



Of Intellectual Hospitality: Buddhism and Deconstruction

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Abstract

This paper makes a plea of a stronger ethos of intellectual hospitality in dialogical exchanges between the Western philosophical and non-Western wisdom traditions, focusing in particular on the relationship between (Mahayana) Buddhist teachings and Derridean deconstruction. The main point of reference for this discussion is Zen lineage holder and philosopher, David Loy's writings that explores the reciprocity between Buddhist and deconstructive understandings to pursue the goal of 'mutual healing'. Loy's discourse is in principle a laudable attempt at encouraging a stronger ethos of intellectual hospitality in comparative scholarship. However, I will show that his criticism of deconstruction's 'textual idolatry' betrays an inaccurate, myopic reading of Derrida's writings. Loy's discourse thus lapses back into the habit of ontotheological closure, which he claims the Buddhist approach is better at overcoming than deconstruction; and in enacting, if only unwittingly, one-upmanship, it falls short of the proposed goal of 'mutual healing'. To develop this argument, I first identify intellectual hospitality as a guiding ethos of an emergent discourse called Buddhist critical-constructive reflection, which cross-fertilises Buddhist teachings with the knowledge-practices of the secular academy to address current issues. I then outline the key points of consonance between Buddhist and Derridean thinking before problematising Loy's criticism of deconstruction. After showing how Loy's proposed objective of 'mutual healing' functions instead to stymie dialogue, I chart a way forward towards renewed intellectual hospitality between the two sets of knowledge-practices by submitting for consideration, the ways in which the bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana and the Derridean = passion for the impossible share a commitment of utter response-ability towards incalculable alterity – a praxis-ideal that may be described as *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

Contributor Note

Edwin Ng teaches media and communication studies at Deakin University, Australia. His ongoing research explores the reciprocity between Buddhist teachings and radical thought in critical theory, seeking to redress the general neglect of questions concerning religion and faith in cultural studies scholarship, and to develop new approaches to the postcolonial study of Buddhism, especially with regard to the emergent 'Western Buddhism'. He has published articles on these issues in *Cultural Studies Review*, *Australian Religion Studies Review* (now the *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion*), and *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*. Edwin is currently finishing a book manuscript entitled, *Buddhism, Cultural Studies, A Profession of Faith*.



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 paper addresses a key challenge facing dialogical exchange between the Western philosophical tradition and Asian Dharma traditions: *intellectual hospitality*. The challenge of intellectual hospitality is especially pertinent to critical discussions about the soteriological claim found in various Dharma lineages about the possibility of pure or unmediated awareness, which can be actualised via the attentional-concentration training functions of meditation practice. The claim of unmediated awareness, as Richard King notes, 'constitutes a major point of disagreement between mainstream Western intellectual thought and classical Asian traditions of spirituality' (King 1999: 182). More specifically, it goes against what is broadly described as the constructivist paradigm, of which the 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 challenge absolutising discourses and social, historical, and political essentialisms. Favouring a multiplicity of understandings and becomings, they argue in different ways that subjectivity is 'conditioned by and firmly embedded within linguistic and cultural forms' (King 1999: 169-170). This tension between the Western intellectual tradition and Asian Dharma understandings has been articulated in debates about the relationship between Mahayana Buddhism and Derridean deconstruction (Loy 1987, 1992, 1993, 1996; Magliola 1984; Park 2006).

A prominent voice in these debates is Sanbo Kyodan Zen Buddhist lineage holder and philosopher of comparative religion David Loy, who has written a series of essays to contend that by virtue of the 'religious' practice of meditation, Buddhist strategies for displacing a metaphysics of presence are more radical than deconstructive ones, which remain bedevilled by 'textual idolatry' (Loy 1996: 2). Loy is ostensibly seeking to defuse a longstanding habit in Western scholarship that would dismiss or trivialise the soteriological claims of non-Western traditions with the axiomatic claim that 'religious' truths do not qualify as 'proper' subjects of conversation in philosophical discussion (King 2009). But given that the concept of 'religion' is a Euro-Christian invention, one which has served the hegemonic imperatives of Western imperialism, it is arguable that an unreflexive, stubborn refusal to extend intellectual hospitality towards the counterintuitive or incommensurable truth claims of non-Western heritages is to risk perpetuating the ongoing ideological subversion of non-Western customs and lifeworlds (see Balagangadhara 1999a; Bernasconi

2009; Carey 2008; Chidster 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Dubuisson 2003; Gauchet 1999; King 1999; Masuzawa 2005; McCutcheon 1997; Mendieta 2001; Purushottama and Irvine 2009; Twells 2009; van der Veer 1996).

