. Whilst veracity of 'supramundane' claims about Awakening may not be resolvable within the limits of discourse, I raise this point about the *im-possible* horizon of Buddhist faith because it is not something that can or ought to be ignored. This is crucial if there is to be an exchange of intellectual hospitality between Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and contemporary radical thought, or indeed, if there is to be a spiritually-engaged cultural studies. The next and final chapter of the thesis will therefore consider the question of faith, developing a hypothesis about faith by way of a profession of faith.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A Profession of Faith

The purpose of this chapter is to formulate a hypothesis about faith: to present the case that the question of faith, *a profession of faith*, cannot be ignored if cultural studies is to honour the ethical commitment towards incalculable alterity, or if there is to be a spiritually-engaged cultural studies. Building on the preceding discussion of the affective, visceral registers of experience, we could now say that a spiritually-engaged cultural studies proceeds on the understanding that argumentation, however rigorous, is never self-sufficient; that an ethos of engagement and cultivation in a world of becoming requires *response-ability*, a willingness to constantly reassess our pledges of commitment and retake the decision to honour our promises—in all senses of the word, our *professions*. Otherwise, how do we remain hospitable to incalculable alterity or invite the change we hope for?

To develop a hypothesis about faith for a profession of faith, I first pick up on the debate about faith on DhammaWheel flagged in Chapter Two, to connect this thesis's extended reflections on ethics with a Buddhist- and Derridean-inspired understanding of faith. Reconsidering a modern interpretation of Pali discourse favoured by 'Western Buddhists', I will propose that faith makes its leap from the space of undecidability as it enacts hospitality towards unknowingness. I then develop this notion of faith-undecidability by examining a debate between a radical atheist and a theologically-inspired reading of deconstruction. This will clear the ground for me to posit that Buddhist, Derridean, and Foucauldian discourses stand very close

together in professing faith in the 'immanence of transcendence'—in the possibility of always becoming otherwise—before (re)situating this faith within the thesis's founding, Derridean conceptualisation of cultural studies as a messianic project in-the-making.

While the understanding of faith I'm professing is heavily influenced by my life-practice of Buddhism, I must stress at the outset I do not conflate faith with institutional or creedal commitment, even though it may find determinate expression as the latter. Another source of inspiration for this faith is Derridean deconstruction, which, as I've demonstrated in Chapter Two, shares a commitment with Buddhism in affirming *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. This shared horizon of faith has been obscured by criticisms of deconstruction that argue for the superiority of Buddhism in such a way as to efface the specificities of, and incommensurable differences between, the two. Thus, the profession of faith I'm making here represents an attempt to reinvigorate the conversation between Buddhism and poststructuralist critical theory. As I am adopting a deconstructive strategy to open up the question of faith, I will suspend any determinate definition of faith and instead work with the hypothesis that faith resonates as an affective response that is irreducible to any ontotheological proposition, an affective response that may reverberate through the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'nonbelievers' alike. Recognising its proximity to affirmations of relationality and hope like 'trust', 'confidence', and 'fidelity', I ask: *Might it be that faith is tied to an open question, the movements of an ongoing task?*

Rethinking the role of faith in Buddhism

This thesis began with an autoethnographic analysis of the hegemonic imperatives of Buddhist modernism and the emergence of 'Western Buddhism', elucidating how notions of a rationalistic, non-religious, and even 'scientific' Buddhism continue to influence contemporary Buddhist discourse (Chapter Two). It took as a point of departure a debate on DhammaWheel: 'Why is Buddhist faith not blind?', where mikenz66 questions the argument that Buddhist faith is 'less blind' than monotheistic faiths like Christianity. Mikenz66 notes that Christians have a different soteriological agenda, aiming to go to heaven after death instead of attaining Awakening to transcend the cycle of rebirth. But should they accept and follow the propositions put forth by their religion, they could nevertheless develop such virtues as loving-kindness which Buddhism also espouses, and likewise experience the benefits of their spiritual practice in the present. Heaven would, however, remain unproven to them just as *nibbāna* (Sanskrit: *nirvāṇa*) would remain unproven to Buddhists who are yet to fully attain Awakening: 'So, for the sake of argument, how would you argue that my 'faith' is less 'blind' than the faith of my Christian counterpart?' (DhammaWheel 2009a)[1]

[1] I do not know if there is a direct equivalent of the English word 'faith' in Buddhist discourse. There is, however, the notion of *saddhā* (Sanskrit: *śraddhā*), which has been variously translated as 'faith', 'conviction', 'trust', 'confidence', and so forth. I do not have the expertise to comment on the etymology of the word, nor have I come across any conclusive argument about which of these translations is the most accurate. To my observations, commentators who eschew its translation as 'faith' are typically concerned with demonstrating the ways in which 'trust' or 'conviction' in Buddhist teachings is not predicated on dogmatic adherence or unquestioning obedience, but is rather mutually supported by analytical rigour and discerning wisdom. On the other hand, commentators who wish to emphasise the productiveness of devotional practices or the limits of the conscious intellect or rationality, are more likely to translate *saddhā* as 'faith'. Within the context of Vipassana and the discourses of the Pali Canon more generally, *saddhā* is regarded as one of the five necessary spiritual faculties for the flourishing of Awakening. *Saddhā* thus plays a crucial role in Buddhist spirituality. As I have suggested in Chapter Two, feelings of ambivalence amongst 'Western Buddhists' about the nature and function of *saddhā* is arguably generated by the hegemonic imperatives of Buddhist modernism,

jcsuperstar replies that it is because Buddhists are 'asked to test it, and told it can happen in our lives, not just after death. [A]lso many other faiths have no tolerance for questioning the faith or the teaching themselves.' For jcsuperstar (whose moniker now becomes all the more ironic), it is the injunction to 'test' and 'question' in Buddhism that sets it apart from Christian faith. This is echoed in the next post by Jechbi who writes, 'It's a different theory of faith [...] Christian faith is blind insofar as it is inspired by the Holy Spirit, not based on one's own logic or intelligence or any other such ability [...] If you try to apply the term 'blind faith' to Buddhism, it doesn't fit in the same way that it fits into many forms of Christian theology, because there's an altogether different theory and use of faith in Buddhism' (DhammaWheel 2009a). Leaving aside the gross generalisations regarding Christianity, and the lack of theological understanding reflected in their remarks, the interpretation of Buddhism favoured by the likes of jcsuperstar and Jechbi appears to find its strongest support in the *Kalama Sutta*, a text which has been described as 'the Buddha's charter of free inquiry' (Soma 1994) and even, 'the *Magna Carta* of Buddhist philosophical thought' (Gnanarama 2003: 2). Although hardly mentioned in traditional commentaries, the *sutta* has from the turn of the twentieth century become an important discourse of Buddhist modernism. It recounts the sermon given by the Buddha to the Kalamas who, confronted with contradictory teachings offered by various wandering holy men, ask the Buddha for advice. This passage is often cited as the pith of the Buddha's response:

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and more precisely by the tensions between scientific rationalism and western monotheism within which contemporary Buddhist understandings are contested and rearticulated. For this reason, I will work with the notion of a 'Buddhist faith' so as to use it as a strategic lens to problematise the received binary conceptions in modern secularist thought of rationality versus faith.

> Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing, nor upon tradition, nor upon rumour, nor upon scripture, nor upon surmise, nor upon axiom, nor upon specious reasoning, nor upon bias toward a notion pondered over, nor upon another's seeming ability, nor upon the consideration "The monk is our teacher." When you yourselves know: "These things are bad, blameable, censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them [...] When you yourselves know: "These things are good, blameless, praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them (Soma 1994).

The Buddha, it would seem, was warning against dogmatism and blind faith, encouraging instead an attitude of rigorous inquiry and personal verification (or at least, those who favour a rationalist reading of Buddhism would very likely adopt such a view). For those favouring this interpretation, the passage demonstrates that the Buddha was advocating a kind of rationalist-empiricist epistemology to resolve uncertainty and doubt, a method that leaves no place for tradition and faith—or if it does, admits faith only after it has been 'tested' and 'verified' and rendered 'non-blind'. It is not unreasonable to postulate that this view of Buddhism informs jcsuperstar's and Jechbi's argument that faith must be 'based on knowledge'. However, mikenz66 is unconvinced: 'But fully testing it means going all the way to Arahantship [an *arahant* is one who has attained *nibbāna*], which may take me quite a few more lifetimes at this rate.' He further cites a *sutta* that illustrates this and asks, 'So, until then we are taking it on trust, aren't we?' Mikenz66 is also unconvinced by

the argument that *nibbāna* can be experienced in this life (as opposed to the heaven which is experienced post-mortem). This argument, he counters, merely asserts 'a difference in timing, not a difference in "knowability"' (DhammaWheel 2009a).

In saying that there is no difference between the 'knowability' of the Buddhist goal of *nibbāna* and the Christian goal of heaven, mikenz66 appears to be probing the limits of rational thought. More precisely, he appears to be questioning the tendency in 'Western Buddhist' discourse (emerging out of the historical trend of Buddhist modernism) to portray a natural compatibility between Buddhist thought and scientific rationalism. Insofar as mikenz66's response is an index to this broader discursive formation of which DhammaWheel is a part, I want to take his thinking (and the responses of others in the discussion thread) as a conversational partner to think through the question of faith. Not unlike how Barcan and Johnston (2006: 28) converse with popular discourses on alternative therapies and related spiritualities to investigate new ways to theorise corporality, I too regard this set of discourses within 'popular Buddhism' not simply as 'an object of cultural analysis but also as a *source* of cultural theory.' In order to sharpen critical reflexivity about the power dynamics and hierarchies of value constituting cultural studies work on popular culture, Alan McKee (2002: 311) has suggested that cultural studies extends its theoretical purview, arguing that 'the logic of the cultural studies project demands that we recognize that theorizing is something that happens as much in popular culture as in academic writing.' This is, in effect, the 'double-vector' decision that constitutes the ethical engagement of cultural studies (Zylinksa 2005: 35-38). By taking this 'double-vector' decision to engage critically and sympathetically with lay discourses of Buddhism—and thereby exposing cultural studies to its exclusion of religious understandings and

formations—I am also developing the intellectual hospitality of 'Buddhist theology', which recognises that the contemporary study of Buddhism has to include within its purview 'popular Buddhism' as much as it engages with academic Buddhist studies and formal Buddhist organisations and doctrinal knowledge-practices (Chapter Two).

To this end, I shall read the debate about faith on DhammaWheel as a form of vernacular theory. Vernacular theory, according to Thomas McLaughlin, is articulated in 'ordinary language' and 'does not differ in kind from academic theory.' Hence, academic theory should then not be seen as 'an elitist and totalising activity, but as a rigorous and scholarly version of a widely practiced analytical strategy' (McLaughlin 1996: 6). Vernacular theory can be found in, for example, the working knowledge that nurses develop in providing healthcare. Their ideas about healthcare are shaped by their day-to-day experiences at the workplace and may sometimes coincide or contrast with the theories produced by healthcare academics and institutions. However, the vernacular theories about healthcare would not usually be recognised as legitimate 'theory'. Vernacular theory can also be found amongst the discourses produced in fan communities. In this sense, vernacular theory is akin to Foucault's idea of 'subjugated knowledge', which he characterises as 'an autonomous, non-centralised kind of theoretical production', a kind of knowledge articulated under 'the tyranny of globalising discourses' (Foucault 1980: 81-83). mikenz66's response, in particular, articulates a vernacular theory of faith that questions the relationship between knowledge and faith, and challenges the rational-empirical reading of Buddhism which reduces faith to a problem of epistemology—that is, of 'knowability':

> The point I am trying to make is that, despite the statement that in Buddhist practise [sic] one should "test for oneself", the advertised goal of Arahantship (or even Stream Entry) is, in fact, unverifiable until achieved [Stream Entry is an important early stage in the path towards *nibbāna*.].
>
> Personally, I keep practising because I can see that it does give improvements. I can see that my teachers are living the holy life and it appears to be working for them. I can verify certain signposts from the Suttas, Commentaries, Dhamma books and talks, and discussions with my teachers. However, I cannot actually state that I have "verified the teachings" in the sense of verifying the ultimate goal (*Nibbana*). And I suspect that there are few, if any, here who can.
>
> Of course, it is possible to "redefine" the goal as something along the lines of: "Being reasonably happy and content in this life". Well, if that's the goal, I could say that I've verified it too. However, from my reading of the Teachings, it's not... (DhammaWheel 2009a).

mikenz66 is arguably articulating a different conceptualisation of faith from that typically read in the *Kalama Sutta*, and his views find scholarly support in Stephen Evans's essay, 'Doubting the Kalama Sutta: Epistemology, Ethics, and the "Sacred"' (2007). Evans begins with the premise that interpretations that regard the sutta as a kind of epistemological tract imbue the Buddha's message with a distinctive sense of modernity. Such interpretations give 'Buddhism the status of being at least 2,000 years ahead of the European Enlightenment', portraying Buddhism in such a way that it ostensibly 'holds out the promise of a humanistic and rational religion'; but for this

reason, it 'should make us take pause and ask whether we have been projecting our own categories of thought into it and thereby misunderstanding it' (Evans 2007: 91-92). There are three main points to Evans's argument. Firstly, noting that the term used to describe the Kalamas' conundrum, *vicikicchā*, is often contrasted in other discourses not with certainty but with *adhimokkha,* which means to decide or to choose, Evans (2007: 95) argues that the 'uncertainty' experienced by the Kalamas was a kind of indecisiveness rather than doubt. What is implied, then, when the *sutta* enjoins the reader to abandon *vicikicchā* is that 'one overcomes indecisiveness by making a commitment rather than that one achieves epistemic certainty about the truth of statements' (Evans 2007: 95).

There is another level of ambiguity in the Kalamas' question, which as Evans points out, could mean both 'Who is telling the truth?' and 'Who is making statements that are independently true?' Both suggest that what is at stake is a different understanding of 'truth' than what was held by the Orientalist pioneers of Buddhist modernism, whose positivist interpretations continue to influence Buddhist discourse today. For the Orientalist, the pursuit of truth does not concern itself with the question of 'who' but a question of 'what can be known' (Hallisey 1995: 46). But if we were to follow Evans's reading, the emphasis shifts from 'what' to 'who'; or at least, the questions of 'what' and 'who' are inter-involved, with no clear-cut distinction or hierarchy between them. This means that the kind of truth that the Kalamas were after is not, as those favouring a modernist reading of Buddhism might argue, the truth of objective knowledge. While the question 'Who speaks the truth?' could accommodate both an inquiry about truth statements and about the honesty of the speaker, given the cosmological assumptions of the time, Evans maintains that it is

unlikely that the Kalamas drew a sharp line between these two possible modes of understanding: one ethical, the other epistemological. This underscores that fact that it cannot be unambiguously argued that the Kalamas are seeking epistemic certainty. The question of truth in this instance is as much about ethical conduct as it is about objective knowledge, or at the very least, the two are not regarded as distinct and separate.

