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On Method

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Unspoken Paradigms: Meanderings through the Metaphors of a Field

> "People of the world say 'method, method,' what sort of thing is this method?"
>
> "What do you think? Does it ever occur to the skillful user of method to think, 'I will use this method, I am now using this method, I have used this method'?"
>
> "No, indeed this never occurs to the skillful user of method."
>
> "And why is it so? Because there is no dharma that can be called method. This is why it is called method."
>
> —from a long-lost sutra—

"Method" has finally arrived in the land of Buddhist Studies. It makes its appearance belatedly, reluctantly, and haltingly. Our colleagues in other fields and our students now demand to know what our positions are regarding the questions of "method" and "theory." They expect from us a certain familiarity with the types of discourse that dominate the academy in what used to be the province of classical philology, or, at best, of New Criticism. What shall we, the "buddhologists," say to those who want to know about our "method"?

Even if we make allowances for all that is fashion and trend, even if we truly believe in the hallowed crafts of the philologist and the historian, and even if we suspect that "method" is often a front for a misreading of one sort or another (or for no reading at all!), the call to question our reasons and motives cannot be ignored, and should have been heeded earlier. Those with whom we would like to engage in some form of dialogue have been asking us similar questions for decades. We may have ignored them as long as our craft was shielded by the privileges of the overprotected Academy, but more and more we are unable to keep turning our faces away from this clear call to understand, from this challenge to our goals and to the means leading to our goals. Moreover, those who would shrug

off any consideration of the social and logical infrastructures of their scholarship do not thereby become magically divested of a method, a theory, and a particular choice of perspective. We may choose not to speak about why and how we do what we do, but such refusal does not erase the why and the how of what we do; and the refusal is often interpreted by others (correctly) as some sort of theoretical statement. The healthy suspicion of what may lurch behind the abstruse language of "theory" is one thing, the pretense, against all reason, that one does not have a theory or a method, is another.

This paper is in part the fruit of attempts to engage graduate students in some form of reflection on "theory"—that is reflection on the reasons for doing what we do and on the art of choosing and judging arguments in what we do. The paper is a spin-off from a mini-course I offered a couple of years ago to a small group of Asian students and research associates at the University of Michigan. They had come to a North American university to "learn about Western methodologies."[1] Perhaps with only one exception, they were all interested in "the application of these methodologies to the study of Buddhism," not as a part of a secular humanistic enterprise, but as a part of the study of a religion that was in fact an integral part of their own cultural and religious belief systems.[2] They were consequently baffled by what appeared to them as a pointless reductionism in the methods and conclusions of the work we were trying to pass by them as "Buddhist Studies," yet they were equally shocked to discover that writers on "theory" and "method" did not offer a viable alternative to forms of scholarship that failed to speak to them.

In the more recent, and expanded, incarnations of this course, the majority of my students have been North American graduate students in Buddhist Studies who need to learn of contemporary historical methods, methods of literary criticism, and contemporary critical theory, but who also need to learn about traditional Western methods of study and research, especially those which, in the last 100 years, in Europe, North

1. The choice of words seems to me significant, and suspect. The common use of the word "methodology" to mean "method" strikes me as betraying a mystification of "theory" and "method."

2. This too strikes me as suspect: that we should assume that method is some neutral tool to be "applied" to Buddhism. Even if "methods" were "tools," the selection of a tool is not a trivial matter—even the most naive mechanic knows that you cannot use an Allen wrench on a Phillips head or on a machine bolt, or a metric socket on an English bolt—at least, not without causing major damage.

America and Japan, have helped to form the logic of the forms of research and discourse that we call Buddhist Studies. These methods follow primarily two models: classical philology and historical positivism. These are the "older" methods that have also defined during those 100 odd years "the Canons" that we are expected to study—paradigmatic works of scholarship and representative Buddhist texts.[3]

But a need to understand what we do and why we do it has grown even as the skill and the willingness to carry out the close reading of the text have decreased, placing both student and teacher in a bind: any course in method can only be a preliminary to the acquisition and application of certain formal tools, but experience in the use of such tools is a preliminary to understanding method and theory.

Attempting to serve as a bridge to the uses and values of more traditional tools and the pursuit of more traditional goals, the course has come to be roughly divided into three units of disparate length: (1) a short review of the history of the Western Academy and of the place of Buddhist Studies in the Academy, (2) a middle length survey of issues in contemporary critical theory that are relevant to the study of Buddhism, and (3) a much longer historical and critical review of how we have come to privilege texts, certain texts, and certain methods—in other words, a history of the canons of contemporary Buddhist Studies.[4] The last unit includes, furthermore, reflections on the way in which the scholarly constructs of traditional Buddhists combined with Western presuppositions about history and texts to shape the canons of modern Buddhist Studies.

I describe this class as a course that surveys, for the benefit of future scholars of Buddhism, (1) the position of Buddhist Studies and Buddhism in the Academy, (2) forms of critical discourse that have been used to speak about Buddhism and the study of Buddhism, (3) the critical and analytic traditions of Buddhism before the appearance and hegemony of

3. The content of these Canons has also been determined by historical accidents in the encounter of the Western academy with Asian Buddhist traditions—including the early encounters with Tibetan scholasticism and the canons of particular Japanese denominations.

4. The influence of particular modes of Western learning, especially the ideals and presuppositions of philology as it developed from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, has been such that we can safely assert that these ideals of learning have become normative in Buddhist Studies. So far, Asian and Western Buddhists have not been able to free themselves completely from the spell of these ideals, even when their application is often ignored in practice.

Western secular scholarship,[5] and (4) critical discourse generally. But the central goal of the course is to encourage the young scholar to question the goals of our métier, the types of discourse we use, the audiences (real or imagined) to which we speak, and the constraints and limitations of the field.

The present paper is an exercise in reviewing and reordering the prolegomena to such a course, and therefore touches on most of the issues addressed in the course, but polemically rather than descriptively. Although the plan of this paper calls for speculation and debate, it also calls for some schematics—after all, can there be generalizations without some type of classification and outline? The paper therefore belongs to the genre we sometimes call, with typical scholarly grandiosity and hubris, "the state of the field." Expressed more plainly and humbly, I would like to survey cursorily and examine critically some models of Buddhist Studies. These are the models that remain unspoken in the field, hidden behind metaphors of positivistic science in a discipline where the methods of the positive sciences are seldom, if ever, used.

A Discipline of Sorts

Whatever our position may be on the appropriateness of speaking about Buddhist Studies as a discipline, we at least tend to agree that even a "Buddhist Studies" in quotation marks depends on, or is composed by, certain principles of research and discourse that belong to what we may call the academic disciplines. We assume that Buddhist Studies is in some way analogous to other disciplines, or, at least, defined by the application of well-established disciplines to a particular object of study. The putative foundation that sustains the academic disciplines guarantees the "results" of research in Buddhist Studies.