As a committed practicing Buddhist like Loy, I too profess faith in the potential of meditative or contemplative exercises, and would challenge prevailing Eurocentric regimes of knowledge production that would disregard the truth values of Buddhist Dharma teachings. However, whilst Loy's reading of Buddhism and deconstruction is in principle a laudable attempt at encouraging an ethos intellectual hospitality in comparative scholarship, this paper will show that his criticism of deconstruction betrays a selective, myopic reading of Derrida's writings, and thus his discourse falls short of its proposed goal of 'mutual healing' between the Buddhist and Western traditions. My contention is that Loy's discourse seeks one-upmanship, such that rather than intellectual hospitality it lapses back into the habit of ontotheological closure, which he claims the Buddhist approach is better at overcoming than deconstruction. What this shows, in other words, is that the habit of intellectual *inhospitality*, cuts both ways. To develop my argument, I will first contextualise my own position as a Buddhist practitioner-scholar within the emergent discourse called Buddhist critical-constructive reflection. I then outline the key points of consonance between Buddhist and Derridean thinking before problematising Loy's criticism of deconstruction. After showing how Loy's proposed objective of 'mutual healing' functions instead to stymie dialogical exchange, I will chart a way forward towards greater intellectual hospitality between the two sets of

knowledge-practices by submitting for consideration, the ways in which the bodhisattva ideal of the Mahayana and the Derridean passion for the impossible share a commitment of utter responsibility towards incalculable alterity – a praxis-ideal that may be described as *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*. The paper will conclude with some extrapolatory remarks on the broader political significance of such a long-term dialogical exercise that adopts an ethos of intellectual hospitality to invite mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning.

The intellectual hospitality of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection

This paper's re-evaluation of the relationship between Buddhism and deconstruction develops as part of my ongoing attempt to pursue what John Makransky (2008) has proposed as Buddhist critical-constructive reflection – an emergent discourse that reflects the broader move to decolonise the academic study of 'religion' (particularly, the study of non-Western traditions) by reconfiguring it as a multi-perspectival, and poly-methodical form of cultural studies, one that would become more reflexive of the colonial heritage and/or prevailing secularist, intellectual conceits of 'religious studies' (King 1999: 54). Buddhist critical-constructive reflection pursues two reciprocal aims: to use the Buddhist understandings to enhance academic research on contemporary issues; and to use the knowledge-practices of the secular academy to facilitate the translation and adaptation of Buddhist teachings and formations to contemporary contexts. In short, Buddhist critical-constructive reflection explores new interfaces between academia, Buddhism, and society. As an

expansive, adaptive approach that seeks mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning, it can accommodate such diverse projects as dialogical exchange between psychotherapy and meditative techniques, Christian and Buddhist palliative care, neuroscientific and Buddhist understandings of consciousness, as well as the philosophical-theoretical enquiry developed here on (Mahayana) Buddhist and Derridean thinking.

Regardless of the chosen subject matter, in order for Buddhist critical-constructive reflection to productively pursue mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning, it must be anchored by a commitment to not efface or subordinate the Buddhist practitioner-scholar's faith or affective investment in soteriological propositions of Dharma teachings under the will to power-knowledge of the secular academy. By foregrounding the role of the subject in its own discourse – in this instance, by not pretending that the scholar researching Buddhism is not personally invested in Buddhist soteriological claims as a practitioner – Buddhist critical-constructive reflection can begin to defuse the modern secularist, intellectual conceits of social scientific norms that have governed the academic study of religion (especially non-Western traditions) with rigid, binary conceptualisations of subject/object or insider/outsider. Openness about one's affective investment or commitment of faith in the objects of study that one wishes to bring together as subjects of conversation is crucial for the cultivation of intellectual hospitality, which will be hospitable only to the extent that it does not negate incommensurable difference. With regard to the habitual dismissiveness shown by secularist discourses towards religious truth claims, philosopher of religion Morny Joy (1996:

89) has underscored that 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'. As will be shown below, Loy attempts to redress this dismissive attitude in Western scholarship, but despite proclaiming a commitment to work mindfully with incommensurable difference, his tunnelled-vision criticism of Derrida's 'textual idolatry' and valorisation of meditative 'religious' praxis over deconstructive 'philosophical' *theoria*, would repeat the very habit of intellectual inhospitality he seeks to defuse. But before I reconsider the relationship between Buddhism and deconstruction, it is I appropriate that I contextualise my own invested interest in intellectual hospitality by outlining some salient points about my reciprocal pursuits of Buddhism and post-structuralist-inflected cultural theory. I have elaborated on the specific challenges circumscribing this coterminous sacred-scholarly profession and the question it raises about the role of faith in academia elsewhere, exploring them in the context of cultural studies' general neglect of religion and with regard to the place of autoethnography in the postcolonial study of Buddhism (Ng 2012a, 2012b, 2011).