The second point in Evans's rereading of the *sutta* is that in the criteria given by the Buddha for accepting or rejecting a teaching—'[...] when you yourself know: "These *things* are bad/good [...] blameable/not blameable [...] are censured/praised by the wise [...]"' (Soma 1994; emphasis added)—the Pali word translated as 'things' would refer more accurately to 'fundamental attitudes and actions' rather than 'doctrines' or 'truth statements'. This implies that an epistemological reading of the passage becomes unlikely, for 'it is not clear what it would mean to blame or censure statements. Neither is it clear how blame or censure would bear on their truth' (Evans 2007: 103). He further adds that the Buddha does not in fact say that one should know whether the fundamental attitudes and actions are true or false, but whether they are *wholesome* or *unwholesome*. Evans (2007: 101) thus argues, 'We would seem rather to be in the realm of ethics than of epistemology, and the *Sutta* would seem to offer a model of ethical reasoning, a method rather of determining the good than the true.'

The third point in Evans's rereading is that while a person who has attained Awakening would come to understand *kamma* and rebirth with certainty and even transcend them, there is really no way of proving the attainment in an objective manner. The Buddha appears to admit this, if only tacitly, in the text itself, when he

says that regardless of whether one attains a higher rebirth or not, a virtuous life is its own reward. This then suggests that the Buddha did not preclude a gap of uncertainty even as he enjoined the Kalamas to 'know for themselves' the harm and benefits of their own attitudes and actions. To this extent, 'knowing for oneself' what is good or evil isn't achieved *solely* by empirical 'testing' and 'verification' (which can only ever be partial) but also by an implicit appeal to wise counsel and tradition, which in turn informs one's decision to follow any teaching. Evans thus concludes:

> the method given for making a decision leaves a gap of uncertainty, which is to be filled by an act of faith. An act of faith, indeed, is what the Buddha's discourse here elicits [...] The phrase 'know for yourselves' is sometimes invoked to show that Buddhism does not require faith [or to compare Buddhist faith against other 'blind faiths'][...] [H]owever, the phrase could be translated as 'Should you yourselves come to feel that', suggesting the possibility that the method is not intended to be rigorous, and that it leaves ample room for a gap of uncertainty to be filled by faith (Evans 2007: 105).

mikenz66 echoes Evans in questioning the limits of reading Buddhism through rationalist-empiricist lenses. He recognises that the goal of *nibbāna* is unverifiable until one actually attains some degree of Awakening, which is said to take lifetimes. Yet he remains committed to—indeed, has *faith* in—Buddhism. His faith in Buddhism results not so much from epistemic certainty about *nibbāna* but from experiencing 'improvements' in his life, presumably the relative benefits of relinquishing the fundamental attitudes and actions that cause unhappiness. For mikenz66, to follow the Buddha's method of 'test for oneself' is at least as much a question of ethics as it is

of epistemology. He is willing to commit to Buddhism despite not having epistemic certainty about the goal of *nibbāna*. His decision is an act of faith that leaves open a gap of uncertainty. To this extent, he does not see how his faith could be regarded as 'less blind' than those who choose to accept sacred truth claims about 'God' or 'heaven'.

As a form of vernacular theory, mikenz66's question about the 'knowability' of the object of faith joins philosophers like Charles Taylor (2008) in problematising prevailing epistemological approaches that conflate faith with creedal commitment and that reduce belief to a matter of conscious assent. mikenz66's justifications for placing faith in the sacred claims of Buddhism derives not from epistemological certainty but from a *felt* sense of the ethical import of *embodied sensibilities* and *relational capacities* fostered via Buddhist teachings. In an analogous manner to Foucault's late work, it is arguable that mikenz66's vernacular theory of faith and its role in Buddhist spirituality resituates the imperative to 'know (for) yourself' within the ethos of the care of self as a specific application of the ongoing task of spiritual self-transformation or unbecoming—which, as I have argued, must necessarily expose itself to an ever-receding horizon of unknowingness that eludes all attempts at rationalisation, calculation and verification.

Even those on DhammaWheel who favour a demythologised, rationalist reading of Buddhism acknowledge the embodied sensibilities and relational capacities enabled by their practice, the founding role of ethicality in grounding their faith in Buddhist sacred claims. For retrofuturist—who says that he is drawn to the 'rational and straightforward teachings' of the Buddha but grapples with the 'mythological' and

'superstitious' aspects of Buddhism—faith is founded on the 'wholesome mind states' that result from following the teachings. In a pconversation, he tells me that what strengthened his faith in Buddhism was: 'Reduction in suffering [...] the practical application of the Four Noble Truths. Seeing repeatedly over time that yes, this suffering is because of craving'. Jechbi, for whom faith must be based on logic, expresses similar sentiments, conceding that it is impossible to 'know for sure' the truth of Awakening, which until realised can only remain an 'imagined future'. He chooses instead to have faith in 'suffering', our existential reality of *dukkha*:

> After all, the Buddha's entire teaching revolves around suffering and the end of suffering [...] The reality is that we're all suffering. We've mostly learned at least to some extent that short-term solutions like wealth, good-relationships, good health etc. yield only temporary results. Suffering continues. So we're motivated to practice for the end of suffering for ourselves and others [...] In Buddhism, I don't think we have blind faith in some imagine[d] future, such as arahantship. Instead, we have firm, unshakable faith in suffering, real and present in this very moment. Faith in suffering motivates us (DhammaWheel 2009a).

retrofuturist expresses similar sentiments when he says that he has experienced the 'wholesome mind states' and the 'reduction of suffering' that result from 'the practical application of the Four Noble Truths.' To this extent he can claim to have 'tested', and even to a certain degree 'verified', the Four Noble Truths. However, he cannot claim to have absolute certainty about the sacred claim of Awakening or liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Yet, the fact that he has experienced a reduction of 'suffering', developed wholesome mind states, and presumably fostered new

relational capacities with others, is enough for him to place faith in the teachings. Not unlike mikenz66, whose faith is bolstered by the experience of 'improvements' in his day-to-day circumstances, retrofuturist's faith is grounded not on epistemic certainty but on the embodied sensibilities of ethics.

This analysis of the attitudes towards faith in the 'Western Buddhist' discourse of DhammaWheel reconnects with the founding gesture of the thesis's profession of faith—this authoring-I's professed desire to critically examine the Buddhist teachings and formations he participates in *with and in* good faith. Whilst I have criticised the hegemonic imperatives underlying the rationalist interpretation of Buddhism favoured by some members of DhammaWheel, it is important that I also affirm my co-participation with these fellow practitioners in the contemporary rearticulation of Buddhist understanding and practice. That is to say, it is important that I endeavour to maintain fidelity to the thesis's promise to not fixate on 'paranoid' analyses of the ideological complicity of others, but also explore 'reparative' ones that might foster mutual recognition, respect, and relationality. Incidentally, in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Performativity, Pedagogy* (2003), which explores the critical and political benefits to be garnered from a 'reparative' approach to cultural analysis, Eve Sedgwick devotes the concluding chapter of the book to a discussion of the pedagogy of Buddhism. Reflecting on her encounters with Tibetan Buddhist teachings and academic discourses on Buddhist modernism, she asks of the latter:

> What is the force of such very critical findings? How and to whom do they matter? Common sense suggests that their impact will fall on nonacademic students of Buddhism more lightly than on scholars in the field. Not only are

> these exacting studies (most of them published by university presses) less accessible to nonscholars, but the prime motives for reading them are also likely to differ. To put it crudely, academic scholars of Buddhism are vocationally aimed at finding a path, however asymptotic, toward a knowledge of their subject(s) that would ever be less distorted by ignorance, imperialist presumption, and wishful thinking, or by characteristic thought patterns of Western culture. On the other hand, the attachment of the nonacademic reader to the truth value of readings on Buddhism may rest on a good deal more pragmatic base. The question Is this (account) accurate or misleading? may give way for these readers to the question Will this (practice) work or won't it? (Sedgwick 2003: 155)

That the non-academic Buddhist practitioner's attachment to the truth value of Buddhist teachings may rest more squarely on a pragmatic base, is evinced by the ways in which mikenz66, retrofuturist and others on DhammaWheel articulate their Buddhist faith in terms of ethical considerations, measuring the value of the Four Noble Truths in terms of the 'improvements' or reduction in *dukkha* they have experienced in their daily interactions. As to whether these non-academic lay Buddhists would find the exacting studies on the hegemonic imperatives of Buddhist modernism inaccessible, I am inclined to postulate that their displayed aptitude for 'vernacular theory' and sustained collective work of interpreting, critiquing, and cross-referencing canonical discourses, translations and commentaries, is indicative of a range of analytical capacities to engage in 'scholarship' and critical inquiry. But even if some members of DhammaWheel (or non-academic lay Buddhists in general) may not in fact find academic discourses inaccessible, it is another issue altogether

whether they would be interested in academic research or be inclined to interrogate the prevailing imperialist and/or Western-centric presumptions behind their engagement with modern translations of Buddhist teachings.

I have on several occasions shared on DhammaWheel the findings of my research on the historical contingency of the emergence of 'Western Buddhism' (see, for example, DhammaWheel 2011, 2013a, 2013b). It is difficult to objectively ascertain how my views have been received, but a survey of existing responses to my posts indicates varying degrees of resistance, scepticism, curiosity, and receptivity towards the academic perspectives I share. A recurring objection is that the authors of the studies I cite (for example, Lopez 1995, 1998, 2008; Sharf 1993, 1995) are merely engaging in an exercise of 'intellectualising' or 'theorising' Buddhism and not 'practising' it. This is a problematic claim: firstly, because it disavows the collective work of knowledge production or 'theorising' that participants of DhammaWheel in fact perform and rely on to make sense of their Buddhist practice, regardless of whether they consider themselves 'scholars' or engage with scholarly discourses or not; secondly, it is a fallacious claim since the Buddhist scholar-practitioners' academic research on modern, 'Western' translations of Buddhism mutually supports their sacred commitment to honour Buddhist teachings, and is even expressive of a shared profession of faith in Buddhist sacred truths. We brush up here against a similar problematic faced by studies on media fandom: the moral dualisms posited between academic-fans and fan-academics (Hills 2002) mirror those posited between the Buddhist academic-lay follower and Buddhist lay follower-academic.

I touch on this issue to flag it as a key challenge to be addressed in the development of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection discourses that would investigate questions of cultural expertise and hierarchies of values in contemporary Buddhist formations. But more pertinently, for the present task of formulating a hypothesis about faith, my point is that whilst the scholar-practitioners' engagement with Buddhist sacred truth claims would be oriented to some extent by the vocational imperatives of research and/or critique, inasmuch as they are also cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path leading to Awakening, their relation to the truth values of Buddhism ought not be regarded as dissymmetric to that of non-academic Buddhist lay followers. Irrespective of the specific skill sets (i.e. academic know-how or otherwise) by which a Buddhist art of living is cultivated, such an ongoing life-practice must necessarily entail a pragmatic inquiry of 'Will this (practice) work or won't it?', or more precisely, 'Is this (practice) enabling a greater capacity to recognise the many dimensions of *dukkha* and bringing about its easing?' My argument, therefore, is that to some degree or another, an academic Buddhist committed to the Four Noble Truths would be engaging in a mode of ethical reflection not dissimilar to the ethical process of 'verification' and 'testing' performed by DhammaWheel members like mikenz66, retrofuturist and Jechbi. This is a pragmatic base of becoming more attuned to *affective capacities* and *embodied sensibilities*, by which one develops trust and conviction—*a profession of faith*—in Buddhist teachings.

This thesis has been an attempt to articulate in the language of academia, and specifically the language of poststructuralist continental philosophy, how I am 'testing' and 'verifying' the Buddha's teaching; or to be more precise, since I am concerned with *embodied sensibilities* or the *affective, visceral registers* of ethical

commitment rather than epistemological truths, how I have come to 'feel' rather than 'know' my decision for accepting Buddhist sacred truth claims. Like mikenz66 and others, this decision is grounded on the lived experience of cultivating wholesomeness and openness towards the reality of *dukkha*. I have attempted to work through these feelings of trust and conviction in Buddhist sacred understandings with the help of academic practice. In view of the analyses of the preceding chapters, my faith in Buddhist sacred claims is as much nourished by the ethical sensibilities and affective capacities I have cultivated via Buddhist practice as the deconstructive and Foucauldian ethico-political itineraries. In regard to the foregoing discussion on Buddhist faith, the ethical outlooks described by Foucault's research on the Ancient Greek precept of *epimeleia heautou* (the care of self) appear to resonate at the same pitch as Evans's rereading of the Buddha's ethical advice to the Kalamas. To paraphrase Foucault, the Buddha's advice appears to suggest that transformative truth ought not be sought via purely objective means but with recourse to spiritual self-cultivation, whereby truth is allowed to arrive by way of the movement of *askēsis*, as the transfiguring '"rebound" ("*de retour*") effects' (Foucault 2005: 16) of one's effort at transforming the relationship of self to (not-)self and others—an art of living as a movement of un-becoming.

The undecidability of faith and faith in undecidability

From the idea that a Buddhist practitioner could foster trust and conviction in Buddhist teachings vis-à-vis ethical considerations of one's relative wellbeing in relation to others, I shall now extrapolate a hypothesis about faith that could be explored by 'believers' or 'non-believers' alike (within Buddhist or academic contexts or otherwise). In light of how the Kalamas' decision to overcome indecisiveness does

not eliminate uncertainty as such, I want to posit that to cultivate an art of living is to work productively with the *undecidability of faith and to profess faith in undecidability*. For in order for it to be an *ongoing* practice of freedom or Awakening, one has to make the decision to persist with it and constantly double back on the actions of mind, body, and speech—that is to say, to accept that one's decision never overcomes the open, futural horizon of possibility without which there is no movement in the first place: undecidability. How else to perform the ceaseless work of unbecoming? This idea that ethical decision (or any decision) never overcomes but is rather made possible by undecidability is informed by Derrida's writings.

If an art of living cannot but begin as a repeated decision in the face of undecidability—an ongoing task of critique, crafting, mindfulness, waiting—is this commitment to always become otherwise also a commitment to what Derrida calls *l'avenir*, the absolute future *to come*, to which we can only say yes, 'yes' to the 'perhaps'?[2] In discussing what comes before (but not in any temporal sense) religion and reason, Derrida (2002: 47) paints this arresting image: 'an abyss [...] a desert in a desert, there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could—*perhaps*—be yet to come.' A call for and of faith? *Perhaps*? Derrida says:

> This experience of the "perhaps" would be that of both the possible and impossible, of the possible as impossible. If all that arises is what is already

[2] To engage in yet another *jeu d'esprit*, what if we cross-read the deconstructive idea of undecidability with the suggestive, if debatable, implications of Libet's finding of the half-second delay. As discussed in the previous chapter, one possible conclusion to be drawn from the half-second delay is that our capacity to steer or veto action—which is already underway by the time we become consciously aware of the decision to act—involves a backward referral in time. So perhaps, in a manner of speaking, a decision is always late on arrival, already preceded by a movement of trace, and always finding itself having to depart yet again to make another leap—of faith?

> possible, and so capable of being anticipated and expected, that is not an event. The event is possible only coming from the impossible. It arises *like* the coming of the impossible, at the point where a *perhaps* deprives us of all certainty and leaves the future to the future. This *perhaps* is necessarily allied to a *yes*: yes, yes to whoever or whatever comes about (Derrida 2005a: 74).