However, other forms of scholarly activity that we would regard as safely established in a disciplinary history, and therefore as a safe model for our projects in Buddhist Studies, have equally questionable or modern pedigrees. Even the "well-established" disciplines are relatively young, and have communities of participants and audiences that are ever shifting

5. In the process of developing these themes in class discussion, a meta-analysis of the goals of the course leads inevitably to questions of authority and constraints on human knowledge and behavior. Although this paper addresses such issues only indirectly, their importance should become obvious to the reader as I develop my argument. I have attempted a more explicit discussion of issues of religious, textual, and scholarly authority in Buddhist Studies in two workshops I offered at Otani University in the summers of 1993 and 1994.

and colliding. They are not defined by a core intellectual practice, but by a tradition of practice and by a community that is to a great extent a guild of craftsmen (only recently more open to craftswomen). All the disciplines have suffered major transformations. A shift from art and avocation to profession has changed radically the meaning of the word "philosophy," for instance. This same shift has changed humanistic discourse in general, to the point that the term "Humanities," like "Liberal Arts," remains only as a convenient label for college administrators. Philology and history have suffered a similar professionalization and a specialization that has gradually created a class of scholars dedicated to a professional discourse of recondite jargon and *érudition pure*, with no sense of an audience outside the limited circle of the professional.

Of course, a discipline is also a set of modes of thinking. But it is seldom, if ever, a single set of such modes. It may include a set of norms—especially norms about which forms of discourse are acceptable and which are not. The norms, or rules of genre, however, are fluid, and the vitality of a discipline may depend on its capacity to tolerate and accept challenges to these norms.

The vitality of a discipline also depends on its capacity to garner support from the community, and this is often accomplished by listening to a variety of voices. Beyond the voices of the academe there is another set of important voices: the voices of those upon whom the survival of the discipline within the established academe depends (government officials, students, students' parents, university officials, editors, the press). A discipline is accountable to a number of audiences, and our colleagues within the guild are only one such audience. Disciplines respond to the needs and to the idealized self-image of particular communities and they are held accountable by those communities.

However, if a person of learning were only accountable to his or her Maecenas, responsible scholarship as we know it would not exist. The scholar is also responsible to a broad range of audiences, extending from the potential or occasional reader, to the members of the traditions to whom we owe the works that we study. Such a broad definition of audience, of course, entails a broad definition of the role of the scholar. A single scholar cannot carry out all roles, but should aspire to serve honestly and with dedication at least some of the communities that justify the scholarly enterprise, and not just the communities or the individuals that support, or participate in, the scholarly enterprise.

Among the forgotten communities of readers that we often neglect are those of the person's who seek in Buddhism a humanistic model. Like-

wise, we cannot forget the communities of the new believers in the West, for whom a secular non-sectarian Buddhist scholarship will probably become a necessity. But, above all, the most important neglected "audience" is that of those who created the traditions we now study—those who, in a peculiar way provide us with a justification.

A tradition is also a set of practices and norms tracing their roots into the past. Here Buddhist Studies, for instance, depended for a long time on the traditions of European philology, and attempted to model itself on Classical Studies. The disciplines of Indology and Sinology are good examples of stepchildren to Classics. The youth of these disciplines is not only a chronological curiosity but an indicator of the extent to which academic disciplines are specific to certain historical moments, and the degree to which disciplines are fragile. At least since the creation of the modern research institution, the life of disciplines has depended as much on discovery and paradigm shifts as it has on academic bureaucracies and scholarly guilds. Accordingly, the coexistence of competing voices and interests (within disciplines and among disciplines) is essential for the survival of tradition even as it is the very ground for the fragmentation and transformation of the tradition.

What is peculiar about discipline in the humanities, however, is that the avowed interests of the discipline and the values that may be derived from the cultural products studied by those disciplines do not have to coincide with the interests and values of the communities that support them. Often, the genre of the discipline is shaped as much by the norms of the tradition that it studies as by any conscious reflections on the goals and limitations of the discipline.

Buddhist Studies, for instance, has developed several identities that are in fact built around the focal points provided by the tradition itself. So that the nature of this discipline—like the nature of many other intellectual traditions—depends not only on the processes and means of production associated with it, or on its social context, or on the explicitly recognized interests of the classes that practice it, but depends likewise on idealized notions of what the subject is or was, and on abstract notions of its value, and what constitute truth values in the discipline's discourse. A similar illusion gives all intellectual enterprises the protection of an illusion: that it has a life of its own. Thus, it is possibly to do art criticism that imitates Vasari for an audience in New York City, in 1995, under the auspices of a state agency, and only a few hundred yards from a Arab, Jewish, Black or Hispanic neighborhoods.

A scholarly discipline is not only a matter of disinterested intellectual effort, for it is evidently also a matter of the abstract application of intellectual curiosity through the medium of a discourse accessible, intelligible, and valuable to an intellectual elite, yet supported by a community that is interested in the veneer of learning. Consider the irony of a Conference on Buddhism in the heart of Mexico City, or of Buddhist Studies in Ann Arbor, only some 65 kilometers from the heart of the "inner city" of Detroit. Consider the irony of Buddhist Studies in America in dialogue with Indology in Japan. Such ironies already raise some questions as to the nature, audience, and social role of the discipline.

Discipline Defined by Its Object

But, as already noted, disciplines may also be defined by their objects. One could therefore argue that Buddhist Studies is only defined by content, not method. This is at least partially true, and likely to become more than partly true as the old philological models are displaced by ethnographic and, one would hope, literary models. However, the study of Buddhism has still much to learn from other fields of study that define themselves by an object or a cultural sphere. Thus, Christian Studies, without laying any claim to a separate methodological discipline has made better use than Buddhist Studies of the ways of arguing used in so-called "established" academic disciplines.

Today, research in Christian Studies is no longer based only on texts, and is no longer concerned only with doctrine or history. Of course, unlike Buddhist Studies, Christian Studies has a clear place in Western communities at large—it may find itself cornered by secularism, but it is not the isolated hobby of a handful of gentleman scholars, for it is also based on a community presence. Christian scholars and scholars of Christianity have embraced an understanding of Christian traditions that makes ample and creative use of contemporary advances in criticism, seeing, for instance, the religious text and religious discourse as literary and narrative events. A generous use of literary criticism, psychological anthropology, and history of religious approaches has not in the least compromised the textual disciplines. Consider for instance the rich range of possibilities open to a beginning Biblical scholar or an undergraduate interested in progressing beyond the "introductory" course—as illustrated by manuals such as Tucker, 1971, and Turner, 1982. Compare these sources with the limited understanding of what is Buddhist scholarship illustrated by some of the rare "manuals" of Buddhist Studies accessible to the modern reader, such as de Jong's history of Buddhist Studies or

Hirakawa's *Bukkyo-gaku Nyumon.*[6] Only some rare manuals of Indology come close to providing anything close to what we find in the Christian Studies texts and manuals (e. g., Renou, and Bechert and von Simson).