I am someone who would pass for a postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert. That is, even though I grew up in Singapore where (Mahayana) Buddhism was a part of my diasporic 'Chinese' ancestral heritage, I only embraced Buddhist teachings after migrating to Australia in 2002 for tertiary education and shortly after discovered Western translations of Buddhist discourses along with a passion for academia. My personal

pursuit of Buddhism has thus always been reciprocally informed by my professional pursuit of cultural research (with a focus on poststructuralist-inflected critical theory); and whilst my formal practice of Buddhism is informed by Theravadin teachings, I have also drawn inspiration from my informal study of the Mahayana (specifically, the poetry of Ch'an/Zen and Madhyamika philosophy of Nagarjuna). This coterminous sacred-scholarly profession has not developed without significant tension and feelings of ambivalence about how I traverse the insider/outsider divides on all sides to at once inherit and betray the religious/secular legacies of the East/West. With my researching into the historical trend of Buddhist modernism, these feelings became intelligible as the lingering traces of ideological contestations between Western(-ised) translations of Buddhism and the anti-colonial currents of Asian Buddhist revivalist movements (Gombrich 1993; Lopez 1995, 2002, 2008; McMahan 2008; Sharf 1993, 1995; Snodgrass 2003, 2007). For whether it be the Orientalist reification of a textualised Buddhism as a means to denigrate the perceived degeneracy of native Buddhist customs (Almond 1988: 95; Lopez 2008: 9), or the appropriation of Western scientific rationalism by the 'Protestant Buddhist' movement in Ceylon as a means to resist colonial rule and Christian missionisation (Gombrich 1993; Lopez 2008: 153-195; see also Prothero 1996), or the underlying Japanese chauvinism and nationalism of D.T. Suzuki's (following his teacher Soen Shaku) romanticised translation of Zen (McMahan 2008: 122-134; Sharf 1993; see also Snodgrass 2003; Victoria 2006) – these struggles for cultural and political legitimacy, which have generated reverberations that are still resonating through contemporary Buddhist formations, are characterised

by a pervasive habit of one-upmanship. That is, they all perform selective (mis)readings of the other's discourse in order to the assert the superiority of one's own position. In view of this bad habit, I want to make a plea for a stronger ethos of intellectual hospitality in supporting the dialogical, translation exercise of 'hosting the stranger' (Kearney and Taylor 2011). By drawing attention to Buddhism's and deconstruction's shared commitment to unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, I want to use my in-between enunciative position as leverage to perform a version of the 'cross-reading' exercise proposed by Richard Kearney in his 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)

My cross-reading of Buddhist and deconstructive ideas via a re-evaluation of Loy's writings is not strictly speaking 'inter-religious', though there will be an

indirect encounter with certain Judeo-Christian concepts that Derrida deconstructs. Nevertheless, the principles of intellectual hospitality underpinning Kearney's suggestions remain pertinent, in that my aim is to stage a conversation where one tradition 'confronts, challenges, augments and amplifies another via collaborative exchange of symbols and narratives' (Taylor 2011: 19). To proceed, 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 recounts the Buddha himself saying, 'Whoever sees dependent co-arising sees the Dhamma; whoever sees the Dhamma sees dependent co-arising' (Thanissaro 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*, or 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 Truths 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. (Thanissaro 1997a)

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 *samsara* or the cycle of rebirth. 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 a multimodal and multilevel movement of *emergent* 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)

An analogous 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 the form of 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 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 recall and reaffirm the differing and deferring movement of emergent 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, deluding 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. But this is only a limited explanation to illustrate the soteriological pragmatism 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. (Thanissaro 1997b)

The Buddha neither affirms existence nor non-existence, and in so doing arising is accepted co-dependently and relationally with cessation, being with 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] (Thanissaro 1997b). In the Mahayana, the 'middle path' is explicated in the *Nirvana Sutra* as the unconditioned awareness of Awakening: 'Buddha-nature neither exists nor non-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 and dualistic thinking. 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)

Reconsidering David Loy's Buddhist critique of deconstruction

In the volume *Healing Deconstruction: Postmodern Thought in Buddhism and Christianity*, Loy claims that the collection of essays explores pathways 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 thinking. On the one hand, by clarifying how deconstruction vigilantly exposes the danger of 'an idolatry of self-presence', the exchange can help 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 can illuminate 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).