'Perhaps' bridges the space between the possible and the impossible, or what Caputo explicates as the future present and the absolute future. The future present refers to the momentum of the present towards a future we can reasonably anticipate; hence we maintain a savings account, for instance. The absolute future, however, is the unforeseeable future that shatters 'the comfortable horizons of expectation that surround the present' (Caputo 2001: 8; 1997a: 69-87). Unlike the future present, it offers no horizon to orientate our calculations or expectations. The absolute future makes all knowledge of what might be possible *impossible*—impossible because it is wholly outside the order of what can be *reason*ably anticipated. Yet, this unforeseeable future to come is the condition of possibility for calculation or expectations—for *any* decision. Thus, every decision cannot but expose itself to undecidability, always given up and over as a pledge (of faith?) to the absolute future to come, *l'avenir*, the impossible—not unlike a sacrifice (more on this below).

The aporetic logic of undecidability running through such Derridean motifs as *l'avenir*, justice, hospitality, and the gift informs Caputo's conceptualisation of a 'religious sense of life' demanding nothing less than faith, love, and hope. By 'the religious' Caputo is not specifically referring to, but doesn't exclude, organised religion. Rather, he evokes 'the religious' to designate 'a basic structure of our lives [...] that should be

placed alongside very basic things, like having an artistic sense or political sense' (Caputo 2001: 8-9). Derrida, informed in part and subversively by his own Jewish heritage, has himself described this structure of experience as 'messianicity without messianism' or the messianic, which refers to 'the opening to the future or to the coming of the other as the advent of justice, but without horizon of expectation and without prophetic prefiguration [...] At issue there is "a general structure of experience"' (Derrida 2002: 56). The messianic does not belong properly to the Abrahamic religions nor does it require a messiah, for to give it specific content is to circumscribe it within a determinable horizon which the absolute future makes impossible. *Messianicity is not a horizon but the shattering of the horizon* (Caputo 1997a: 118). For Derrida (2002: 56), this 'abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and of a trust that "founds" all relation to the other in testimony.' In *Specters of Marx*, he speaks of the affinity between Marx's messianic spirit and deconstruction's affirmation of unconditional justice to come as 'the movement of an experience open to the absolute future of what is coming, that is to say, a necessarily indeterminate, abstract, desert-like experience that is confided, exposed, given up to its waiting for the other and for the event' (Derrida 1994: 90).

Messianicity is another name for undecidability, the possible-impossible aporia that sets the condition of possibility for temporal experience. Martin Hägglund, whom Oksala cites in her reading of Foucault's tacit affirmation of messianic politics, has criticised theologically-informed approaches to deconstruction, citing Caputo's writings on 'religion without religion' as exemplary of what he claims are 'wrongheaded' reading of Derrida's itinerary (Hägglund 2008: 116). A detailed study of

Hägglund's criticism of deconstructive theologians is important for understanding the implications of the so-called 'religious turn' in Derrida's thinking, but I cannot undertake this task here. For the purpose of this chapter, I shall outline the salient points of Hägglund's quarrel with Caputo's work to clarify two crucial points. First, that faith remains relevant even for atheism (or a radical atheism as Hägglund envisions it, at any rate). Second, to evoke Connolly's terminology, the faith I'm professing assumes a stance of 'radical immanence' that strives to be hospitable to 'mundane transcendence', a stance which, I will argue, is shared by Buddhist, Foucauldian, and Derridean thought and practice.

Debating the im-possible: radical atheism against God

Hägglund disputes Caputo's (1997a: xxi, xx) claims that Derrida's passion for the impossible testifies to 'the religious aspiration of deconstruction', and that 'the impossible, being impassioned by the impossible, is the religious, is religious passion.' These sentiments are accompanied in Caputo's work by such assertions as, 'with God all things are possible, above all *the* impossible', and, 'with God everything is possible, even *the* impossible' (1997a: 114, 113). Caputo also evokes a passage from the Gospel of Mark (10:27), 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible'. For Hägglund this statement is the matrix for Caputo's misreading of Derrida. The main point of contention in this debate is that Caputo reduces Derrida's passion for the impossible 'to the passion of prophetic eschatology', which Hägglund (2008: 120) contends, the former wrongheadedly 'detects in Derrida's writings on justice and the gift'. Hägglund argues instead that Derrida's work professes a radical atheism; if the 'structure of the trace entails that everything is subjected to the infinite finitude of time [...] any notion of God as a positive infinity is contradicted

from within by the spacing of time, which cannot be appropriated by religion' (Hägglund 2008: 143). It is understandable why Hägglund takes issue with Caputo's apparent belief in God as a positive infinity, such as when the latter claims that whilst absolute justice may be impossible within the legal orders of the human estate, it would not be so in 'the kingdom of God, where God rules' (1997a: 224). Following the deconstructive logic of contamination—the aporetic condition of undecidability—judicial systems cannot but admit the possibility of injustice every time they give the open horizon of absolute justice the form of a determinate law, as they must, whether it be the meting out of recompense or punishment. Yet, we find Caputo (1997a: 113, 114) saying that God 'will count our every tear', letting 'justice flow like water over the land' and 'letting justice come "for all of God's children"'. The same appeal to 'God' is made in his discussion of the pure gift, which although impossible where human relations are concerned, is not so for God who 'is love and what God gives is best, because God's will, God's heart, is good through and through', and 'every good gift is from God' (Caputo 1997a: 225, 229).

Hägglund thus alleges that under Caputo's treatment the impossible is figured as an ideal possibility that we desire, but which is inaccessible because of our mortality. Such an understanding, Hägglund claims, is the opposite of Derrida's passion for the impossible, which does not posit an inaccessible ideal, but rather 'what is most undeniably real' (Derrida 2005b: 84). The impossible is undeniably real because 'it answers to the spacing of time that divides everything within itself' (Hägglund 2008: 121). The impossibility of being in itself is not a negative predicament to be overcome, since the spacing of time or movement of trace marking the absent present is constitutive of the experience of 'what is'. Hägglund further argues that such spacing

'is quite incompatible with the religious ideal of absolute immunity' (seemingly posited by Caputo's unabashed talk of God), since the spacing of time 'makes it impossible for anything to be good in itself [and] opens the possibility of alteration and corruption from the first inception' (Hägglund 2008: 121). As Derrida (2005a: 90) puts it, it is important to keep open the question: 'how is it possible [...] that what renders possible renders impossible the very thing that it renders possible, and introduces; but as its chance, a chance that is not negative, a principle of ruin in the very thing that it is promising or promoting?' In other words, to profess passion for the impossible is not to desire what is above or beyond the possible, but to accept that what is desired is constituted by temporal finitude, the impossibility for it to be in itself.

Time makes the gift possible, since gifting is dependent upon temporality. Yet, temporality is precisely what makes the gift impossible, since time can never be in itself. Hägglund argues that because the most desirable gift 'cannot be immune from its own alteration', to say that the impossible gift is possible in the kingdom of God is to cancel out the condition of the gift. For a gift that is pure in itself cannot be given; 'nothing can be given without a temporal interval that opens the possibility of violent loss and corruption' (Hägglund 2008: 122-123). The same logic applies to absolute justice, which is not possible without the spacing of time that allows unpredictable events to rupture the generality of law. Yet, the coming of time is precisely what renders it impossible by exposing any juridical decision to the possibility that it may be unjust. Hägglund thus argues that Caputo's claim that the impossibility of absolute justice is overcome in the kingdom of God cancels out the very condition of justice:

> Derrida's argument is, on the contrary, that it is quite impossible for there to be an absolute justice that is immune to injustice or a gift that is immune from being a poison. This impossibility is not negative, but the possibility of any justice or gift. Justice must be open to injustice and the gift must be open to being a poison, since neither justice nor the gift can be given in itself (Hägglund 2008: 123).

On the whole, I agree with Hägglund's exposition of the deconstructive logic of the im-possible. However, I am not persuaded by his claim that Caputo evokes 'God' as a religious ideal of 'absolute immunity'. Hägglund appears to read the 'kingdom of God', or just 'God', as a straightforward transcendental. But are Caputo's evocations of these words as straightforward or unambiguous as Hägglund makes them out to be? The section of Caputo's book 'Deconstruction and the Kingdom of God' (from which Hägglund picks out the allusions to the 'kingdom of God') explains at the outset that what is being proposed is a 'demystified, deconstructed' Christianity that 'does not turn on making earthly payments on long-term, deferred celestial returns but on giving, pure and simple'; and that the '"kingdom" [...] is not the deferred reward for present sacrifice but the future present [...] organized around giving and forgiving [...] not the hypersacrifice of a God, of a divine immolation.' Caputo also rearticulates the kingdom as 'a kingdom of gifts', evoking the parables in the gospel of Matthew of the birds and lilies to claim that 'faith means to live without keeping count, without taking account (*sine ratione*), and to say yes, a number of yes, *oui, oui*, again and again, each day, day by day.' (Caputo 1997a: 224). 'The kingdom', Caputo (1997a: 225) writes, 'is the call of the other, and the kingdom is here and now'. Consider also his reflections on the point, 'Nothing is safe':

> If deconstruction were a theory, it would be a theory that nothing is safe, pure, clean, uncontaminated, monochromatic, unambiguous; nothing is "simply exterior" to the circle of self-interest. Deconstruction is a quasi-theory of undecidability [...] Deconstruction is an exploration of as many "instants" of undecidability as it has time (as it is given time) to study. Its "solution" to the question of undecidability shows a trend: it always tends to say that the undecidability is permanent, that undecidability is first, last, and always, but that decisions must be made and indecision broken, that paralysis is a condition of possibility and impossibility of motion [...] One begins where one is and does all that one can, keeping our narcissism as open-ended and hospitable as possible; the rest is beyond us. The pure gift, a gift pure and simple, is im/possible, a condition of possibility and impossibility, and impossible passion, an impossible that impassions (Caputo 1997a: 225).

These passages, in and of themselves, do not invalidate Hägglund's criticism of Caputo writings, a comprehensive discussion of which I cannot undertake here; in the larger context of the latter's work, there could very well be misreadings of Derrida in the language of Christianity. But given that these passages suspend received 'celestial' or 'divine' interpretations of the 'kingdom of God', they do at least indicate that they need to be taken into account—certainly if Hägglund (2008: 122) is going to allege that Caputo 'reads the paradox of impossibility in the wrong direction', or that to evoke the 'kingdom of God' is to harbour 'the dream of an absolute immunity, where the good would be immune to evil, justice immune to injustice, and the gift immune from being a poison' (2008: 120). Had the proposal to put '~~God~~' under erasure, and the above

reflections on the paradox of the impossible not been omitted from discussion, how surefooted would Hägglund's (2008: 127) argument appear to be: that writers like Caputo 'rely on an absolute presence' even as they lay claim to thinking beyond the metaphysics of presence?

A related question concerns Hägglund's (2008: 11) claim that his approach to Derrida's oeuvre is 'analytical rather than exegetical', an assertion presumably made with deconstructive theologians in mind, who would ostensibly lean towards an exegetical approach. Insofar as the purpose of Hägglund's (2008: 11) work is 'to develop [Derrida's] arguments, fortify his logic, and pursue its implications', I do think that he has presented a cogent thesis for a radical atheist logic at work in Derridean deconstruction. However, to seek recourse from the same logic of undecidability and contamination that he hopes to rescue from supposedly 'wrongheaded' readings of Derrida, I wonder if, in the final analysis (whatever that may look like), it would be possible to draw a sharp line between the analytical and the exegetical, a distinction that Caputo does not (nor even Derrida!) profess to maintain. Indeed, Caputo's writings (and even more so Derrida's!) perform a playful co-contamination of the analytical with the exegetical: undecidability.

My point in problematising Hägglund's critique of 'religious' deconstruction is not to refute a possible reading of radical atheism in Derrida's writings per se. Hägglund concedes that his thesis, like any other, is liable to betray inconsistencies. Nevertheless, he maintains that 'even if one is able to find passages in Derrida that cannot be salvaged by the logic of radical atheism [...] in order to turn these inconsistencies into an argument against the logic of radical atheism [...] one has to

show that they are not in fact inconsistencies but rather testify to the operation in Derrida of a different logic altogether' (Hägglund 2008: 12). I have neither demonstrated the inconsistencies in the logic of radical atheism nor testified to the operation of a different logic in Derrida's work. If anything, I want to do the opposite. I affirm Hägglund's argument about the paradox of the impossible. As per my Derridean reading of the bodhisattva vows in Chapter Three, I am very much in agreement with Hägglund (2008: 122) when he says: 'For Derrida, the impossibility of being in itself opens the possibility for everything. The impossible must remain impossible, since only the impossibility of being in itself allows anything to happen'. But doesn't Caputo affirm the same, despite his predilection for the allegorical prose of biblical writings and unabashed passion of and for the Christ? And here is the rub: *what if a passion for the impossible, being always and already divided within itself, is so committed to unconditional hospitality towards the other that it may impassion the hopes and aspirations, the endless decisions, of 'believers' and 'nonbelievers' alike?*

So perhaps faith is pertinent to both the religious and non-religious (Christians, Buddhists, theists, atheists, agnostics, or otherwise), since our experience as mortal beings is necessarily temporal—is given time; a gift of time—haunted by the trace of difference. Which is to say that faith makes a relation to alterity possible. Derrida writes: 'I do not *see* the other, I do not *see* what he or she has in mind, or whether he or she wants to deceive me. So I have to trust the other—that is faith. *Faith is blind*.' (Derrida 1999a: 80) The implication, then, is that faith as such is never at rest, but is rather a movement that is prised open by change, by chance, by the incalculable future to come, by the fact that trust *may* be violated or deceived. Otherwise, why trust, why have faith, why the need for fidelity, why promise? In the *Politics of*

Friendship, Derrida (1997: 16) says that 'this break with calculable reliability and with the assurance of certainty—in truth, with knowledge—is ordained by the very structure of confidence or of credence as faith'. Such a faith, impassioned by the paradox of the impossible, makes its leap from the aporetic space of undecidability; from the groundless ground of the future present, faith extends a welcoming hand to the absolute future to come. This is how Hägglund puts it:

> There can be no relation to the other and no experience in general without such faith in the mutable. We can never know for sure what will happen because experience is predicated on the unpredictable coming of time. Whatever we do, we place faith in a future that may shatter our hopes and lay to waste what we desire' (2008: 126).

I want to take a moment here to return to the debate on DhammaWheel regarding 'blind faith'. We have seen how mikenz66 probes the limits of the argument that Buddhist faith is not blind because it is 'based on knowledge'. Since Awakening is said to be beyond discursivity and takes lifetimes to attain, he asks: 'So, until then we are taking it on trust, aren't we?' mikenz66 also questions his interlocutors' attempts to secure their argument with the claim that where monotheistic faith (or to be more precise, their reductive understanding of monotheistic faith) promises heavenly peace and joy to come after death, Buddhism posits that the peace and joy of the promise of Awakening could be experienced in this very life. For mikenz66, this simply asserts 'a difference in timing, not a difference in "knowability"' (DhammaWheel 2009a). As a form of vernacular theory, the discussion between DhammaWheel members brushes up against similar problematics as those

confronting the discourses of professional scholars like Hägglund and Caputo: the spacing of time marking the limits of knowability, which testifies to the finitude of our existence; the horizon of impossibility that makes possible response-ability, trust, confidence, fidelity, faith.