The difference between Christian and Buddhist Studies is perhaps in part explained by the fact that Buddhist Studies continues to be a Western enterprise about a non-Western cultural product, a discourse about Buddhism taking place in a non-Buddhist context for a non-Buddhist audience of super-specialists, whose intellectual work persists in isolation from the mainstream of Western literature, art, and philosophy, and occasionally even from the mainstream of contemporary Buddhist doctrinal reflection. The audience to which Christian Studies speaks shares with the Judeo-Christian tradition a more or less common language. It is possible, if not natural, for members of this audience to accept the conceit that they belong to the tradition and the tradition belongs to them. Any attempt to show that we are in fact in a different universe from that of early Christianity will not convince the audience of Christian Studies; because this audience has a cultural sense, an unshakable belief that creates meaning even where the tradition has lost its meaning. Buddhist Studies and its audience lack such a common language and such a conviction. In fact, even in Asia it is losing its capacity to maintain the myth of an unbroken tradition and a common, meaningful, language.

Furthermore, whereas Christianity and Christian Studies as we know them are the fruit of a continuous interaction with Western secularism, rationalism, and the modern and postmodern Western self, most of our Buddhist materials and many of our Asian informants belong to a very different cultural tradition. The methods and expectations of our scholarship and our audiences have been shaped by a cultural history very different from that of Buddhist traditions.[7]

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6. Generally, I have abstained from discussing in any detail works or authors mentioned in this essay as models or examples of particular types of scholarship. Complete references to the works mentioned or to sample works of the authors mentioned have been provided in the bibliography. The bibliography also includes a selection from the bibliography of the course alluded to in this essay—readings the influence of which is behind the essay and its arguments. Not all of these titles have been referenced in the body of the article.

7. Because of these cultural differences, comparisons can be skewed. Consider, for instance, the way in which Luther is studied by Erikson (1958) and Ignatius of Loyola by Meissner (1992) with the difficulties one would face attempting a similar analysis of either earlier figures in Western tradition or many of the classical figures of Asian Buddhism. As social circumstances

Nevertheless, even within the very limited circle of that minority of privileged individuals plying the trade of Buddhist Studies, there is a belief and a sense of continuity—it may not be shared by it audience and by the community that supports Buddhist Studies, but it is nevertheless a more or less effective mythology of continuity, legitimacy, and truth. This belief (that is, the belief that the scholar of Buddhism is somehow connected to, or "in tune with" the Buddhist tradition) is in part maintained by an unconscious return to imagined origins, a return that is accomplished by using some of the forms of traditional Buddhist learning as models for contemporary scholarly genres. We have to a certain extent adopted some of those classical models, and remained bound and constrained by some of the presuppositions of such models, especially those that appear to confirm on the surface our own preconceptions—our own Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment preconceptions.

The Buddhist tradition is itself rich in critical methods. Used ingeniously, some of these traditions of critical inquiry or of hermeneutic suspicion, could be used to help the modern scholar question the Buddhist tradition. But this is seldom done. Our failure to do so may be attributed in part to the fact that these traditions of critical inquiry have become fossilized; but it is also true that such traditions were never traditions of free inquiry in any sense close to what the term has come to mean in recent Western history.

The rise of "criticism" in the West is based not on the same historical circumstances that produced Buddhist traditions of criticism. The latter were formed in debates that were largely within religious discourse or between divergent religious discourses. The multiple roots of Western criticism include debate between secular and religious forms of discourse, and among metaphysical speculation, scientific theory and empirical observation of types that were unknown in Asian tradition—and which are relatively young in Western tradition. In such encounters Western philosophers have confronted a long line of critiques of language (from the critique of Latin and the Vulgate to the linguistic theories of de Saussure and beyond), critiques of textual authority (from the critique of the Book and its authority to the death of the author, and the object of the work), and critiques of religious authority (from a critique of the deity

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change, the potential for this type of analysis (and the potential for meaningful discourse of this type) also changes—consider for instances the possibility for psychological analyses of King's biography of Satomi Myodo (1987) or some of the materials in the life of Hakuin (Yampolsky, 1971).

who spoke the text to a critique of the motives of the human authors and transmitters of sacred texts). For all its philosophical sophistication the Buddhist tradition never confronted (and has barely risen to confront) the full implication of such challenges.

Let us then pause briefly to reflect on some of our roots—on classical models for what one would characterize as "Buddhist Studies." I see a wide range of styles of scholarship. Some of these styles have deep roots in Asian as well as Western cultural conventions and assumptions about the nature of knowledge generally, about the nature of religion and religious knowledge, and about the nature of Buddhism. Classical Buddhist assumptions in these areas have been transposed or displaced to apply them to the human sciences, thus confirming prejudices that are at the same time secular and religious.

Of course, other styles of Buddhist Scholarship have deep roots in Western paradigms that may be traced back to Greece and the Middle Ages, to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, to Western colonialism, to the development of the modern research university, and to the development of Western historical criticism. But in the present essay I wish to focus only on a few traditional Buddhist models that may have reinforced some of our own preconceived notions about the nature of evidence, discourse, and text.

Four models of Buddhist scholarship are to a great extent defined by their subject matter—in other words, they emulate the assumptions and goals of the subject they study. These models or ideals are: (1) the true word, especially the written scriptural word, as the object and goal of Buddhist scholarship, (2) the doctrinal system as a prerequisite for truth, (3) the doctrinal word as the principal tool for understanding Buddhism, and (4) the sequential or chronological ordering of events and ideas as a necessary precondition for the truth of judgments about religion.

The definition by subject matter is only the surface of these genres. There is more to be said as to the cognitive styles and contexts that define and constrain each of these genres, but I will confine myself to a brief examination of how these genres of scholarship suggest the limits of our scholarly imagination. These are a few of the ways our object of study tends to shape our discourse, or how they become part of our discourse, rather than simply the object of our discourse.

1. Words as the primary object: The strict, or classical, philological model
This is one of the oldest "method" of Buddhist Studies—old in Asia as well as in Europe.[8] It owes its strength and longevity to the virtues of close, grammatical reading. But it often assumes that "Buddhism" is primarily, if not exclusively, accessible through, or embodied in, texts, and that certain texts rather than others embody Buddhism in a more true or perfect form. In its most extreme forms this model obsesses over individual words and syllables, almost as if meaning depended on the elucidation of single words.

Philology is, as the Greek roots of the English term suggest, a love for words—and in this love it betrays its magical origins. The philologist believes that words contain truth, and that their power derives from truth. The philologist also believes only he or she has access to "the true word." One may reject the notion that the true word is the word of God, that God's authorship is the ultimate guarantee of meaning, yet authorship, authority, and truth remain linked in the scholarly imagination.

Traditionally, this true word was the etymology, that is, the philologist assumed, against the evidence of living languages and historical linguistics, the existence of an ultimate, pure origin of words. The usual claim is to knowledge of an earlier or earliest "meaning" of the word, a meaning that somehow invalidates or supersedes any other meaning the word may have later in history. Thus, the Buddhist scholar may debate the "original" meaning of the name "Amitābha," concluding that he can know the true meaning of the name of the Buddha Amitabha, and that he can know this meaning better than those for whom the name is an integral part of a living language and a living universe of belief.