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 their agenda of 'mutual healing', which dovetails in principle with the cross-reading exercise of 'hosting the stranger' I am adapting for this paper. But I want to question the way in which their task of 'mutual healing' presupposes 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 enacts critical inhospitality towards deconstruction, because it effaces how Derrida himself, 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.

In addition to the edited volume *Healing Deconstruction* (1996), Loy's allegations about deconstruction's 'textual idolatry' appear 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 suggestive of the continuing influence of Loy's criticism 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 half-way-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 the claim is repeated 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 anticipate Derrida's but also offer a more thorough deconstruction of existence, or as he puts it, the whole

universe. Loy illustrates his claim 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 the infinite other elements, it cannot be said to possess self-presence or be self-existent, for each element is thoroughly dependent upon others. Rather than being self-existent, each element is interpermeated with infinite other elements. Indra's Net, in other words, expresses the principle of dependent co-arising. If it posits a cosmos, it is that which 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 whilst Loy acknowledges the affinities between Buddhism and deconstruction, he maintains 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 suggests 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).

Such a judgment about the supposed superiority of meditation or religious praxis, I want to suggest, does not give space to host 'mutual healing' but rather enacts intellectual inhospitality towards both deconstruction *and* Buddhism. 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. 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 critique 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 with regard to Derrida's own playful writings about the 'text' or 'textuality'. 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 that deconstruction's focus on textuality complicates the supposed 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, Loy also asserts that 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 search for 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 language exclusively but the movement of trace immanent to differential repetitions of habit and habitat, *both words and things*, forming the body-mind's sense of spatiotemporal existence-in-this-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 late 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 preoccupation of 'text' or 'writing' is always an intervention against 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 Loy 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 shaped by the hegemonic imperatives

of Buddhist modernism (Sharf 1995) – Loy is no doubt committed to the transformative potential of a wholly other, unmediated awareness promised by Buddhism. And here we again confront one side of the central problematic of this paper: how might we extend intellectual hospitality towards the soteriological truth claim and promise of Buddhist meditation?

My contention is that the dialogue on ‘mutual healing’, as it has developed thus far, 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. Moreover, Loy’s deployment of the ‘religious practice’ of meditation as the necessary corrective to deconstruction’s ‘textual idolatry’, also unwittingly re-enacts intellectual inhospitality towards Buddhism. Despite his stated commitment to non-dualist thinking, in a move that ironically affirms deconstructive ideas about supplementarity and contamination, Loy’s criticism is remains haunted by an enduring dualism of the Western intellectual tradition he inhabits: like a spectral presence, the religion/philosophy distinction underpinning the claim about the corrective necessity of meditation remains invisible to Loy’s non-dualistic critical eye. But as King (1996) has argued, this dualism 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 analytical 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 the observation by Robert Magliola (2006: 246) 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. It is beyond the purview of this paper to consider the controversies within Huayan over specific doctrinal interpretations. For the purpose of evaluating Loy’s criticism 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). Magliola 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 by seeking recourse in the kind of ontotheological closure that deconstruction questions; Loy's claims that Buddhist deconstructive strategies are better at overcoming such a logocentric habit notwithstanding, ontotheological closure is precisely what his criticism re-enacts. This is evident in the passage quoted above. As Magliola (2006: 247) astutely observes, the ontotheological closure of Loy's discourse is exposed by the phrase '*within* Indra's Net', which reveals that 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 that aims at 'mutual healing' needs to mindfully cultivate and maintain an ethos of intellectual hospitality – or to put inversely, it needs to guard vigilantly against the intellectual *inhospitality* of habitual one-upmanship. What next for the dialogue, we could ask, after concluding that Buddhism is more 'radical'? How would this assertion of one-upmanship enable further dialogue, mutual enhancement and reciprocal learning? To reinvigorate the dialogue between Buddhism and poststructuralist thinking – to take seriously the transformative potential of Buddhist meditation without positing its superiority – I shall chart a trajectory beyond the critical impasse by refocusing attention on how Buddhism and deconstruction both affirm an open horizon of utter response-ability, sharing a praxis-ideal of what I would call *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally*.