My answer to mikenz66's question about how one could argue that Buddhist faith is less blind than other faiths is that Buddhist faith *is* blind—but *not*, as the term is typically used, in the sense that Buddhist faith demands unquestioning trust in or obedience towards any particular creedal proposition. Rather, it is because *faith cannot see*, or at least because it is not the duty of faith to see. Faith *feels* its way around, accepting that it is always and already divided within itself by the spacing of time. We have seen how the Buddha's discourse to the Kalamas articulates a piece of ethical advice about the ways to discern feelings of unwholesomeness and/or cultivate trust and confidence in feelings of wholesomeness. This is a piece of advice about how one ought to act on one's limited capacity to know, so that in the face of uncertainty one may make decisions that would be conducive to the easing of *dukkha* for oneself and others. These decisions do not resolve undecidability; undecidability is what allows for the making of decisions. Reading the profession of faith articulated in this Buddhist discourse alongside Derridean professions of faith, perhaps it would not be inappropriate to evoke Caputo (1997a: 63) to describe it as 'faith without faith', where 'undecidability is the first, last, and constant, the element, the space in which faith makes its leap, the horizon in terms of which faith understands its limits, understands that it is faith, through a trace darkly.'

Between an immanent and transcendent horizon of faith

These debates about faith give voice to the tensions in micropolitics between existential orientations of immanence and transcendence. As we have seen, a micropolitics of becoming contested at the level of perception seeks to harness the ethical and political force of non-rational or pre-conscious processes, contestations about which discourses on affect provide an important set of analytical tools. In making a profession of faith, my aim is to furnish this set of analytical tools with the hypothesis that *faith is irreducible to any ontotheological proposition, an affective response that reverberates through the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers' alike*. Or to put it another way, *I want to propose 'faith' as a conceptual category for investigating the affective dimensions of contemporary life, one that is no less pertinent to scholarly than to sacred pursuits*. Connolly's work is again instructive. By working with the understanding that in a world of becoming '[e]xperience, experiment, reflection, cultivation of spiritual sensibility, and resolute action are five dimensions that cannot stray far from each other', he draws attention to the role of faith in orientating existential stances that place hope in either immanence or transcendence:

> A comparative element of contestable faith enters each camp, even though new events and arguments may conjoin to put pressure on this or that version of either. We [who are committed to an existential stance of immanence] define the term "faith" in a way that touches but does not correspond completely to some transcendent readings of it. *Faith to us means a contestable element in belief that extends beyond indubitable experience or rational necessity but permeates your engagement with the world* (Connolly 2011: 39; emphasis added).

Connolly does not engage with Derrida's writings, but it seems to me that his conceptualisation of faith resonates with deconstructive ones; since from a Derridean perspective, rational necessity is always exceeded by supplementarity and experience always emptied of indubitable presence by *différance*—the spacing of time, the gap of undecidability—from and over which faith cannot but make its leap. Regarding thinkers like Spinoza, Deleuze, and Foucault as kindred spirits, Connolly (2011: 43) professes a faith that is guided by an existential stance of radical immanence: 'By immanence I mean a philosophy of becoming in which the universe is not dependent on a higher power. It is reducible neither to mechanistic materialism, dualism, theo-teleology, nor the absent God of minimal theology'. Connolly develops this understanding with the help of Deleuze and Guattari, who present the case for radical immanence, firstly, by challenging the idea of transcendence lodged 'in the mind of a god, or in the unconscious of life, of the soul, or of language [...] always inferred'; and secondly, by affirming historically contingent 'relations of movement and rest, speed and slowness between unformed elements, or at least between elements that are relatively unformed, molecules and particles of all kinds (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 266).' The concept of 'force-field' examined in the previous chapter derives from such a philosophy of 'movement and rest', which proceeds on an understanding of causality as *emergent*. Hence, radical immanence diverges from mechanistic materialism, in that it does not reduce 'the dicey process by which new entities and processes periodically surge into being' to efficient causality (Connolly 2011: 44). What is especially pertinent to the present discussion is how emergent causality accommodates and even exposes the otherwise:

> Emergent causality consists of resonances within and between force-fields in a way that is causal but beyond the power to isolate and separate all elements in determinate ways. An element of mystery or uncertainty is attached to emergent causality (Connolly 2011: 174).

At the present juncture, my sacred-scholarly life-practice appears to be drawn towards radical immanence. I would say that the Buddhist-Foucauldian art of living, which mutually supports this Buddhist-Derridean profession of faith I'm articulating, shares Connolly's (2011: 70) faith in 'an open temporal horizon exceeding human mastery', an immanent naturalism that is 'irreducible to both closed naturalism and radical transcendence'. Yet, I say this not without a degree of ambivalence, and indeed, *undecidability*. Let me try to articulate this via Charles Taylor's description of how life in a secular age is experienced within an immanent frame or immanent order: 'Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it' (2007: 543-544). Existential orientations that push towards openness are those that understand the human good to be 'consubstantial' with the transcendent, whether it be conceived as 'God' or something ontically higher than the human. For those oriented in this manner, the good is conceived with reference to the transcendent in some form. Existential orientations that push towards closure are those that regard the human good as intrinsically immanent. For those oriented in this manner, the good is conceived without appeal to the transcendent, which may even be regarded as inimical to human flourishing: 'The human good is in its very essence sensual, earthly; whoever identifies a transcendent goal departs from it, betrays it' (Taylor 2007: 547). A crucial point to note here is that 'going one way or another [immanence or

transcendence] requires what is often called "a leap of faith"' (Taylor 2007: 550). What Taylor means by a 'leap of faith' dovetails with the hypothesis I have formulated with the help of the Buddha's advice to the Kalamas, and Derridean deconstruction—that is, faith as the anticipatory confidence generated by our felt sense of this worldly life; faith as that which supports the hopes and aspirations of religious and non-religious individuals alike. Taylor says:

> What pushes us one way or the other is what we might describe as our over-all take on human life, and its cosmic and (if any) spiritual surroundings. People's stance on the issue of belief in God, or of an open versus closed understanding of the immanent frame, usually emerge out of this general sense of things.
>
> This can hardly be simply arbitrary. If pressed, one can often articulate a whole host of considerations which motivate this stance, such as our sense of what is really important in human life, or the ways we think human life can be transformed, or the constants, if any, of human history, and so on.
>
> But the take goes beyond these particulate insights. Moreover, these themselves can be changed through further events and experience. In this way, our over-all sense of things anticipates or leaps ahead of the reasons we can muster for it. It is something in the nature of a hunch; perhaps we might better speak here of "anticipatory confidence" (2007: 550-551).

Following Taylor's account, proponents of, say, liberation theology, would belong to the first camp—existential orientations that tend towards openness—since they are

supported by anticipatory confidence in God as consubstantial with the human good and the striving for this greater good for all. Proponents of new atheism like Richard Dawkins, on the other hand, would belong to the second camp—existential orientations that tend towards closure—since they reject the notion of the transcendent as a threat to the human good and are supported by anticipatory confidence in the explanations of materialist naturalism. But things are not so stark or straightforward. Even with these examples, which for the sake of argument I'm invoking not so much as empirical constituencies but as two possible positions located on a discursive spectrum, there could be what Taylor calls 'cross-pressures':

> [W]e must also remember that there always have been a great many people who have been cross-pressured between the two basic orientations; who want to respect as much as they can the "scientific" shape of the immanent order as they have been led to see it; or who fear the effect of religious "fanaticism"; but who still cannot help believing that there is something more than the merely immanent [...] What emerges from all this is that we can either see the transcendent as a threat, a dangerous temptation, a distraction, or an obstacle to our greatest good. Or we can read it as answering to our deepest craving, need, fulfilment of the good. Or else since religion has very often been the first: think of the long line that runs from Aztec sacrifice, through Torquemada, to Bin Laden; the question really is whether it is only threat, or doesn't also offer a promise (And we might add the question whether *only* religion poses this kind of threat; the twentieth century, through the figures of Stalin, Hitler, and Pol Pot, seems to indicate the contrary) (Taylor 2007: 549).

So a deconstructive theologian like Caputo, who seeks to welcome 'the kingdom of ~~God~~', recognises his embeddedness within the immanent order. Yet, professing a passion for the impossible, he still holds open the possibility of an unexpected, unforeseeable something more than the merely immanent. A radical atheist like Hägglund, on the other hand, who regards deconstructive readings of '~~God~~' as 'wrongheaded', appears to view any notion of the transcendent as a danger. Yet, professing a passion for the impossible, he does not close off the possibility of unimaginable radical change, and even the ruin of the immanent order as such. In which case, we could ask whether Taylor, who professes faith in the movement from immanence to transcendence and regards an existential orientation of pure immanence as 'closed', has closed himself off to how the latter could nevertheless be 'open'?

To further pluralise Taylor's ideas, Connolly distinguishes between two ways of conceptualising 'transcendence'. On the one hand, there is radical transcendence, which he takes to mean 'a God who creates, informs, governs, or inspires activity in the mundane world while also exceeding the awareness of its participants' (Connolly 2011: 74). On the other, there is mundane transcendence, which refers to 'any activity outside a nonhuman force-field or human awareness that may then cross into it, making a difference to what the latter becomes or interacting with it in fecund or destructive ways, often without being susceptible to full representation before crossing or explanation by means of efficient causation after it' (2011: 74). Connolly neither professes faith in radical transcendence nor pretends that he has disproven it. What he professes is radical immanence 'replete with multiple, often fugitive

encounters with mundane transcendence', an existential orientation that 'is *open* to the outside, even though it omits a place for personal divinity' (Connolly 2011: 75).

This version of an 'open' radical immanence resonates with my sacred-scholarly sensibilities; and I wonder if the members of DhammaWheel affirm a form of radical immanence too, since their 'vernacular theory' of faith regards the coming to terms with the experience of dissatisfactoriness immanent to mundane existence as a pragmatic, productive way to maintain fidelity to and actualise the promise of the transcendence of *dukkha*, proclaimed by the Buddha's Awakening to the so-called 'Unconditioned' or 'Deathless', which remains unconjecturable as such within the limits of reason or 'knowability'. In any event, that an existential stance of radical immanence is open to mundane transcendence means that it may be hospitable to the Buddhist sacred truth of Awakening, which I have interpreted in a limited, 'mundane' manner. Hence, the detour into Taylor's claims about the push and pull of 'openness' or 'closure' within the immanent frame of our secular age to qualify my profession of radical immanence.

The interpretation of Awakening I have been working with dovetails with Connolly's understanding of an immanent practice of (un)becoming that strives to invite the outside of quotidian experience via adjustments in embodiment, perception, conduct and sentiment, as well as experimentations with duration. To paraphrase Connolly, the event of the outside of thought interrupting sedimented habits of the body-mind to mutually transform each other, may not be representable or intelligible until its rupture in consciousness—or we could evoke Foucauldian terminology to say—until the movement of transgression traverses and marks the line of limit: an endless

crossing (see Chapter Five). Radical immanence is 'open' to the extent that it allows itself to be surprised by mundane transcendence, which may arrive by way of what Massumi (2002: 76) describes as 'transductive conversion [...] an ontological vector that in-gathers a heterogeneity of substantial elements along with the already-constituted abstraction of language ("meaning") and delivers them to change.'

This reading of Awakening in terms of radical immanence does not close off the possibility of an unconditioned awareness of phenomenal reality and selfhood—that closure in academic discourses on non-Western wisdom traditions that Richard King (1999, 2009) cautions against. It also allows critical dialogue to move beyond the impasse that has stalled around the claim that Buddhist strategies of disrupting the metaphysics of presence and logocentrism are, by virtue of 'religious' meditative praxis, more 'radical' than the 'philosophical' theorising of Derridean deconstruction (see Chapter Two). But even as I interpret Awakening in terms of so-called mundane transcendence, it is important that I also acknowledge traditional Buddhist beliefs that posit celestial realms of gods and deities 'higher' than human and earthly existence. Together with the 'lower' realms of ghosts and hell-beings, they spin round as the endless cycle of rebirth or *samsāra*, the transcendence of which is Awakening.

For instance, my late paternal grandmother was a devotee of the Pure Land tradition, the most widely practiced form of Buddhism in East Asia. The central practice is the recitation of mantras, the aim of which is to attain a 'higher' rebirth in the Buddha realm of the Pure Land, which is said to precipitate the process of liberation from *dukkha* that transcends all realms of rebirth. So even though Buddhism does not posit a creator God, a case could be made that a streak of radical transcendence traces

through Buddhist ideals, in that they posit the possibility of 'crossing' over to a wholly other plane of sentiency that is ontically 'higher' than or 'beyond' both the human and the Divine. I do not want to close off this reading, lest I perpetuate critical blindness to the continuing ideological subversion of traditional Asian Buddhist understandings, customs, and practices—as I may have in my initial enthusiasm for rationalist interpretations of Buddhism as a new 'Western Buddhist' convert.

Another reason I qualify my existential commitment to radical immanence is because I remain ambivalent about some aspects of Caputo's and Hägglund's readings of Derrida, even while I find inspiration in both—one looking to welcome the transcendent, the other resolutely immanent. Where Caputo is concerned, I cannot say that I share his Christian faith as such, since I am quite openly a lapsed postcolonial Christian convert–turned–atheist–turned–'Western Buddhist' convert. As I attempted to show in Chapter Two, the conditioning of my Christian upbringing—and perhaps more importantly, my relationship to my Christian partner—is not something I can or ought to be able to easily disavow. Curiously, whilst I do not self-identify as 'Christian', and for all intents and purposes I would describe myself (or be described by others) as not-'Christian', I do not feel un-'Christian' as such. Perhaps this is why I am still able to find inspiration in Caputo's allusions to biblical verses and his evocation of '~~God~~'. Yet, I am not prepared to call myself an atheist, not least because of the pathologising effects that can be and have been generated by the imperialist, Western-centric presumptions of atheist discourses on traditional Buddhist understandings or the sacred customs of non-Western lifeworlds more generally. So whilst I am sympathetic to Hägglund's attempt to maintain fidelity to deconstructive ideals, I am cautious about the unacknowledged inhospitality of his

atheist discourse, in that it appears too ready to make a final decision about the im-possible relationship between the immanent and transcendent. To my understanding, atheism, or even a radical atheism, turns on the assumption that 'God' or radical transcendence can be disproven, if not presupposing that it has already been disproven. This, however, remains an open question. Derrida himself, who in seeking to affirm the im-possible relation between the immanent and the transcendent, not only occasionally evokes 'God' in his writings,[3] but is also careful to avoid declaring that he *is* an atheist, saying instead that he *passes* for one:

> My own understanding of faith is that there is faith whenever one gives up not only any certainty but also any determined hope. If one says that resurrection is the horizon of one's hope then—since one knows what one names when one says "resurrection"—faith is not pure faith. It is already knowledge [...] That is why you have to be an atheist of this sort [someone who "rightly passes for an atheist"] in order to be true to faith, to pure faith (Derrida 2004: 12-13).