In its most extreme practical form, the clarification of etymologies and the proper choice of variants constituted the whole of the philological enterprise. The true word was the key to the true text, and the latter was the locus and the ground of meaning and authority. In its most extreme theoretical (or theological) formulations, the philologist claimed that he could understand the believer's belief better than the believers themselves by understanding the true meaning of the texts the believers claimed as

8. That is, if we consider Burnouf as the founding father of Buddhist Studies. But even Vassiliev, working "in the field," speaks of how his texts allowed him to correct the Buddhist teachings he received from his informants in China. If one traces the origins of Buddhist Studies to an even earlier stage, say to the groping researches of de Harlez or Abel Rémusat, Buddhist Studies as "philology" is even more clearly a reverence for words, written words, above everything else.

their ultimate authority. Such claims are indeed a rare combination of Protestant models of scripture-centered theology, colonialist presumptions of cultural privilege, and a misuse of rationality as a key to understanding the non-rational. This exotic combination creates a scholarly fundamentalism that asserts that only texts, and only "old" or "primary" texts should have authority, that texts have fixed, immutable, "original" meanings which inhere in the text itself, and above all that there is a sharp distinction between textual truth and the truth of daily superstition.

This form of scholarship is represented by the traditional editor and translator. The philological tradition seeks to "establish" a text (ironically, this has been called "lower criticism" in other quarters) and then to convert this text by some type of grammatical algorithm into a text in another language, which is then presumed to be a true version of the original.

This hope or aspiration has Buddhist antecedents, for instance, in the Chinese Buddhist search for the original Indian text and the struggle to find the right translation method. But our ancestors had a better sense of mythic irony, for they often conceived of the original as an ideal, lost, inaccessible, and inexhaustible—as all pristine sources ought to be—serving perhaps as an antidote to the hubris of the editor-translator.

Among Buddhologists, the presumption of a single source lead to the once common practice of attempting to "establish" a text by conflating several versions, often from obviously divergent recensions, traditions, and regions. Thus was born the art of reading a Chinese-Tibetan-Sanskrit text, which in the hands of a skillful philologist could be used as an ingenious control on the vagaries of textual transmission, but which could be overdone to create a hybrid text. When such a text was created, it was presented as a work of philology, with an almost naive pretense that it was not a creative work of literature, not a work of commentary, criticism, or theology. But this pretense is central to the survival of the myth of philological authority: there is not only the possibility of a perfect enunciate, but it has been in fact identified, the single true word is safeguarded by science, not tradition.

This critique of philology should not be taken to imply a rejection of the fundamental role of the discipline. It is a critique intended to restore perspective in those of us who practice the discipline. The object of criticism are the tacit assumptions that allow us to present an edition as the true text, or the assumptions that make us confuse correctness or completeness with historical accuracy or even truth. I am also questioning the assumption that the text, especially the text established by the philologist,

is somehow a privileged voice, an authoritative source for judgments of truth in matters of Buddhist doctrine or history.

Accuracy does not guarantee much, especially when it is a matter of accuracy as the recovery of the text verbatim. For the verbatim reproduction of a text is only that, the reproduction of a text. This is the trap of the philologist, so well depicted in Borges's "Pierre Menard, autor del Quijote" (Borges, 1944a). The true perfect exegesis, the true perfect edition, tells us nothing about the text—at best it is an echo of a text.

There is still room for, and an unquestionable need for accuracy and rigor. No one could quarrel with the thoroughness of texts such as the *Udanavarga* constructed by Bernhard, which, although claiming to present the correct text, is compiled with enough care to provide the next reader with the necessary tools to make his or her own decisions as to which text is to be read. Also worthy of being presented as a model of careful work to our students are works like Fujita's transcription of the Nepalese manuscripts of the *Sukhāvativyūha*. My words of warning are not directed at thoroughness or at the need for some sort of grammatical and textual integrity, but rather at the presupposition that textual integrity and "neatness" are synonymous with truth, or with historical fact or historical understanding.

A critique of narrow philology is not a critique of philology, nor is it a defense of "higher criticism" and critical theory for their own sakes. It is more a warning against a neglect of the study of the text for what it may tell us about actual texts and actual human beings, about the situation that make the text a cultural product, a neglect of the cultural function, literary and moral merits of the text, and a loss of memory that leads to forgetting the study of the text for what its study may tell us about ourselves and our goals.[9] These types of neglect allow us to ignore tradition, its value, its challenges and what we may need to challenge in tradition. Differences, meanings, and conflicts are glossed over.

The confusion that can arise from attempts to conflate meaning with verbatim reproductions of a text, text with single literal meaning, and total meaning with uncontested meanings, can be seen in a recent translation of *Suttanipāta* published by the Pali Text Society (Norman, et al., 1984). In

9. The word "actual" is used advisedly to modify "text." Actual is not the same thing as real or true. The term is a shorthand for a perspective on the text that takes into account as wide a context as possible, considering the materiality of the text, its intertextual parameters, the history of its uses and commentaries, and the function of the text in the research, intellectual, and professional lives of modern scholars.

this work an attempt is made to have the English reflect the grammar of the original (though not the poetic complexity, or the meter), whatever the pitfalls of this conceptions of the text, it should nevertheless be a challenge to the traditional readings of this text through late commentaries. Yet the editor attempts a compromise with tradition avoiding an obvious confrontation. This strategy produces a strange hybrid that is neither one thing nor another, and creates confusion where the reader should have seen conflict.

Naturally, these last paragraphs are to a certain extent caricatures, but they are arguably "exaggerations in the direction of truth." Contemporary practitioners of the art have gradually moved—and I hope will continue to move—in the direction of a more critical view of their task. A "more critical view" means a scholarship that is aware of the difficult position of the textual scholar: between the risk of being another Pierre Menard and the risk of pure palimpsest, and between the risk of disregarding the constraints of source and object, on the one hand, and becoming, on the other hand, paralyzed by the hope of gathering all the sources, of having every variant and every edition in "the Library of Babel" (Borges, 1944a).[10]

Jerome McGann, offering a "critique of modern textual criticism" (1983), reveals the limitations of a model of textual transmission that presupposes a single prototype or that asserts the ultimate authority of a putative "autograph." McGann's critique is especially illuminating for those of us who work with ancient Asian text because it is addressed at textual criticism in the study of texts composed after the introduction of the printing press—in other words, it is a critique applied to a literary context in which the concepts of autograph and faithful reproduction make some sense. One need not look at the complexities of textual transmission in Asia to realize that the concepts of autograph, original, and accuracy in transmission are relative reference points, controls that are themselves shifting as information, interpretation, and goals shift.

Anyone who has experienced the trials and tribulations of writing and publishing knows how uncertain is the process and the ideal. One must

10. Ironically, Borges himself not only writes playfully *with* Buddhist ideas but also "seriously" writes *about* Buddhism. In the latter efforts one cannot avoid the feeling that he has allowed himself to get trapped more than once in the web of philological fantasy, when he attempts to understand the legend of the Buddha using 19th century demythologization (Borges, 1952). For all his attempts to penetrate the mystery of Buddhism Borges still does this through the eyes of European scholarship, which he barely imitates (Borges and Jurado, 1976, and 1980).

negotiate with editors after spending long hours negotiating with oneself in an effort to craft a very preliminary object—the so-called "manuscript." We look in trepidation as this object is transformed into a different one, the book or the chapter. Throughout the process we are sustained by a belief, which we hold against all evidence, a faith that somehow the creator, and the ideas, and the words, and the book form some sort of coherent whole, perhaps an unchanging unity. We live in the hope that whatever comes out at the end will become an effective vehicle for what our imperfect memory makes us believe were or are our positions, or for what memory makes us believe are the true words about someone else's words and ideas. When the final work becomes the locus or the pretext for a plurality of foreign voices, what shall we conclude, that the work has been misunderstood by every other reader, or that maybe there were many works to start with?