Unconditional unconditionality unconditionally

In 'The Deconstruction of Buddhism', Loy (1992: 228) explains 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 a follower of the Mahayana, Loy's life-practice would be oriented by the bodhisattva ideal, and he would presumably recite the bodhisattva vows on a regular basis. 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.

In the spirit of the inventive cross-reading that Kearney suggests, I want to experiment with an interpretation of the bodhisattva ideal in terms of what Derrida repeatedly affirms as the deconstruction's passion for the *impossible*. 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, to remain faithful to the hopeful aspirations of this radical promise for the future, of a promising future for countless 'other others' as Derrida might say, it is necessary to undercut one's own desire for bodhisattvahood and even to refuse to give the path of Awakening any 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 a journey towards any destination in the first place. The condition of possibility for embarking on a path of action at once announces its impossibility – or the impossibility of circumscribing it in any determinate manner, at any rate. Otherwise, how does one extend 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 paper 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 domain in order to welcome whoever and whatever arrives without demand, 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 the inaugural promise of absolute hospitality an impossibility. 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, 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, but serves as the open horizon of possibility for determinate action, for the striving towards unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, even if such a praxis-ideal always remains unfulfilled as such: yet to come. 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 aporetic logic im-possibilises the unconditional promise 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' (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 plea for forgiveness is met by a response, 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. (2001: 44-45)

Derrida's treatment of aporetic promises like hospitality and forgiveness exposes the impossibility of being in itself, the double bind of temporal experience or what he describes (via deconstructive readings of the Judeo-Christian heritage he inhabits) as 'messianicity without messianism', which articulates another iteration of *différance*, the idea that nothing is simply present to itself. For Derrida, impossible messianic ideals like hospitality and forgiveness (and can we also include the aporetic promise of bodhisattva ideal?) entail 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'. In this regard, I would join Park in (re)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 standing 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 uncon-*



ditionally. To be clear, my point is not that Buddhism and deconstruction are the same. Rather, since there is no straightforward way to arbitrate on whether a Buddhist or Derridean approach to defusing the metaphysics of presence is more radical or effective – in any event, it is important to refuse this habit for one-upmanship to cultivate the ethos of intellectual hospitality – what I am arguing is simply that one way to go beyond the impasse of existing debates, 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 paper has addressed the challenge of intellectual hospitality in comparative scholarship on Buddhism and the so-called constructivist paradigm of Western thought, 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 religiously informed truth claims simply because they appear to be incommensurable with constructivist 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 Euro-Christian-centric intellectual paradigm. The paper then examined how the writings of David Loy enact intellectual inhospitality when they make Buddhist

deconstructive strategies are more radical than Derrida's deconstruction, which is unable to make the 'leap' from theory to practice. This 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 refocused attention on how Buddhism, and particularly the bodhisattva ideal upheld in the Mahayana, 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.

By cross-reading the bodhisattva ideal with the im-possible promises of hospitality and forgiveness, what this paper 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. An examination of the messianic tone adopted in contemporary radical thought would require a few studies of its own.¹ For the purpose of concluding this paper with some extrapolatory remarks on the broader political significance of the arguments I have presented and to signpost trajectories for further dialogical exchange, I want to simply highlight that the so-called 'messianic turn' 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*

¹ For an overview of the 'messianic turn' in contemporary thought, see special issues of *Journal of Cultural Research*, volume 3, issues 3-4, 2009.

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 (as exemplified by the Mahayana praxis-ideal of the bodhisattva, for example), we could also ask how it relates 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 this eschatological narrative in Buddhism be drawn into dialogue with current attempts to think the messianic without the determinate messianisms of the Abrahamic traditions?

These are clearly large philosophical questions that require a sustained conversation 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 paper 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. For Buddhism and deconstruction, their shared affirmation of the messianic 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). This task of interrogating the 'now' pledges commitment to, professes a certain faith in the ontological messianicity inherent in politics, a hopefulness that also pulsates as the heart of what Foucault proposed as a critical ontology of the present (1984; see Oksala 2012: 153) – it performs a duty of hospitality towards the incalculable future. Isn't this collective task of receiving the wholly other in good faith, a promise of unconditional unconditionality unconditionally, an invitation for Buddhist critical-constructive reflection?

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