Awaiting the 'perhaps' with Derrida and Foucault

If this profession of faith I am articulating adopts an existential stance of radical immanence, it is perhaps more accurate to say that it arises out of what Connolly calls

[3] How can another see into me, into my most secret self, without my being able to see in there myself and without my being able to see him in me? And if my secret self, that which can be revealed only to the other, to the wholly other, to God if you wish, is a secret that I will never reflect on, that I will never know or experience or possess as my own, then what sense is there in saying that it is "my" secret, or in saying more generally that a secret belongs, that it is proper to or belongs to some "one," or to some other who remains some one? It is perhaps there that we find the secret of secrecy, namely, that it is not a matter of knowing and that it is there for no-one. A secret doesn't belong, it can never be said to be at home or in its place.... The question of the self: "who am I?" not in the sense of "who am I" but "who is this 'I' that can say "who"? What is the "I," and what becomes of responsibility once the identity of the "I" trembles in secret?" (Derrida 1995: 92)

'"the immanence of transcendence", by which productive conjunctions between disparate traditions engender a positive intensification of life [...] Such amplifications can enlarge a sensibility of presumptive generosity to others, including those devoted to radical transcendence' (2011: 75). The productive tensions generated by the immanence of transcendence have shaped the work of the two key thinkers inspirin this profession of faith: Derrida and Foucault, both of whom displayed presumptive generosity towards religious knowledge-practices, sharing a commitment to be open to unknowingness or the outside. Arthur Bradley (2002: 65), for instance, has examined the way the two have attempted to think the outside, pointing out that where 'Foucault sees the difference between the inside and the outside in historicist terms as the product of a determinate empirical event *within* history', Derrida 'sees the difference between the inside and the outside as the product of a quasi-transcendental undecidability that exceeds the distinction between the historical and the transcendental.' Assessing their work, including the acrimonious dispute between them over the history of madness, Bradley (2002: 70) claims that Foucault 'surreptitiously sets history up as a transcendental contraband', which is not so much to 'argue that Foucault was really a negative theologian but rather that his negation of the transcendental in favour of the historical leads to an unwitting reaffirmation of the transcendental by the back door in a structure akin to negative theology.' On Bradley's account, even though Derrida is adamant that deconstruction is not negative theology, he is more upfront than Foucault in admitting a relationship with the *via negativa*:

> I trust no text that is not in some way contaminated with negative theology and even among those texts that apparently do not have, want or believe they

> have any relation with theology in general. Negative theology is everywhere, but it is never by itself (quoted in Bradley 2002: 70).

For Bradley, the reason that Derrida is able to admit his indebtedness to negative theology is because, unlike Foucault, he works with the impossibility of writing a discourse that does not negotiate the transcendental. Hence, he says that both Foucault and Derrida's work:

> [...] are contaminated by something they officially do not believe in and thus cannot imagine [...] but the difference is that deconstruction is nothing less than the attempt to think through the relationship to the other that this contamination implies. In both Foucault and Derrida's texts, then, the historical, archaeological and atheistic slips undecidably into the transcendental, theological and theistic. The thought from the outside becomes impossible to tell apart from the thought from the inside (Bradley 2002: 71)

I touch on this debate not to arbitrate on the relative strengths of their respective approaches (this is beyond the purview of the chapter), but merely to foreground the shared horizon of faith orienting the ethical and political commitments of the Foucauldian and Derridean critical itineraries. To paraphrase Connolly, I claim that both Foucault and Derrida seek a positive intensification of life, that their ethico-political commitments and critical itineraries are inspired by the immanence of transcendence, by the call of the other. Roy Boyne's *Foucault and Derrida: The Other Side of Reason* (1990) has provided a cogent account of how the two articulate a philosophy

of otherness. I want to add that insofar as Foucauldian critique can be characterised as a 'hermeneutics of refusal' that not only refuses to answer the question 'Who am I?' in any fixed way but also challenges those who would seek to answer it on anyone's behalf or enforce their answers on others, it is arguable that Foucault shares Derrida's appreciation of unknowingness and the desire to keep the future open. Foucault's critico-political hope echo Derrida's messianic affirmation of '*viens, oui, oui*', or 'come, yes, yes' (Caputo 2004: 128). Another iteration of 'come, yes, yes' appears in 'Marx & Sons' where Derrida (1999b: 249) describes messianicity as '*une attente sans attente*', 'a waiting without waiting' or 'a waiting without expectation', as the French word *attente* also connotes. One hears a sympathetic voice in Foucault's essay on Blanchot, 'The Thought From Outside':

> Language in its every word, is indeed directed at contents that preexist it; but in its own being, provided that it holds as close to its being as possible, it only unfolds *in the pureness of the wait*. Waiting is directed at nothing: any object that could gratify it would only efface it. Still, it is not confined to one place, it is not a resigned immobility; it has the endurance of a movement that will never end and would never promise itself the reward of rest; it does not wrap itself in interiority; all of it falls irremediably outside. Waiting cannot wait for itself at the end of its own past, nor rejoice in its own practice, nor steel itself once and for all, for it was never lacking courage. What takes it up is not memory but forgetting. This forgetting [...] is extreme attentiveness (Foucault 1987: 55-56).

The faith of cultural studies, perhaps?

Given the undecidability of faith and the faith of undecidability, could it perhaps be said that every decision is at heart a wait—*the pureness of the wait that waits without waiting*—not unlike how in Vipassana one must repeatedly make the decision to remain attentive and equanimous, to forego all expectation, so as to invite a wholly other experience, which may hopefully arrive if one awaits steadfastly without demand: *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*? If the Buddhist goal of Awakening can only ever be awaited, it is by no means a passive waiting, since one awaits precisely by starting again and again, here and now, to invite the impossibility one awaits. As discussed in Chapter Three, the bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana makes such a vow of utter response-ability (e.g. Beings are numberless; I vow to awaken with them), as if to say: 'That it is impossible is precisely why it can and must be done.' Derrida's messianic affirmation of 'come, yes, yes' and '*attente sans attente*', along with Foucault's philosophical musings on the extreme attentiveness that awaits the thought from the 'outside', offer a fitting allegory for the Buddhist sacred claim and practice of Awakening to reality 'as it is'. Perhaps in awaiting Awakening, one inhabits what Derrida calls the desert in a desert: there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could—*perhaps*—be yet to come (where Derrida and Foucault gaze together towards the impossible horizon with unknowingness, and *perhaps*, faith?).

There too, I want to suggest, a messianic cultural-studies-in-the-making awaits patiently as a promise in the face of incalculable alterity, standing resolute on a 'double vector decision' involving attentiveness towards those marginalised others it engages with, and continuous re-examination of its own commitments, boundaries

and exclusions (Zylinska 2005: 35-36). This thesis is predicated on a Derridean conceptualisation of cultural studies as a 'responsible response' (or what I describe as response-ability) that adopts a foundational aim of responding to difference and to what calls for recognition and respect. It proceeded on the understanding that 'the political commitment of cultural studies already works against a certain [foundation-less] normative horizon', and that 'its numerous acts of political practice simultaneously *perform*, propose and develop an ethics of cultural studies' (Zylinksa 2005: 4). As 'an ethical opening to incalculable alterity', cultural studies is 'a project-in-the-making, on its way', and can 'never be properly founded' (Zylinska 2005: 35). In Derridean terms, then, we could speak of cultural studies as 'a promise [...] a messianic project of awaiting the unknown and the not-yet, of opening ourselves not only to the differences we already know and can name but also to those that remain unnameable and unidentifiable, to what may yet surprise and scare us' (Zylinska 2005: 39).

In the Introduction, I asked if cultural studies' ethical commitment, its affirmation of undecidability, already presupposes and performs an act of faith. The thesis is now in a better position (though still not without discomfort or uneasiness about the reaction this might provoke for the authoring-I) to answer in the affirmative: yes, yes. Or to put it another way—since the profession of faith I am making is committed to always let the question of faith remain a question—the ethics of cultural studies is made possible by what Derrida (2002) describes as a 'fiduciary act' between faith and knowledge, by the impossibility of placing one before the other: undecidability. So if knowledge is always already marked by the trace of faith, should a responsible response, the promise of cultural studies, ignore the call *for and of* faith? Can we

conceive of cultural studies, a spiritually-engaged cultural studies, that would be willing to explore a more hospitable encounter with faith?

This configuration of a cultural studies driven by an ethical imperative to always 'start again', as Goenka might say, engages in an act of sacrifice—not unlike how the bodhisattva sacrifices its own Awakening for the sake of all 'other others', to evoke Derrida's (1995: 61) reading of the story of Abraham and Isaac. The 'ethical can [...] end up making us irresponsible', because every response towards the absolute singularity of an other sacrifices 'other others': *tout autre est tout autre*, every other (one) is every (bit) other. Derrida writes:

> The simple concepts of alterity and of singularity constitute the concept of duty as much as that of responsibility. As a result, the concepts of responsibility, of decision, or of duty, are condemned to paradox, scandal, and aporia. Paradox, scandal, and aporia are themselves nothing other than sacrifice, the exposition of conceptual thinking at its limits, at its death and finitude. As soon as I enter into a relation with the other, with the gaze, look, request, love, command, or call of the other, I know that I can respond only by sacrificing ethics, that is, by sacrificing whatever obliges me also to respond, in the same way, in the same instant, to all the others (Derrida 1995: 68).

If responsibility always involves ir-responsibilisation (see, for example, Chapter 9 in Miller 2009), then, any ethical or political decision cannot be taken once and for all but must be continuously reviewed, retaken—because every decision cannot but recall and reaffirm the enabling non-space of undecidability, the impossibility of decision

that is at once its condition of possibility. Derrida (1999: 66) says, 'there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability [...] [A] decision has to go through some impossibility in order for it to be a decision.' Hence, cultural studies as a messianic project has to constantly double back on undecidability, returning again and again to the pureness of the wait, the desert in a desert: there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could—*perhaps*—be yet to come.

'Perhaps'—traces of which mark this profession, traversing the art of living, *anicca*, *anattā*, mindfulness, messianicity, the pureness of the wait, come, yes, yes—may perhaps be the most responsible response: 'There is no future and no relation to the coming of the event without experience of the "perhaps"' (Derrida 2001: 54). A messianic cultural-studies-in-the-making would strive to take into account 'the whole spectrum of possibilities and occurrences, the horizon of which is always partially occluded by the "spectre of the perhaps."' (Zylinska 2005: 37) This is important: *embracing the indeterminacy of the perhaps does not imply paralysis*. As Derrida (1997: 67) says, 'If no decision (ethical, juridical, political) is possible without interrupting determination by engaging oneself in the perhaps [...] the same decision must interrupt the very thing that is the condition of possibility: the *perhaps* itself.' Therefore, cultural studies has to 'remain open to the possibility of its pervertibility, collapse, annihilation, and withering down' (Zylinska 2005: 36). And inasmuch as its ethical engagement is *performative*, our critico-political interventions—academic publications and conferences, engagements with consumer practices, cultural policy studies, etc.—have to be accompanied by a form of delay or deferral, an openness to

the unknown. This invitation to openness recalls the arts of living where delay/deferral accompanies and sustains the pursuit of freedom, which embraces unknowingness and repeatedly remakes decisions in the face of undecidability to actualise the potential for new sociopolitical choices and relations, for becoming otherwise, for unbecoming, for Awakening. So whilst Zylinska does not evoke the idea of faith in her deconstructive reading of a performative ethics of cultural studies, does she not effectively make a profession of faith, a pledge of commitment to an open, futural politics in the following?

> It is in this very openness to the unknown, to the forms of political engagement that cannot yet perhaps be described in the language of cultural theory, sociology, ethnography or any other more established disciplinary discourses, that cultural studies becomes intrinsically ethical [...] For Derrida messianic politics constitute a viable political option arising out of the renunciation of a desire to rule, control and master; it is a politics which does not compromise its commitment even if it does leave a specific agenda behind. What we are left with are ways of respecting or greeting what remains to come—a future of which we know nothing. What comes will never belong to the order of knowledge or fore-knowledge' (2005: 39).

We return yet again to the pureness of the wait, the desert in a desert: there where one neither can nor should see coming what ought or could—*perhaps*—be yet to come. A call for and of faith? Perhaps, 'faith without faith', where 'undecidability is the first, last, and constant, the element, the space in which faith makes its leap, the horizon in

terms of which faith understands its limits, understands that it is faith, through a trace darkly'? (Caputo 1997a: 63)

?!?!?!

My coterminous practice of Buddhism and cultural studies has made this question of faith impossible to ignore, impossible not to say yes, yes to the perhaps, not if I wish to maintain fidelity to undecidability, *anicca*, impermanence, change, *anattā*, not-self, which admittedly can and does arouse fear and trembling; but I cannot keep silent because it also arouses, *perhaps* it is even the condition of possibility for, trust, confidence, hope, and yes, love. In light of the analyses of the preceding chapters, I have attempted to articulate in this chapter the Buddhist, Derridean, and Foucauldian-inspired movement of faith that is both presupposed and performed by this authoring-I's sacred-scholarly profession. I first examined the role of faith in Buddhist spirituality, problematising received epistemological interpretations of the *Kalama Sutta* to argue that faith in Buddhism is guided by ethical reflections on embodied sensibilities as it makes its leap from the space of undecidability. I then read this notion of faith alongside Derridean ideas about the im-possible aporia, reviewing a radical atheist critique of religious readings of deconstruction to suggest that faith is pertinent to both the religiously and non-religiously committed, since experience as such is always and already divided within itself by the spacing of time, the absolute future to come, an ever-receding horizon of im-possibility that exceeds knowledge.

If feelings of trust, conviction, and hope are better understood as reverberations of the visceral registers that do not strictly speaking fall within the order of knowledge as such (though conscious reflection plays a role in making such reverberations

intelligible), then perhaps we could work with the hypothesis that faith is irreducible to any ontotheological proposition. Perhaps faith could be investigated as an affective response that reverberates through the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers' alike. In which case, cultural studies ought not ignore the question of faith, not least because the movement of faith, whether we care to admit it or not, supports the ethico-political commitment of cultural studies as a responsible response towards incalculable alterity: *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

To conclude, I want to visualise the hypothesis raised in this thesis with this leitmotif—?!?!?!—in Thai Buddhist artist, the late Montien Boonma's work. Boonma, who lost his wife to breast cancer in 1994 and succumbed to a brain tumour himself in 2000, confronted *dukkha* through his art, the uncertainties of life that are *anicca*. ?!?!?! was plastered on the walls of his dying wife's hospital room, representing his experience of Buddhist meditation, of the unknown, surprise, discovery, hope—the movement of faith:

> The question mark is the symbol of the unknown realisable through meditation. The spiral shape of the question mark represents the movement from the outer to the inner (and vice versa) achieved by concentration. When we grasp the unknown, we feel it but cannot express it. The exclamation mark is a symbol of this feeling of realisation. I perceived a gap between these two [...] the question and the response these [...] two are never ending. A response can turn into the subsequent question. It's like our mind (quoted in Poshyananda 2003: 29).

My point in sharing Boonma's thoughts on ?!?!?! is not to make claims about the superiority of Buddhist spiritual exercises for realising the unknown, but simply to raise a modest proposal that faith is what we feel but cannot ever fully express. Given the inroads made into the study of affect in the past decade, could this be one way forward: to investigate faith as something *felt*, of the non-rational (which is not to say irrational) in tension with—or perhaps in a *mutually supportive* relationship with—the rational? *Faith as an affective response born in in-between-ness (of the body-mind).* This preliminary hypothesis will need to be refined, delimited and operationalised within more specific working parameters, and developed in conversation with other kindred spirits. In view of the conversations to come, I hope this thesis has at least presented a cogent account of why matters of faith *matter*—perhaps quite literally, as both the condition of possibility for and reverberations generated by the visceral, affective 'co-doings' within and between bodies. This formulation of the question of faith is certainly pertinent in the case of Vipassana as it prioritises an interpretation of *vedanā* as the affective tone of bodily sensations. But it could also be explored in the contexts of other religions or spiritualities, and even non-religious contexts like academia—where faith may very well be the 'ultimate glue' (Hills 2002: 4; see Chapter One) that holds together our hopes and aspirations as we engage in the (endless?!?!?!) pursuit of understanding, helping us adhere to our ethico-political commitments with *fidelity*, *trust*, *conviction, confidence* and *hope* for our practice, craft, vocation, calling: our *profession*. Perhaps this could be one way to redress the neglect of matters of faith in cultural studies, if not the academy more generally?