The emptiness of author and authorship is both a cultural event of our time and a subjective experience. This event and this experience are simple reminders that any text lives only in a context created by other texts, other events, other persons—there is no such thing as erasing the "errors" of our predecessors, since our "discoveries" only make sense in the context of the discourse they created. Buddhist words and works in particular, if presented as the texts "as they are," as "what the texts say before any interpretation," or as the truly original source, without precedent, would be context-less. In a paper that has been unfortunately neglected, Paul Griffiths gave us the convenient term "Buddhist Hybrid English" to designate that form of English we have created in an attempt to translate Buddhist jargon into English. But this attempt seems to fail only because it is an attempt to convey Buddhist discourse apart from a community of believers, "free of interpretation" and free of the biases that are built into the English language—in other words, as if it could exist outside the actual world of English language users. Griffiths also pointed out the absurdity of a translation without a context, and seemed to privilege the contemporary interpretive study over the translation, arguing that the Western scholar should only do the former. In doing so, he was pointing not at a problem inherent to Buddhist texts but inherent to transmitting literature into a culture that still lacks the audience for that literature.

My perception of the problem differs from Griffiths's, insofar as the Buddhist case is only an extreme case of the problem of translation generally. Like other translations, translations of Buddhist texts must have an opportunity to enter the shifting terrain of the international language of English, and there compete for meanings. One must, therefore, come to

the defense of a modicum of Hybrid English. Unamuno's criticism of the those who expect proper Spanish translations ("traducciones castizas") of Hegel and Kierkegaard seems applicable in this context. No one among us can predict, much less legislate, the future of appropriate or meaningful language—to do so would be to claim individual property rights over something that is useful and valuable only because it cannot be owned by individuals. Like the single true text, the single appropriate expression is only a fiction, a fantasy created by our desire to control the authority of the sacred word.

An excursus: The lexicon

An extreme manifestation of the cult of the word is the belief in the power of the glossary, the lexicon, and the word index. Again, the Buddhist tradition has provided us with a model to follow. We can call this the *Mahavyutpatti* tradition—which originates in the West with an early attempt to translate a derivative of the great Tibetan glossary, an attempt that is one of the earliest pieces of Buddhist scholarship in Europe. As an exaggerated appeal to the authority of words, this tradition would have meanings encoded in lists of polyglot equivalents. It is also assumed that "the underlying meaning" is a Sanskritic meaning. In this form, the lexicographic tradition has been considerably undermined by the growth of independent Sinological and Japanological branches of Buddhist Studies, and of late, has also been weakened by the growing independence of Tibetan Studies. But here too the tradition still retains a place of importance in the training of Buddhist scholars, because Buddhism itself relied on and turned towards the Sanskritic meaning of words as a corner stone for the construction of theological meaning.

A close relation to the tradition of the word-list is the index tradition. In Buddhist studies the distinction between the index and the concordance has failed to develop as it has in other disciplines. Critical indexing (as we see, e. g., in Weller's index to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*) is rare; so are indexes that serve a heuristic function, be it grammatical (as in Nobel's index to the Tibetan text of the *Suvarṇaprabhā*) or thematic-exegetical (of which only some rare indexes of similes and metaphors exist). Word lists are of some use, especially when they are comprehensive—see Ejima's index to the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra* (1985), the fruit of ten years of work. But generally it is not easy to tell if a work of this nature is meant as a tool or as a collection of sacred words.

I allude to this confusion between tool and collection of sacred words, but I do not mean this facetiously or sarcastically. It may be that the

index does serve a sacred purpose worth investigating. It is also true that indexes are still of some value in the absence of comprehensive critical dictionaries.

2. "Systems of thought": The scholastic model

Asia, however, did not only give us the sutra, and the translator, or the lexicographer, it also gave us the creator of systems, the scholastic as commentator and abhidharmist. Thus it gave us a second model of Buddhist scholarship. Many of us, trained in the hallowed philological tradition were also trained in an abhidharmic tradition. The recognized need (and I would argue the justifiable requirement) that our students understand traditional systematizations often bred modern abhidharmists. Figures like Rosenberg, Vassiliev, Stcherbatsky, and their Indian, Tibetan, and Japanese sources played a major role in the formation of early Western models of Buddhist scholarship and conceptions of Buddhism. They tended to create a Buddhism that was disembodied, abstract, and, above all, deceptively elegant, antiseptic, and orderly.

This is not meant to deny the importance of the careful study of native scholastic traditions. Among the many reasons why Buddhist cultures and literatures should be part of a university curriculum, I would list first the fact that Buddhism offers a mature and sophisticated critical tradition that can be used in the classroom as a model of what is alternative. My warnings are more against two other, dangerously overlapping, uses of the tradition: (1) to create the illusion that Buddhism is a closed system, impenetrable or unchallengeable, and thereby, (2) to reinforce the Western preconception of Buddhism as the wholly other and incommensurable.

The scholastic systems should be the subject of some sort of social critique, of a critique of genre, etc. But, at the same time, they should retain some role as part of the backdrop for our pedagogical narratives of Buddhist history and doctrine. They should also be the object of philosophical criticism. A fine example of this approach is the work of Paul Griffiths (1991, 1994), which illustrates well an imaginative use of this tradition, in his case concerned not only with contexts but with what we may call etic validity.[11] He has been one of the few scholars of Buddhism

11. I am not sure how Griffith's interests and approaches in this latter work would agree or disagree with his earlier statements about Buddhist Hybrid English. But it would be unfair to make much of disagreements I may see today without first hearing what disagreements he would see, because the two sets of opinions represent two different Griffiths at two different points in time.

to recognize that underlying our historical and textual research—and perhaps ultimately providing or denying its justification—is a struggle for truth, and that generally the Buddhist scholar is philosophically timid in this area.

I would add, in a more contemporary tone, that "truth" comes in many forms and shapes, and that the struggle for authority and its accouterments (prestige, power, influence, self-satisfaction, and a sense of security and control), can take place in the restricted and isolated environment of an academic guild, around issues of syllable count and epigraphic dating. One should not assume that the scholar who denies any interest in philosophical truth is in fact renouncing all claims on truth.

"Truth" in the abstract is never enough. It is in the nature of philosophy and theology to thirst for systems and order, to crave for some type of closure. But this is only achievable in a didactic mode, in the mode of the catechism. In other socio-political contexts, the press for ideational closure and neatness unravels. This closure may be reduced to an ultimate appeal to what is wrongly conceived as a "Mādhyamika mystical silence." It may be established with an appeal to a non-Buddhist authority (though this is now less common). But the most common is for the closure to be constructed—very much like the illusion created by Borges with his Dr. Brodie, and his Hervert Quain—out of the presumed order and internal consistency of the system.