CONCLUSION

Yours faithfully and with *mettā*

> The declaration of the one who professes is a performative declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing one's responsibility. "To make profession of" is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one's word and believe this declaration (Derrida 2001a: 35-36).

This PhD project did not begin as an inquiry about 'faith' per se, but about the ethico-political significance of Buddhist spirituality and meditation practice within the context of neoliberal governmentality. However, about one third of the way into my candidature, it became impossible to ignore a tugging felt at the heartstrings of this project of the authoring-I—the realisation that I'd been uncomfortable, and yes, *afraid* of stating outright my curiosity about the nature and role of faith in my pursuit of doctoral research and Buddhism. Why was I afraid? This discomfort was partly generated by the thorniness and irresolvability surrounding the nature of faith generally. But I cannot deny that much of my trepidation stems from the tensions surrounding this authoring-I's attempt to understand his Buddhist faith *with and through* the academic discourses of cultural studies—the tensions constituting my emergent subjectivity as a religiously committed, if conflicted, postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert working within the secular knowledge-practices and perceived expectations of the university, which I maintain, has to uphold a certain public duty.

Perhaps I'm afraid of the disapproval, or worse, the ridicule I might face in professing the sacred inspiration I bring to and discover through both Buddhism and scholarly research. Indeed, as recounted at the start of this thesis, my expressed academic interest in religious commitments and/or sacred ideals has indeed been met with jests and incredulity (am I being overly 'paranoid'?). So even though this study was initially conceived as an inquiry into the micropolitics of Buddhist spirituality, it didn't take long before the undercurrents of discomfort erupted as a wave of curiosity, and even exasperation[1]: why aren't academics willing to consider that a commitment to knowledge may also involve faith, or at least, be *hospitable* to the question of faith, and therefore the possibility that sacred or spiritual pursuits may have contributions to make to problems cultural studies research grapples with; problems concerning ethics, (inter)subjectivity, the body, and affect? And perhaps the more intriguing and urgent question, one which I have postponed till now to submit for your consideration: what might this reluctance to admit 'faith' obscure, efface or disavow about the memory and responsibility of the humanities, and of the past, present and future of profession in, and of, the university?

In developing this thesis, I find it irresponsible to maintain a facade which holds that faith does not or cannot also support my Buddhist-inspired practice of cultural studies and vice versa; my pursuit of a profession in and of the university. But why bother to profess faith? What purpose does it serve? To draw this thesis to a close—or rather, to expose it as *an opening* for incalculable alterity (or if I may, to offer it as a

[1] The 'tipping point', as it were, was probably precipitated by a combination of my reading of Evans's re-evaluation of the *Kalama Sutta* and consequent reflections at a meditation retreat, Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling*, Derrida's treatment of its ideas about faith in *The Gift of Death*, and the latter's lecture/essay on 'a profession of faith', which I discuss shortly.

dedication of kammic merits to the Awakening of innumerable beings and the future of profession)—I would like to draw out the implications of the response which already traces through the preceding seven chapters, in relation to current concerns about the micropolitics of the university. Consider, first, how Connolly describes the micropolitical function of declaring one's faith:

> Because faith, argument, and evidence typically become mixed into each other, it seems wise to state your existential wagers on this front actively and openly to the extent you can. For each disposition does make a difference to how you engage the world—whether, say, you adopt a morality of command or an ethic of cultivation, whether you mine worldly experience alone to strengthen attachment to existence or seek strength from beyond this world, whether you seek to amplify sensitivity to other modes of agency in nature beyond the human estate or focus on either the human estate or its relation to God, and so on. Such modes of articulation can also open wager/faith to engagement with pertinent modes of evidence, inspiration, and argument from other faiths/creeds, including their accounts of the experience of duration (Connolly 2011: 40).

So, following Connolly, the act of professing one's faith supports an ethos of engagement. For Connolly: 'To articulate the mode of immanence that moves me, for instance, can open people like me to close engagement with developments in complexity theory, opening up new avenues to enhance sensitivity to the world' (2011: 40). More specifically, then, a key function of stating one's faith in any particular existential stance or creedal commitment is to foster affective ties and/or

invite new alliances with kindred spirits. A willingness to make oneself vulnerable, to speak and listen with intellectual hospitality and good faith, can serve to encourage all participants to become more mindful of the comparative contestability of the stances we embrace. Hence, Connolly evokes Nietzsche's idea of the 'spiritualisation of enmity' in his writings. Whilst I share an appreciation of 'the value of having enemies' (Nietzsche 1998: 22), I think it is also helpful to articulate an appreciation of the complementary value of friendship or friendliness, in which *I trust, and with which I trust* you would agree, can only ever be cultivated with intellectual hospitality and good faith. So I'd like to submit for your consideration how friendliness—or what I will even profess as the forging of *spiritual friendship*—may be pertinent, and perhaps quite crucial, to the future of the profession (of faith?) in and of the university: *our profession*.

The decision to entitle this PhD project 'a profession of faith' was inspired by Derrida's lecture/essay, 'The Future of the Profession or the University Without Condition (thanks to the "Humanities," what could take place tomorrow)' (2001a),[2] where he insists on upholding the value of performative declarations that promise as they profess—pledges of commitment that would accept the necessity of awaiting, in the absence of any possible 'last word', the delay and deferral that must accompany their solicitation of trust, the indefinite postponement of the arrival of what they promise and profess. Anticipatory confidence—*perhaps?*—it hopes. Specifying that he is evoking a European model of the 'modern university', which 'after a rich and complex

[2] I have not capitalized 'humanities' in this thesis, but for the purpose of this conclusion I will follow Derrida in rendering it as 'Humanities'.

medieval history, has become prevalent [...] over the last two centuries in states of a democratic type', Derrida says that this:

> [...] university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an *unconditional* freedom to question and to assert, or even, going further still to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the truth (Derrida 2011a: 24).

The university without condition, or the unconditional university, has not yet come into existence. Though its received-but-unfulfilled promise of unconditionality, traceable in part to a medieval theological tradition of scholasticism, has been rearticulated in a decisive manner by the 'immense question of truth and of light' heralded by the Enlightenment—Derrida thus claims that the promise of the university without condition 'has always been linked to the question of man, to a concept of that which is proper to man, on which concept were founded both Humanism and the historical idea of the Humanities' (2011a: 25). Citing two founding events of the twentieth century to situate his profession of faith in the university to come within an analysis of the present—namely, the declaration of 'Human rights' (1948), and the institution of the juridical concept of 'Crime against humanity' (1945) that organise a *mondialisation* or 'worldwide-ization that wishes to be a humanization'—Derrida (2001a: 25) says: 'The horizon of truth or of what is proper to man is certainly not a very determinable limit. But neither is that of the university and of the Humanities.' The new Humanities for the university to come will be granted the 'unconditional right to ask critical questions' not just in relation to the history of the concept and man and humanism, but 'to the history even of the notion

of critique, to the form and the authority of the question, to the interrogative form of thought' (Derrida 2001a: 26).

The new Humanities, in other words, must be capable of undertaking the task of deconstruction—'*ad infinitum*', Derrida (2001a: 24) pledges—beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and axioms. Some directions in which this deconstructive task could be taken by the Humanities include the rethinking of their own history with regard to 'the act of professing' and 'the theology and the history of work, [and] of knowledge and of faith in knowledge' (Derrida 2001a: 49).[3] If a deconstructive task is necessary, it is not in order for the Humanities to be contained within the limits of traditional disciplines. Rather, Derrida professes hope in the Humanities to come that will 'cross disciplinary borders without, all the same, dissolving the specificity of each discipline into what is called, often in a very confused way, interdisciplinarity or into what is lumped with another good-for-everything concept, "cultural studies"' (2001a: 50).

I cannot tell if Derrida is being dismissive of cultural studies or if he is simply making a point about the varied ways in which it may be used to belittle or celebrate academic work that transgress disciplinary boundaries and/or scholarly norms. In any case, my sympathies are with Spivak's response to his seeming dismissiveness: 'Mend Cultural Studies, don't just scorn it; it won't go away' (2005: 165, 166). Noting how 'Cultural Studies' may be variously performed via engagements with (though not

[3] I state only these as they are most pertinent to the thesis but Derrida (2001a: 49) also mentions 'the question of man, of the world, of fiction, of the performative and the "as if," of literature and of *oeuvre*'. See Miller (2005) for a discussion of Derrida's claims about literature and its relation to the profession of the unconditional university, sovereignty and democracy.

necessarily finding a home in) literature, philosophy, anthropology, political science, and history, and how these disciplines are themselves variously grouped under the 'humanities' or 'social sciences' in different national and/or institutional contexts, Spivak proposes that it points 'vaguely in the direction of the human sciences', suggesting that by working patiently and persistently to 'whittle away at this vagueness [the cultural studies] impulse could be retrained to go to work for the kind of things—to come—that Derrida invokes' (2005: 165).

This idea of the continuous 'whittling away' at the 'vagueness' of cultural studies' proper relation to the traditional disciplines of the university, recalls Zylinska's conceptualisation of cultural studies as always-in-the-making, guided by a foundation-less normativity that presupposes and performs the ethical impulse to always retake a double-vector the decision to rethink and recommit its relation to its objects of study and its own limits and exclusions. In short, the 'vagueness' that is immanent to the definition and status of cultural studies is what solicits and sustains a pledge of response-ability towards incalculable alterity. I had cautiously raised it as a question at the start of this thesis, but now as we come to the conclusion-as-opening, I shall declare (with increasing trust that my profession might be received with intellectual hospitality and good faith) that if cultural studies makes such a promise, then, it is at once *a profession of faith*. Despite Derrida's remark, why can't such a deconstructive cultural studies-on-the mend, as it were, be put to work, if it isn't already being so, to invite the future of the profession in and of the university to come?

In the attempts to find a voice to articulate a study of contemporary ('Western') Buddhism to which this authoring-I has pledged vows of commitment, this thesis has had to consider some theoretical oversights and methodological glitches that might hinder cultural studies' capacity to become more mindful of its promise and better to perform its duty as one form of '[t]he discourse of profession'—which on Derrida's account, 'is always, in one way or another, a free profession of faith; in its pledge of responsibility, it exceeds pure techno-scientific knowledge' (2001a: 36). To this end, one important issue that has had to be addressed is the possible layering of unacknowledged secularist intellectual conceits that may have dismissed, or continue to dismiss, matters of faith as irrelevant to cultural studies' struggles for a future politics. Chapter One thus considered how cultural studies could become 'spiritually engaged' by drawing on the ethos of engagement in its own archive to intervene in the politics of spirituality, the cultural space in which received understandings of 'religion' and sacred ideals of various cultures are being reinterpreted, contested, and even increasingly subordinated under the neoliberal governmental logics underpinning individualist and capitalist forms of spirituality.

Whilst it is important to maintain a critical, sceptical view of such hegemonic effects, it is unlikely that the Greek-Latin-derived term 'spirituality', which has a long (ig)noble history within European civilisation and its encounters with non-European civilisations, is going to lose sway as a genre or naming convention for an evolving constellation of knowledge-practices that pertain to some of the most basic existential conundrums and embodied sensibilities of life within the 'immanent frame' of our so-called 'secular age'. So to paraphrase Spivak's response to Derrida's remarks about cultural studies, perhaps in response to the tendency of prevailing

sociocultural research to belittle the value of 'spirituality', a spiritually-engaged cultural studies might say: 'Mend [the frames of reference for understanding] spirituality, don't just scorn it; it won't go away.' If such a shift in attitude towards more 'reparative' readings of spirituality is performed, together with a willingness to interrogate assumptions of a 'foundational secularism' in sociocultural research, cultural studies may perhaps become more receptive to some of the tasks for the Humanities to come. A spiritually-engaged cultural studies may come to better appreciate how *matters of faith matter*, by coming to understand how faith matters to cultural studies' own pledge of commitments, its response-ability to incalculable alterity, a performative declaration that promises as it professes.

This thesis has approached the inquiries delineated by Derrida (regarding faith-in-knowledge and knowledge-in-faith) obliquely, from the perspective and direction of developments in the field of religious studies. These developments seek to reconfigure religious studies' approaches as forms of cultural studies (King 1999), especially with regard to the study of non-Western traditions. Bearing the legacy of colonial, Euro-Atlantic-Christocentric outlooks about the evolutionary order of 'world religions', the academic study of non-Western traditions needs to be critically reflexive about the ideologically-laden concept of 'religion' and the totalising operations of binary conceptualisations of religion/philosophy (or the modern paradigm of 'secularism' more generally) as master categories. This problem—immanent to the study of 'world religions' and evident in the conundrum of 'border control' when non-European wisdom traditions meet the scrutinising gaze of 'philosophy' (in its rigorous modern sense), at the meeting of lifeworlds—constitutes part of what Derrida calls

'globa*latin*ization': that is, the idea that 'the world today authorizes itself in the *name* of *religion*' (2002: 64; emphasis added).[4]

Derrida's provocation reminds us to take pause to consider how non-Western traditions are typically admitted into the mainstream of Western intellectual discussion only when the 'foreignness' of their ancestral customs (i.e. expressions of cultural difference which may hold sacred commitments) accept their translations by the Western paradigm into markers of 'religious' or 'tradition-bound' features.[5] One example of the counter-move to defuse the secularist, intellectual conceits of modern discourses on non-European sacred/wisdom traditions, a move to 'decolonise' *philosophia* or the 'love of wisdom' (King 2009; see also Bilimoria and Irvine 2009), is Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, which was the focus of Chapter Two.

I would therefore like to make a profession of faith, a performative declaration that promises as it professes, in the productive alliance between spiritually-engaged cultural studies and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, to pledge response-

[4] Derrida (2001d: 88) also says, 'As soon as I call it a "religious phenomenon" or "the founding archive of religion as such", the moment of Christianization has already begun.' Building on Derrida's thinking, Gil Anidjar (2013) has proposed the deconstructive task of 'globalatinology', which turns on the recognition that the word 'religion' is what enables the translation and expansion of the process of Christianisation (see also Masuzawa 2005). This is one of the main reasons why throughout this thesis I have largely avoided describing Buddhism in terms of 'religion'; though I also acknowledge that the process of globalatinisation serves as the condition of possibility for this authoring-I to speak about his engagement with 'Western Buddhism'. Hence, the overview of Buddhism modernism in Chapter Two, and also the decision not to efface the ongoing influence of Christian thinking via my own upbringing and via the works of Derrida and Foucault. Indeed, part of the objective of this conclusion is to acknowledge my necessary relation of unfaithful fidelity towards the worldwide Christian legacy.