The illusion of completeness is a traditional Buddhist value so that it seeps into modern scholarship from traditional models as well as from our natural compulsion to have it all. It is therefore possible to see these styles of scholarship as a modern response (or, rather, correspondence) to the authority of the Buddhist tradition itself, but they also may be the result of the Western scholars discovering himself in the Indian scholastic. One may use knowledge not as self-discovery or discovery but as self-confirmation or as a way of knowing in order not to know.

Buddhist scholastic traditions deserve of course our attention as documents of Buddhist ideology and polemics. But they cannot contain the last words in matters of doctrine, much less of history. The question is how they are to be read, the degree of suspicion that we must bring to a genre that is peculiarly multivocal and therefore cannot be seen as normative. One needs to understand its multivocality and its position relative to other sets of voices, including those that are presented as the source for scholastic authority, their opposites or so-called "low" traditions, and the traditions of the contemporary world.

A specially silent, but egregious, gap in the construction of scholastic normative pictures of Buddhism is created precisely by the absence of the alternative voice and the alternative genre, by silence regarding the social setting and the religious function of those alternative voices. One does not have to advocate any extreme left-wing position to see that important segments of the religious life of a tradition are ignored by the systems approach to religion and ideology of religion. Even a conservative, albeit idiosyncratic, thinker like Miguel de Unamuno saw the difference between the voice of a John of the Cross and the voice of a Teresa of Avila, understanding that the issue was not one of differences in doctrines or systems (John of the Cross's strength), but of personal and gender styles, and of expressive force (Teresa's strength). In other words, the topic of theological writing, like the topic of all other writing, is the person and his or her position in a world of culture and materiality (St. Teresa's "pots and pans," in Unamuno's language). Teresa's idiosyncratic and messy style has, for a given culture and a given subculture (Unamuno is thinking of Spanish women) the same force, power, and importance as the *Critique of Pure Reason* has for a different subculture (male, Northern European). The system is therefore only the veneer of other realities, which, of course are many of them social, but which I would argue, with Unamuno, can be at the same time "spiritual" and "philosophical" but of a kind different from the illusion of order created by the sanitizing, prophylactic effect of scholastic systematization.

3. Doctrine and truth: The doctrinal tradition

In our field, perhaps more than in any other, there is a constant struggle to bring in or keep out questions of truth. Susumu Yamaguchi is said to have gently persuaded Louis de la Vallée Poussin to wonder aloud about his motives for studying Buddhism: the practice of this métier—strange indeed in Western societies—must hold some clue to the secret (perhaps unconscious) workings of the mind of this particular and peculiar type of scholar.

We may ask what attracts a scholar to a field where "doctrine" and "truth" are clearly being contested, and what makes one type of person into a defender of Buddhist truth claims, another into a detractor (a type that is surprisingly rare, at least in the scholar's public persona), another into remaining evasive and hiding behind the shield of "scholarly neutrality."

Committed scholarship is a style of Buddhist learning for which the tradition provides a variety of models. In fact, the presence of such mod-

els may be part of the reason that reactions to the issue of doctrinal truth can be so strong—the Buddhist tradition, though generally less assertive and aggressive than other religious traditions, is nevertheless a proselytizing tradition, and as a religion demands some sort of commitment.

How sensitive this topic can be becomes obvious to me even as I write these lines and hesitate: most of the contemporary examples that come to mind result in such poor scholarship (and often work against the tradition in strange ways) that I move with trepidation. Nevertheless, the traditional model of scholarship with commitment can produce elegant and responsible scholarship even today. One can think of the work (or I should say the life-time dedication and creativity) of Gadjin Nagao as perhaps the quintessential model of quality for this tradition.

Likewise, it is possible still to find intelligent criticism (that is, in the sense of polemics, not in the sense of critical theory) following traditional doctrinal lines. The recent work of Hakamaya and Matsumoto (their censorial term "hihan" sometimes misconstrued as if it meant "critical" in the contemporary Western sense). Needless to say, I would take exception with their use of concepts of history and origin, but as I have already noted, the tradition accepts these models, and a criticism coming from within the tradition is justified in appealing to such notions of history. In the same breath I add, however, it is justified, but it must also be ready to be challenged by more contemporary notions of history and authority.

More common than these two types is the attempt to make "silent statements about truth"—that is, the presentation of doctrinal claims as part of simple "reporting" tradition. This refers to the scholar whose leanings and preferences are hidden behind the persona of the "objective reporter" (alas, a true oxymoron). This is doxography's rich cousin—the modern scholar replicates or imitates the classical doxographer with the advantage of some modern tools. At one time this was a common genre (perhaps a method of sorts, insofar as genre and method cannot be separated in practice). But its main weakness (talking about systems of truth while ignoring everything that is outside the system) is now too well known. Regrettably, neglect of doxography may bring with it neglect of the broader issues of "systems" and their religious and social functions.

On the positive end, the attempt to appear "objective," if accompanied by the understanding and practice of accounting for negative evidence, can lead to preservation and highlighting of particular strata of the tradition that would otherwise be neglected by the scholar who has shed all pretense of "objectivity." On the negative end, the objective accountant, like the doxographer, can turn into a professional claiming his or her pro-

ductions as independent entities called facts, discoveries, and the end and all of science. Then this scholar is dangerously close to so many other ways of knowing in order not to know (and confess without confessing). Or, at best, scholarship has then the beauty and joys of butterfly collecting (admiration that depends on the death of the object).

4. Doctrine and time: Textual histories

The construction of history based on the logic of textual evidence (that is on a "rational" ordering or stratification of the sources) is especially common in the study of Indian Buddhism and may be due in part to scarcity of historical documents. But the general tendency to understand history as a movement in a single, orderly, and rational direction is not only due to the need to rely on too much literary sources. Here too truth values and judgments of value generally are reduced to a certain preconception of what is order, and the more fundamental preconception that order must exist in history. This is compounded by the existence of so-called Buddhist "hermeneutics" of stratified truth, or the hierarchy of truths. The modern scholar therefore finds himself or herself reproducing, consciously or unconsciously a type of *p'an-chiao*.

History then becomes not the history of common belief systems and local variations, but the story of how a system of beliefs either devolves away from its pristine origins (decay) or evolves towards a culmination or recovery (growth). Buddhist traditions lend us models for both metaphors of history. Decay is the theme of the so-called "prophecies of the decay of Dharma." Culminationism is at the root of the so-called "hermeneutics of the three turnings."

The concept of historical decay, so common in the days of Spencer and Spengler, has fallen into disrepute. But culminationism is still very much alive and often shapes our teaching, because our courses are often organized according to some type of chronological grid. It is possible to combine both models by conceiving of "life" as culminating in old age. Thus, a recent book on Buddhist art states in its preface that the books is "a panoramic survey of the history of Buddhist art from its origins in India to its final efflorescence in Japan" (Yamamoto, 1990).

Many of us are trying to move away from the chronological template in class and in research. The challenge of the future, however, will be to find a way to retain the obvious pedagogical advantages of a chronological matrix while we replace the implicit universal linear narrative with a narrative that is neither culminationistic nor atomistic. At this point in time, it appears that the abandonment of hegemonic and universalisitc

conceptions of history is leading to the fragmenting of knowledge, history, and identity. The flourishing of the Festschrift and the conference volume may be a silent academic reflection of the general fragmentation within and among societies that comes with the loss of a sense of universal history, the loss of self, and the loss of object.

The Development of Critical Awareness

There is no need to review the traditional roots of the problematic assumptions behind these four approaches to Buddhist Studies. One cannot imagine that any one would quarrel with the notion that traditional Buddhist's in Asia have assumed a single voice, the pure and pristine source, cloaked in the mythologies of gradual revelation, culmination, and the last word. But, much culminationist polemics (sometimes mistakenly called "hermeneutics" in contemporary writings on Buddhism) have had as their astutely implied consequence the existence of a "latter teaching" that is in fact the final teaching and by implication the true and pure teaching. Buddhist scholars and believers are not, after all, immune to the fever of wanting to be "the last man."

Nevertheless, apologetic moves like Buddhist culminationist doctrines bear witness to an awareness of the multivocal nature of a tradition. Such an awareness or unconscious intuition can also be seen in the traditional histories of the schools and doxographies. The intuition appears occasionally in the reports of pilgrims, in the religious travelogue. The latter genre might be seen as an early forerunner or distant relative of the modern ethnography. Ethnography, of course, is not necessarily critical—its various roots in the goals and habits of the wealthy traveler, the colonial officer, and the missionary are well known and need not be reviewed here.

Nevertheless, ethnographic and anthropological research occupy a dominant position among those methods that attempt to avoid some of the pitfalls of the traditional modes of doing Buddhist Studies (Lewis 1989, 1992, 1994). Yet anthropological thinking sometimes seems to only exaggerate the gap between present forms of Buddhism and ancient Buddhism that had been posited already by the ideal image of the inviolate past presented by the philologist (the human Buddha who could not have taught the "superstitions" of real-life Buddhists). The philologist may be reluctant to accept what we observe in the field, or what the believer reports to us in the field, but the anthropologist should not accept the assumptions of this reluctance. The converse of this is the tendency,

noticeable in some recent studies to assume that the textual study is not only in need of revision, but fundamentally flawed.

A healthy critique of the uses and misuses of the textual tradition needs to stay with us, especially with those of us devoted to textual study. A refocusing of our narratives on the wider field of practice (as observable behavior in the field) can give us refreshing presentations of the tradition (witness some of the more recent books of wide appeal, such as Swearer). However, any good criticism can be abused. Three words of caution are therefore in order.

First, we are reaching the saturation point, at which the critique can become trite, predictable. When this happens the critique turns into tendency and fashion, and inevitable blinds us to other perspectives. The net effect on humanities and humanistic learning, and, what is more important, humanistic education, is not easy to access. The presentation of Buddhism in the classroom as something occurring only in a practice without canonical benchmarks may be more corrosive that one can perceive on first blush—after all, this degree of secularization and devaluation of the book is not accompanied by a parallel secularization and devaluation of the Great Books of our own culture. Granted that in major research universities this may not be the case, still I would argue that, in a society dominated by Western models of truth and authority, an exaggerated inflation of the "field" approach to Buddhism that excludes the textual tradition and the canons that guided that tradition may work in support of the exoticization of Buddhism, reinforce its alterity, and reinforce the perception among our students and the public at large that Buddhism is only a curiosity, and certainly not comparable to the well ordered and well-demonstrated products of our own culture.[12]

Second, by the time Buddhist Studies came to appreciate fully the value of ethnographic observation, ethnography itself was under attack and in crisis. Ethnographic studies on Buddhist cultures or Buddhist communities have yet to make full and effective use of contemporary critiques of ethnography. It is too early to predict, for instance, how these critiques will affect the way we understand the interconnection between oral and

12. This opinion may very well reflect my experiences teaching in a university in the heartland of North America. But I cannot imagine there are many places where Buddhist canonical ideals and concepts of rationality compete without a handicap against Western canonical ideals and notions of rationality. The challenge to the canons is paradoxically after all a notion that is very white, very European, very middle class. Additionally, higher education in the industrialized world continues to be dominated by the ideals of European culture.

textual traditions in Buddhism, or the way we will come to understand the stratification of authority across a field of Buddhist practices.

Third, a simplistic or "methodological" exclusion of the textual tradition leads to two errors of perspective. This perspective may turn into fact the questionable assumption that textual traditions and textual elites are entities separate from the living traditions and the non-elite groups with which they obviously interact. Additionally, it may lead to further neglecting an important field of research: the location and function of the text in the praxis of a religious community.

We would be well advised, therefore, to open the field to alternative models, but to do so with constant watchfulness (which is not the same as being timid or unduly cautious). There is no single alternative method that will solve our problems. To assume that there is would be a return to the assumption of the single true word. The present climate of scholarship in other fields is already having a salutary effect on our field—the methods we may want to emulate are under constant attack and revision, to the benefit of all of us. Hence, lest I give the impression that Buddhist Studies is mired in ancient scholasticism and surreptitious dogmatism, I rush to note that as the second century of Buddhist Studies approaches its middle point, scholars are struggling more and more with the question of what is it that we are doing and why.

The process must continue. Buddhist Studies will have to come to grips with these questions soon or else continue its isolated existence. It may very well be that Buddhist Studies will remain marginalized even if it faces up to this challenge—after all there are forces greater than scholarly honesty and clarity. It may even come to pass that Buddhist Studies will disappear as a result of facing up to the challenge, destroyed by its own self-doubting; but I for one cannot imagine the field going in any other direction but the examination of its own assumptions, roles, and claims.

The training of Buddhist Studies scholars excludes serious reflections on the position and value of the scholarly enterprise, particularly that of the buddhologist. Such reflections may be avoided for reasons of efficiency, that is, of time. But they are also reflective of a general tendency to work as if the rest of the world were not relevant. Not only do we fail to examine the location of the discourse of Buddhist scholarship in scholarship and education generally, or its roots in the past (including the recent past of contemporary scholarship on Buddhism), we also miss, as a consequence, the opportunity to examine the role of Buddhist scholarship as a competing discourse, and above all the role of *Buddhist* discourse as a competing discourse. These are, in fact, the key functions of criticism,

all of which have not only theoretical interest but also practical consequences.

"Criticism" is a concept with a wide range of meanings (and therefore a wide range of claims). In Buddhist Studies, however, the dominant and normative model has been that of the curator, not the critic. Hence we have not enriched the field as we could have if we were more open to the full range of criticism that we find in other fields in the humanities. I am referring to the acceptance of judgments and evaluations (needless to say educated and discriminating) about the value—artistic, social, religious—of our sources, the application of so-called "lower-criticism with a clear view of its presuppositions and its implications for "higher criticism." An active and live debate on how we make the above judgments, in particular, the philosophical investigation of the process, the possibility, the meaning, and the ends of scholarly investigation generally. By "criticism" I mean primarily the last of these meanings, and include the investigation of comparative issues in doctrine, sociology, etc., as long as they are conscious efforts to define the nature of our relationship to the materials, subjects, or texts that we are investigating.