[5] An analogous term used by 'Western Buddhists' on DhammaWheel when discussing aspects of traditional Buddhist customs versus the supposedly more 'original' understandings of modern interpretations is 'cultural accretions'—the implicit, fallacious and hubristic claim being that the modern secularist paradigm by which 'Western Buddhist' understandings are articulated is not 'tradition-bound' or is unadulterated, as it were, by 'cultural accretions'.

ability to a key task of the new Humanities: the necessity to move beyond Eurocentrism and anti-Eurocentrism. For Derrida, this task of overcoming the dualism of Eurocentrism/anti-Eurocentrism entails a question of ir/responsibility towards one's inheritance—a question of legacy, of 'upholding the memory of a heritage essentially Euro-Christian (Greek, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic of Mediterranean/Central European, or Greco-Rom-Arab/Germanic)', of recognising its origins, and perhaps most importantly, of going beyond its limits (Egéa-Kuehne 2005: 43). I have noted how Derrida, the self-described 'little black and very Arab Jew', has characterised the centrifugal dissemination of meaning affirmed by deconstruction as a work of 'unfaithful fidelity' (Chapter Three). I also suggested that Foucault too maintained a certain unfaithful fidelity with a persistent subtextual 'religious question' that investigates the centripetal pull of the theological substratum of Western 'secular' culture and politics, *without* effacing or being ashamed of theologically-informed concepts in this thinking or his own Christian upbringing (Chapter Four). An unfaithful fidelity, in other words, is maintained by the decision to accept the heritage that comes *before* and *to* us, *received* by us, without our choosing (just as no one chooses their birthnames or the language they are born into)—recognising that with this acceptance, comes the necessity to constantly retake decisions, to 'select, filter, interpret, and therefore transform, to not leave intact, unscathed', what we inherit (Derrida quoted in Egéa-Kuehne 2005: 39).

This thesis's coterminous development of spiritually-engaged cultural studies and Buddhist critical-constructive reflection seeks to honour an unfaithful fidelity. On the one hand, by refusing an axiomatic, presumptive secularism governing the work of 'critique', so as to repledge cultural studies' ethical commitment; and on the other, by

interrogating the hegemonic imperatives of Buddhist modernism from which 'Western Buddhism' develops, so as to develop new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society, *without* effacing the faith of the practitioner-scholar. To this end, whatever flaws there may be in the present attempts at 'cross-reading' or 'working the hyphen' that would require the retaking of a double-vector decision, I would like to dedicate this thesis as an opening for the future of the profession, an opening which must be invited with a close, 'long and slow' study of the historical roots and development of philosophy and the Humanities, so as to reveal how they have been and are being transformed and appropriated by non-European languages and cultures (Derrida quoted in Egéa-Kuehne 2005: 43). Hence, Chapter Three's plea for intellectual hospitality, the cultivation of which is crucial to undercut the habit of Eurocentrism versus anti-Eurocentrism. This habit of out-mastery or oneupmanship, evident in nineteenth century discourses of Buddhist modernism, can still be detected (albeit with different, subtler inflections) in contemporary discourses like Loy's criticism of Derrida's 'textual idolatory'. Hence, my decision to demonstrate and affirm throughout the thesis the ways in which the Derridean and Foucauldian ethico-political itineraries and Buddhism (whether it be 'letting go/start again' or Awakening or the bodhisattva ideal) share a passion for, gift themselves over to, the impossible possibilisation of *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally.* The promissory praxis-ideal of unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, which Derrida professes for the university to come, could invite the intellectual hospitality Eleanor Kaufman hopes for:

> [...] a mode of being in common that is not a form of correcting or out-mastering the other, but a way of joining with the other in language or in thought so that

> what is created is a community of thought that knows no bounds, a hospitality that liquidates identity, a *communism of the soul* (2001: 141).

For Derrida, the responsibility of and for such a community would perhaps require the intellectual to recognise that s/he is not only 'a guardian held responsible for the memory and culture,' but also 'a citizen entrusted with a sort of *spiritual mission*.' (Derrida 1992b: 23; emphasis added). What are we to make of these claims, since 'soul' and 'spiritual' are not concepts that academics today associate with the profession, though they might treat 'spirituality' as an object of study, something that people do 'out there' in popular culture? Given Derrida's suggested tasks for the Humanities (which he insists must be undertaken in cooperation with other disciplines of the university), it would seem that the revitalising of academia's spiritual mission hinges on sustained re-examinations of what has been rightly or wrongly assumed about our 'secular vocation'. That is, deconstructive genealogies of those exclusions which the governing term 'secular' wishes to forget but cannot do without. Derrida has said provocatively: 'I do not think that there is anything secular in our time' (2001c: 67). This would ostensibly be an affront to secular-minded people, not least academics who are suspicious or critical of 'religion'.[6] Derrida's claim, however, does not strike the ears of this authoring-I as provocative, because this diasporic 'Chinese', postcolonial Christian convert–turned–atheist–turned–'Western Buddhist' convert, has always and already been an heir of and traitor to the promises made in the name of 'the secular' over 'the religious' and vice versa.

[6] I ought to state that I do in fact affirm the 'secular commitment' of academia, but in the very general sense that the overarching ideals of the university ought to be committed to the public good, and not dictated by private interests, whether it be the agendas of the market economy, religious institutions, or lobby groups.

Inasmuch as they are part of current debates about the conceits of modern secularism, Derrida's remarks ought not be read as a disavowal of secularity so much as a plea, especially to we who would make a profession in the university, to investigate the extent to which our 'secular vocation', as Robbins (1993) describes it, may harbour unacknowledged, Euro-Christocentric intellectual hubris and/or be complicit with the symbolic or actual violences that are enacted in the name of 'secular critique' (my contention is not with Robbins's very valid description of academia's public function, but the totalising operations of received axioms of 'the secular'). Derrida's plea recalls the subtextual question of this thesis: 'Is critique secular?'. To recall Wendy Brown, who I quoted at the start of Chapter One, if a presumptive secularism governing academic research may generate critical blindness to its totalising effects, then, '[u]nseating governance of this sort is the very signature of political, social, and cultural critique; it targets what is presumptive, sure, commonsensical, or given in the current order of things' (Asad, Brown, Butler and Mahmood 2009: 8). In light of Derrida's profession of faith in the unconditional university's right to ask all questions about received understandings of critique/faith/knowledge, and in light of the unfaithful fidelity which the Humanities to come must honour, might we not conceive of the critique of 'secular critique' as a part of the task of revitalising academia's, or at least cultural studies', 'spiritual mission'?

To the revitalisation of the profession's 'spiritual mission', I dedicate this thesis' overarching concern with the politics of spirituality. The principal approach I have adopted to investigate 'spirituality' is a Foucauldian one. With the analytic of

governmentality, I showed within the context of engaged Buddhism how a politics of spirituality is coterminous with a politics of subjectivity (Chapter One). Against the backdrop of attempts within and between religious studies and critical theory that seek intellectual hospitality between sacred and scholarly commitments (Chapter Two and Three), I demonstrated how new analytical tools may be (re)assembled from the notion of 'limit-experience' and the twin concepts of 'spiritual corporality' and 'political spirituality' embedded in Foucault's oeuvre (Chapter Four). Using Vipassana as an indexical discourse of a 'Western Buddhism'-in-translation, I also explored how Foucault's late work on the care of self/art of living may facilitate (a spiritually-engaged) cultural studies' goal of helping the 'personally speaking' researcher and the subjects of conversation of their discourse, cultivate long-term patterns of resistance that may allow the subject to dissolve itself or detach itself from the habitual orders we suffer under, by always becoming otherwise than before. That is, the work of desubjectification, of cultivating new relations of (not-)self to not(-self) and others, of unbecoming (Chapter Five). Then, through a discussion of affect and biopower, I drew an emergent Buddhist social theory into dialogue with current thinking on the affective, visceral registers of experience to demonstrate the inter-involvement of a politics of spirituality with a politics of affect (Chapter Six). And with the help of canonical, scholarly, and popular Buddhist discourses, as well as theologically-inspired and radical atheist readings of the deconstructive passion for the impossible, I elucidated the interrelation between embodied sensibilities, ethical reflection, and performative faith-in-and-of-undecidability, extrapolating from this basis how 'faith' may serve to nourish and support the hopes and aspirations of 'believers' and 'non-believers', irrespective of whether one tends towards existential orientations of immanence and/or transcendence (Chapter Seven).

I dedicate these chapters on the spirituality of matters of faith to kindred souls who—in recognising that the 'soul' is not 'an illusion' or 'ideological effect', but on the contrary is that which is 'produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power'—would not only pledge a commitment to a communism (communion?) of souls for the future of the profession, but also give testimony to the suffering (com-passion) of souls outside the university who are variously subject to analogous apparatuses of power: 'madmen, children at home and at school, the colonized, [and/or] those who are stuck at a machine and supervised for the rest of their lives' (Foucault 1979: 29). For is it not a fact that the university is a disciplinary space, a site and conduit for the exercise of power in the neoliberal art of government? Is it not a fact that our profession, that what we profess—academia's 'spiritual mission'; its potential (or not) for 'a communism of the soul'—is at once the object and objective of a diffused network of apparatuses of control for the conduct of conduct, or the governing of the soul, as Nikolas Rose channeling Foucault might say?

As exemplified in Australia by the recently elected federal government's announcement to cut 'wasteful' funding of 'futile research' in the humanities (Benson 2013), I *trust* that the present trend of valuing academic work largely in the calculative terms of the market is as painful a reality for you as it is for me. 'The Future of the Profession' recognises the neoliberal governmental imperative of enterprise in the technocratisation of the so-called corporate university (or a 'University Incorporated', partly enabled by digital tele-technologies that serve at once to corporatise and render the voices of academia more mobile, vulnerable and incorporal) as a key challenge for the future of the profession. This thesis has not been able to investigate

the relation between the faith of/in the market, and matters of faith in and of the university, a complex long-term issue which must be addressed collectively.[7] But I take heart in the conversations to come that may host the Buddhist wisdom of Loy's suggestive proposal about the parallels between the not-self of the human body and the not-self of the corporate (*corporis*; *corpus*) body—not simply because of my sacred commitments but also because of the consonance between Buddhist social theory's vision of a spiritually-engaged micropolitics and contemporary critical theory's vision of an affectively-engaged micropolitics; both seek to harness the virtual power of force relations within and between the personal and the social, ethics and politics, corpora and concept, faith and knowledge, recognising that they are in- and out-folded through one another as the constant processes of making and remaking, the co-doings and co-undoings, of a world of (un)becoming. The force-fields generated by and enveloping such relational patterns are always susceptible to the 'dissonances' in the feedback loops enabled by the endless crossings of perpetual change, *anicca*, which may transgress unknown/unknowable limits between the 'inside' and 'outside' to precipitate unpredictable mutual transformations.

[7] Brian Massumi (2002: 45) has noted that 'the ultimate foundation of the capitalist monetary system' is 'faith', and he relates this to the 'matter-of-factness' of affect, which he insists, needs to be taken into account in cultural and political theory. I thus dedicate this thesis' proposal that 'faith' be investigated in terms of 'affect' to the fostering of an unfaithful fidelity towards cultural studies' inheritance of Marxist critique. In his assessment of the turn towards 'creative industries', Graeme Turner has underscored the importance of cultural studies maintaining as a foundational stance, its 'long-standing commitment to the applied critique of the social and political effects of a market economy' (2011: 688). I look forward to the conversations to come with fellow cultural studies researchers who would honour this pledge of commitment by rethinking Marx's criticism of religion, which as noted in Chapter One, may not be as inimical towards religious ideals or matters of faith as it has been widely taken to be. To evoke a common mis/appropriation of a piece of advice in Sun Tzu's *Art of War* by corporate- or business-speak, if a key 'adversary' of cultural studies' ethico-political task (or the future of the profession more generally) is a certain 'religion of the market', then, shouldn't academic researchers performing the applied critique of the social and political effects of a market economy—know the 'enemy' as we know ourselves?

So what if, with intellectual hospitality and good faith, we collectively cultivate mindfulness of such 'co-doings' within and between the (in)corporalities of the 'University Inc.'? What if, guided by enunciative practices that perform double articulations of ('cuttings' into epistemological regimes of truth and ontological vectors of affectivity forming) the academic-self, we allow the haunting voices of a yesterday that never *was* (present as today since *today* is never *present* to itself) to remind us of the duties that come before and are received by us without our choosing? Hence, an ir/responsibility to perform the affirmative, testimonial act of a certain work of mourning, to give witness to what has been and what may yet be to come—decisions for today, here-and-now, as a permanent opening from yesterday for tomorrow. Couldn't we use this long and careful testing of the limits of thought and memory's habitual forgetfulness to produce new cartographies of bodies, capacities, and fields of possibilities—the mapping of lines of flight or capture that may dis/enable relational connections or blockages—for new ethical landscapes on which to stage a communism/communion of souls and the renewal of the promise and profession of our 'secular vocation's' spiritual mission?

I take heart that there are kindred souls who share the same spiritual vision of the work of friendship in academia, even if they do not speak of 'spirituality'. I find encouragement in, for example, Melissa Gregg's (2006) invitation to fellow cultural researchers to cultivate mindfulness of the affective voices of academic reading-writing, or 'scholarly affect'. Drawing on a set of ideas that includes those I have engaged with (e.g. Couldry's and Probyn's ideas about 'speaking personally'; Kaufman's ideas about intellectual hospitality; Massumi's ideas about the productive

excess and autonomy of affect), Gregg examines the writings of eminent cultural studies figures who have inspired her, making the case for modes of address in our discourses that might serve the function of 'strengthening' and 'catalysing' others. This, she notes, would constitute a form of 'specific' intellectual practice that Foucault spoke of. Our 'affective voices', the communication of our passionate investments, could serve to 'encourage solidarity and continuity in scholarly work. Creating links between a past, present and future community of writers and thinkers, scholarly affect emphasises the importance of imaginative, rousing writing in a sometimes technocratic world' (Gregg 2006: 8). Might we not accept this invitation and re-dedicate it as a collective promise and profession, the work of friendship or friendliness, by kindred souls? For friends and between friends? Spiritual friends? *Perhaps*?

On this note, I ought now to speak more forthrightly about, and *in*, a voice I had to set aside in the peripheral margin of Chapter Two (footnote 2) as a periphery observer rather than an active participant of the conversations I stage throughout this thesis: the faithful voice of the autoethnographic (not-)self of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. I had explained that enunciative practices that 'speak personally' about the undecidability of ethical decisions *text*uring the embodied sensibilities of one's performative faith, could help Buddhist practitioner-scholars learn from one another and strengthen their sacred-scholarly commitments. More importantly, the narrating and sharing of 'the spectre of the perhaps' haunting the authoring-I's decisions to speak in one's own name, could be a way for the Buddhist practitioner-scholar to acknowledge and nourish their shared profession of faith in Awakening with fellow Buddhists (or other kindred souls) within and outside the academy—thereby

cultivating *kalayana mittata*, admirable or spiritual friendship. The Buddha, in correcting a disciple's mis-evaluation of faithful companionship as a secondary component of the work of Awakening, insisted on admirable, spiritual friendship as 'the whole of the holy life' (Thānissaro 1997a). The Buddha also explained that one cultivates admirable, spiritual friendship by seeking the companionship of those who are 'advanced in virtue', that one emulates those who are 'consummate' in 'conviction', 'virtue', 'generosity', and 'discernment' (Thānissaro 1995).

I profess faith in this advice, but not because I claim to be consummate in these skilful habits. Rather, it is partly because I have found encouragement and inspiration in Buddhist teachers (via face-to-face interactions and textual encounters) who embodied these skillful habits, and partly because I am hopeful that there would be fellow academics who would uphold the value of these habits to cultivate a different set of values to the calculative, market valuing of the humanities and the neoliberal governance of the university. I am also duty-bound to mention that on the last day of a Vipassana course, meditators are taught to dedicate whatever insights or kammic merits they have garnered to all sentient beings, using what is called *metta* practice. The word *mettā* is usually translated as 'lovingkindness' but at root it has connotations of 'friendliness'.[8] In the Theravada tradition, or at least in modern interpretations, *metta* is regarded as a guiding virtue for one's relation to (not-)self, others and the

[8] In *mettā* practice, the meditator first directs feelings of goodwill ('May I be at peace, may I be at ease,' etc.) to oneself, then to a person whom they respect or feel gratitude towards, then to a person to whom they have neutral feelings, then to a perceived enemy, and then finally to all sentient beings, regardless of who, what, and where they might be. The underlying logic of *mettā* is comparable with the bodhisattva ideal, in that they both serve to undercut self-identification with and attachment to the striving for Awakening.

world. Might we not imagine the same guiding virtue for the future of the profession: the work of friendship or friendliness?[9]

And so I offer to you this thesis as a profession of faith in the name of 'Buddhism' and 'cultural studies'. To extend a welcoming hand to the future of the profession, I have decided to profess my Buddhist faith. But I made this decision not in order to proselytize, even if I do hope that this thesis would pique curiosity about the productiveness of bringing cultural studies into dialogue with Buddhist sacred understandings (and potentially, other sacred understandings). *I profess because I inherit and betray.* It is important that I do not efface this authoring-I's Buddhist faith, because I am obligated to give witness to the otherness that comes before and puts the 'I' into question as a secret-less secret and ir/responsibility of active interpretation, a testimonial act of recalling and reaffirming those exclusions it cannot do without. This profession of faith is necessary to maintain a permanent opening to a future presupposed and performed by a foundation-less normativity of deconstructive ethics, by which I am committed to always retake a double-vector decision to honour my unfaithful fidelity to 'Buddhism' and 'cultural studies' and their constitutive otherness: a pledge of response-ability towards ghosts and spirits of inheritance.

[9] I am aware that Derrida and Foucault both dealt with, in different ways, the theme of friendship towards the end of their lives. I have not been able to examine this aspect of their work in this thesis. But I note that it signals yet another point of consonance with Buddhist understandings. And to anticipate what I will raise shortly, I hereby dedicate this thesis to the conversations to come with admirable, spiritual friends in academia who may perhaps agree with David Webb's suggestion in his appraisal of Derrida's and Foucault's thoughts on friendship: 'Friends are those with whom we work on the historical conditions of our existence, and those with whom we share the practice of becoming who we are [or, I would add, of refusing who we are asked to be]' (2003: 119).

> Whoever inherits chooses one spirit rather than another. One makes selections, one filters, one sifts through the ghosts or through the injunctions of each spirit. There is legacy only where assignations are multiple and contradictory, secret enough to defy interpretation, to carry the unlimited risk of active interpretation (Derrida quoted in (Egéa-Kuehne 2005: 39).

I accept that the unlimited risk accompanying the ir/responsible work of active interpretation means that my attempts at cross-readings—e.g. the juxtaposition of the Derridean passion for the impossible with the bodhisattva ideal, and of the Foucauldian understanding of the body's capacity for transgression and limit-experience with Buddhist sacred truth claims about the potential experience of the dissolution of the body-mind—are liable to betray inconsistencies and/or re-enact the one-sided absolution or ontotheological closure they seek to avoid. A deconstructive reading will surely expose these logocentric habits. But if there is this unlimited risk it is at once also the precondition by which active interpretation may persist as an ongoing, endless task, impelling it to sacrifice any 'last word' to the future as a permanent opening for incalculable alterity. I also accept that despite my attempt to generate 'scholarly affect', it is not up to me to presume that my writing has been 'imaginative' or 'rousing'. Whilst I *hope* that I have been able to articulate, or at least begin to take up a mode of address that may generate the resonance of the 'affective voices' Gregg speaks of, the truth is that it is not, and never will be, up to me to decide: *I do not know*. I may have taken a decision to attempt a certain mode of address, but this decision that is made from the space of undecidability, as all decisions are, is no longer within my grasp the moment I make the decision. This is a fundamental communicative conundrum that deconstruction addresses. Or as Derrida might say, in

order for a postcard to be communicable or deliverable to any recipient, it must always be possible for the postcard not to reach its destination—it is because of this impossibility of foreknowledge that the signatory and addressee are exposed in advance to the otherness of the other(-within-and-before-self). The 'you' and 'I' of any mode of address are already given over to and embraced in advance by one another with (intellectual) hospitality and (good) faith.

To accept that my address to the other 'may not reach its destination' is to affirm the trace-movement by which a reciprocal response of trust may be solicited and sustained. It also recalls a founding ethical gesture and declaration of this thesis: the invitation to work mindfully with the deconstructive understanding that at the heart of all speech-acts is a promise. In light of how 'The Future of the Profession makes a plea for response-ability, is it not crucial to also be mindful of how the performative speech-acts of and for the new Humanities—the speech-acts of (would be) professors of the university—might uphold the ir/responsibilty of declarative utterances that *profess* as they *promise*? Is it not crucial that we become more attentive towards our inherited duty of a certain testimonial act that gives witness to what must always 'start again'? Perhaps, one way to 'start again' is to interrogate and refuse the will to power of discursive habits that would reinscribe the otherness of truth and truth of otherness, of *an other way of truth*, within prevailing regimes of 'theory' snd 'practice', 'religion' and 'philosophy', or 'secular critique'.

Derrida says, 'To profess is to pledge oneself while declaring oneself, while *giving oneself out to be*, while promising this or that' (2001a: 36). To profess in the name of 'Buddhism', 'cultural studies', or the 'immanence of transcendence', or the 'university

without condition' or whatever names we inherit and wish to honour, it is 'neither necessarily to be this or that nor even to be a competent expert; it is to promise to be, to pledge oneself to be that on one's word [and] to devote oneself publicly, to give oneself over to [the declarative commitment], to bear witness, or even to fight for it' (Derrida 2001a: 36). More importantly, 'what matters here is this promise, this pledge of responsibility, which is reducible to neither theory nor practice' (Derrida 2001a: 36). We could note that Derrida again joins Foucault in affirming an *other* way to our habitual practice of questioning truth. In his final lecture series at the Collège de France, *The Courage of the Truth* (2011b), which deals with the practice of *parrhēsia* (fearless speech or frank speaking) in the art of living/care of self, Foucault proposes an other way of questioning truth. Rather than performing an 'epistemological analysis' of the specific structures by which a discourse may be recognised as true, he suggests a complementary analysis of 'alethurgic' forms by which, 'in [her/his] act of telling the truth, the individual constitutes [her/himself] and is constituted by others as a subject of a discourse of truth, the form in which [s/he] presents [her/himself] to [her/himself] and to others as someone who tells the truth' (Foucault 2011b: 3).

In lieu of more thoroughgoing analyses of these proposals by Derrida and Foucault—analyses that must be performed collectively given the proposed functions of these modes of address (of witnessing the truthful manifesting of truth as a testimonial act of truthfulness)—as a preliminary observation I wonder if those who have taken the decision to 'speak personally' are not already constituted by a *testimonial relation* and embodying these functions, of the otherness of truth and truth of otherness, of an other way of truth. As noted in the introduction, to give an account of oneself whilst accepting that any account is already crossed many times over by other voices not

'my own', is 'to accept a sense of self that is necessarily suspended "in tension", internally inadequate and unstable' (Couldry 1996: 328). To persist in speaking the self in spite of irreducible complexity is to implicitly rely on a larger 'community' of other reflexive agents; or as Probyn (1993: 169) underscores, self-reflexivity should open a 'perspective which allows us to conceive of transforming ourselves with the help of others.' It seems that whether we actively profess 'faith' or not, you and I and those others whose voices we have yet to hear or respond to, are already given over to and embraced by faith.

In any event, I hereby openly re-dedicate this thesis to the conversations to come about this problematic of soliciting trust and hospitality from and for the other as a promise—a testimonial act of truthfulness by which truth is manifested and by which a pledge of response-ability is made, for the work of admirable, spiritual friendship, for the future of the profession, and above all, for incalculable alterity. And, to paraphrase the Buddha, might we not imagine the work of admirable, spiritual friendship as the whole of the scholarly life? Is the mutual support of friends not vital if we are to collectively retake and recommit ir/responsible decisions that would allow us—not so much to better meet KPIs as competent, compliant professionals of the academic profession, but perhaps more importantly—to give testimony to/as honourable, hopeful professors of the profession, as we mindfully attend to the forgotten memories of legacies we are tasked to recall and reaffirm, whilst dedicating or sacrificing the promises we receive and repledge to the future of the university without condition to come.

This thesis has taken the decision to recall and reaffirm the received question: 'What is Enlightenment?', repledging its promise of truth and light to give testimony to the unconditional questioning of all questions. It exposes this Euro-Christian ir/responsibility to a different, but no less response-able or (un)faithful, duty to recall and reaffirm the received question: 'What is Awakening?', repledging this other promise of truth and light to give testimony to the unconditionality that may be witnessed by/as the natural movement of the breath animating every rebirthing-dying action of body, speech, and thought. And since it is bad faith to pretend otherwise, I confess that these response-abilities to give witness to unconditionality also recall, reaffirm, and repledge the received promise made by a spirit that hovers silently and patiently over the face of the waters, which separate and allow passage to the lives of others. A ghostly breath (*pneuma*) who after declaring the beginning of the Word as the beginning of its words—promising as it professes by giving its word—found the courage (*spiritus*) to breathe a little harder, sending ripples across the surface that arrive as the ebb and flow of foaming waves that dissipate and seep into the sand to at once mark the distance and proximity, the possible journey, between one shore and another. These crossings and re-crossings have been made and are being made by countless others (including this 'cultural thing' called 'Buddhism', as well as 'religion' and 'secularism'), other others who can only *trust* and *hope* that their search for an other world, an other future, would be received with hospitality on arrival.

It was not possible to ignore the spectral voices of these ghosts and spirits of inheritance, without which I could not have experimented with a partial autoethnography of the ways in which the differential repetitions of a world of

becoming have *text*ured this authoring-I's experience of temporal-existence. Received-but-unfulfilled promises of the past are re/birthing-dying as the in/decisions that this authoring-I have had to re-take to be ir/responsible towards the legacies inhabited as the present, or to be response-able towards the undecidable beckoning of the future. These autoethnographic reflections have mutually informed the thesis's theoretical experiments with 'cross-reading'. They elucidate the mutualising dynamics between the affectivity of embodied sensibilities, the undecidability of ethical decisions, and performative faith or declarations of trust and hope in one's chosen existential commitment. I acknowledge that others who have likewise attempted to inhabit an enunciative practice, of 'speaking personally' and of 'finding a voice', may have addressed analogous issues regarding ethics, corporality, affect, and (inter)subjectivity (we could cite, for example, the discourses on subcultural participation I have mentioned, the feminist, queer, or postcolonial discourses on marginalised lives, that work reflexively with the role of the subject in its own discourse). I also acknowledge that these discourses may likewise have attempted to generate 'scholarly affect' or speak with 'affective voice' to evoke empathy and solidarity. I accept that they may have done it more successfully than I have achieved with this thesis's topoi of 'spirituality' and 'faith', which these other discourses do not engage with, nor should they be expected to if these topoi do not resonate with them, or are simply not pertinent to their research.[10]

[10] I must acknowledge here the wise counsel of my PhD supervisor, mentor, colleague and spiritual friend, Lyn McCredden. In an earlier draft of this conclusion, I had hastily phrased my thoughts in such a way that it might have been taken to imply that there aren't others who are already engaging in the kind of enunciative practice I am arguing for. Whilst I am inviting collective, scholarly inquiry into 'spirituality' and 'faith'—which I firmly believe could serve important, strategic micropolitical functions—I have to be careful that I do not absolutise these terms as the necessary preconditions for conversation. On this note, I'd like to express my utmost admiration of Lyn's 'spiri tuality' and 'faith' in *Luminous Moments: The Contemporary Sacred* (2010), even if she did not articulate the impossible passion

Nevertheless, I hope this thesis has made a convincing case about the productiveness of foregrounding and working reflexively with 'spirituality' and 'faith' within cultural studies research (if not academia more generally). Or at least I hope I have been able to pique curiosity in others who are not usually interested in these concepts; to stimulate mindfulness of the unrecognised or unacknowledged hegemonic imperatives in relations of knowledge-power that circumscribe the research and pedagogical programmes of the modern secular academy. Collective mindfulness is necessary to defuse secularist, intellectual conceits that may overlook or denigrate the ethico-political sincerity of—or even suppress the potential for counter-hegemonic force relations that may be generated by—scholarly work that adopt 'spirituality' and 'faith' as a mode of address or subject of conversation (and not merely an object of study). I have come to trust in the promise of response-ability solicited by the questions of 'spirituality' and 'faith', as they appear to offer channels by which certain voices excluded, minoritised, or pathologised by the presumptive secularism governing academic work may be heard. 'Spirituality' and 'faith' as openings by which the otherness of truth and truth of otherness, *an other way of truth*, may be hosted by academics honouring the duties and ir/responsibilities of our 'secular vocation'.

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of her profession as a professor of the university in these terms. I am especially honoured, humbled, and grateful that, placing far more faith in my words than I dare to promise to myself, she quoted my thoughts on 'the sacred' as 'the final word' in the book's introduction:

'*Sacredness unveils itself when we embrace all of our experience—from the heights of ecstasy to the depths of despondency—with non-grasping attentiveness; it is the breath of equanimity that awakens us to what is otherwise, unthinkable, impossible, unconditioned: the not-me, not-I, not-mine.*'

I had forgotten about this profession, declared more than three years ago. But now that it has returned, I confess that I have not maintained fidelity to its promise. So if I may, I'd like to recommit this pledge of unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, and dedicate it to the future of the profession in and of the university to come.

I thus submit for your consideration the important functions that 'spirituality' and faith' might perform to nourish collective hope and aspirations for the future of the profession in and of the university to come—even if, *especially if*, we may individually tend towards divergent existential orientations or hold incommensurable creedal commitments. Intellectual hospitality towards 'spirituality' and 'faith' as a means to welcome the impossible possibilisations of unconditional promises, whose arrival always remain just out of sight beyond the ever-receding futural horizon: the pureness of the wait, come, yes, yes! *Perhaps?* Because I can only *trust* in this profession of faith and place *hope* in its received-but-unfulfilled promises, perhaps a response-able conclusion to make in order to maintain a permanent opening to a future is to accept that one must always 'start again' (and again...). To 'start again' with yet another double-vector decision to honour unfaithful fidelity towards the questioning of these questionings: What are the mutualising dynamics of embodied sensibilities, ethical adjustments in conduct, and performative faith that nourish a spirituality of (not-)self or art of living within the immanent order of a present-absent-to-itself, or of certain days of future past that we call our 'secular age'? What affective investments solicit and sustain a profession? I am prepared to believe that these questions and their solictations (which, as I have suggested, could be visualised as a ceaseless trail of ?!?!?!?!) are resonant with hope—*resonance of hope*. I am hopeful that their reverberations are being felt within and outside academia as movements-in-between, not least by those who are impossibly passionate about impossible passions. *Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

Yours faithfully and with *mettā*

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