Efforts of this kind have already appeared, in works that received some initial celebratory reviews but were soon forgotten, or criticized not for the issues they raise, but for the ubiquitous "errors" in textual scholarship (the trump card is noting how the author is not familiar with "the original languages"). Such criticism is not surprising, since until recently some of the best criticism came from outside the field. Thus the work of Gudmunsen and Tuck fell prey to the most obvious defense of the guild. More recent work, it is to be hoped, will be more robust, since it is coming from within the guild. It remains to be seen how (or if) we will be able to make good use of the rhetorical criticism of Faure (1991, 1993) or the cultural criticism of Lopez (1995).[13]

It is neither necessary nor advisable to steer our students away from classical philology. But we in Buddhist Studies must practice a healthy detachment, an application of skillful means, with respect to its ancient

13. The reception of Huntington's radical rhetorical criticism is much more problematic, since it also raises the specter of borrowing surreptitiously Nāgārjuna's cloak of invulnerability. A different type of criticism, which I would call evidential criticism, has been presented in action more than in theory by G. Schopen. I believe Schopen is also doing a special kind of cultural criticism, although I have not seen him state anything like this publicly. Even his paper on "Protestant presuppositions" shies away from the implicit cultural criticism.

attachment to Enlightenment models of grammatical clarification and psychological divination à la Schleiermacher. The question of how (or if) it is possible to "divine" the other and his, or her, or their intentionality needs to be an integral part of our discussion. The degree to which such "educated guessing" can reflect the scholar and his community's scripting (Tomkins), or the degree to which it is a truncated dialogue (Tedlock) must be considered.

I do not present these imaginings as a way of undermining our profession or declaring our task absurd. But our task, if viewed with rigidity and grandiosity as a quest for the truth, is indeed an impossible task. On this I side with the more radical critical theorists. With de Man, I believe translation is impossible, and with Foucault I regard interpretation as the insertion into a text of a new and foreign voice—hence, "a displacement of authority." But this stance is only a reaction to what I view as the fundamentalism of traditional Buddhist scholarship. When I say that translation is impossible and interpretation is fraudulent, I refer to certain ideals of translation and interpretation. That is to say, a translation that represents the original accurately is impossible. The only perfect translation there can be is the original itself—which, of course, is not a translation, only Menard's *Quijote*. A "critical apparatus" that gives us the true and original social and psychological reality of the text's meaning is absurd, by virtue of the gulf to which the "apparatus" bears witness, and by virtue of the fact that no one can represent accurately and thoroughly the social and psychological reality of anything—not even his or her own reality.

Such ideals are only possible in a mythical discourse in which science is conceived in theological terms: that is, not as probabilistic reasoning and the testing of hypotheses, but as the establishment of authoritative truth. It is important that the scientific model be mentioned here, although the human sciences should be well advised to avoid using this model as the ultimate and absolute judge of scholarly integrity. For the concept of probabilistic reasoning offers a useful analogy for a crucial distinction often neglected in human sciences: the difference between syllogistic certainty and "likelihood."

A moderately experienced reader of Sanskrit can usually determine with a very high degree of confidence whether a given form in a given Sanskrit text is or is not a finite verb. This reader can also assume with almost absolute certainty that this verb forms the kernel of a clause. But, as the reader moves into the grammatical function of this particular verb in this particular clause, or into the relationship of the clause to broader and broader segments of discourse, confidence must by necessity decrease.

As certainty decreases, it becomes appropriate to talk of the likelihood of an interpretation.

This is not the same thing as denying all possibility of distinguishing right from wrong, as long as "right" and "wrong" mean, respectively, plausible and implausible. My criticism is also an affirmation of the probability that the right and wrong we advocate at a given moment may be undermined and denied at the next moment. Right and wrong of textual and cultural analysis are a matter of degrees of confidence. Yet these are not the same as probabilistic confidence intervals, because "probability" (or, rather, "likelihood") in the human sciences cannot be quantified, and depends on experienced intuition and linguistic skill in a manner that probability estimates do not in the social and natural sciences.

Likelihood in the literary sciences remains nevertheless the object of discriminating and educated judgments that constrain interpretive discourse. The actual constraints set by scholarly experience and convention are the "tools" of the trade. They are the limits to imagination set by the object and its medium (be it the limits of grammar or the limits of performance, for instance), and the limitations imposed upon us by the constricted range of our own discourse, audience, and social setting.

In the end, constraints make differences and meanings, because "constraint" is what determines the possibility of meaningful discourse. It guarantees a common language, and therefore a common set of values. It is one way to make sure that scholarship is not a narcissistic enterprise of talking to ourselves in an empty room.

But, in what sense could we say that the constraints of discourse ultimately make no difference? In the sense that the parameters of such constraints are to a certain degree in flux, or, as the fashionable jargon would have it, "they are contested horizons"—without jargon: intelligent, honest, human beings will disagree and argue about these constraints (and so will less intelligent, honest, or even less civil and benevolent human beings). Furthermore, those horizon's of meaning that affect judgments of right and wrong will always be dictated by communities and by the needs of communities. Our choice of the right or the wrong is only relevant insofar as a community will listen and pass judgment. And that the constraints are always open to new conceptions of what the applicability of our notions is. Thus, although the possible readings of a given passage may vary little in a period of a quarter or half a century, the limits of reading can easily expand or contract with the changing of culture, especially across many years of cultural history. Doctrinal readings may be displaced by metrical studies, edition, or etymological studies, which may

give way to form-critical studies, to be followed by a feminist critique. One does not necessarily preclude the other, but each new perspective changes the constraints that we accept as normal limitations on judgments of value.

There is consequently no specific method to most humanistic disciplines—and Buddhist Studies is no exception. There is no specifically Buddhist hermeneutics—unless one really believes in a single way of being Buddhist, in which case we are not talking of hermeneutics but of exegetical and apologetic strategies, at best. But there are a plurality of interfaces between Buddhist traditions (forms of discourse, and social contexts) and the social and discourse contexts of the scholar and the scholar's culture. The number of interfaces is perhaps finite, but it is not closed, not foreordained.

The scholar still retains a certain normative role as the interpreter of the rules of discourse of a given culture or subculture (France, India, the West, the quasi-Western culture of "world scholarship," the North American academy, the guild of Buddhist scholars, the guild of the tibetologists, etc.). But, as I have argued above, the object itself is also the object of this normative investigation—Indian scholastics still retain a certain normative role in Buddhist Studies, and that is as it should be, with certain caveats.

The caveats have to do with the second role of the scholar: that of negotiating normative authorities. The scholar has the difficult task of listening to the voice of Buddhism (or of the plurality of Buddhist voices), listening to the voice of Western cultures (even as they transform before our very eyes like so many clouds), listening to the voice of his or her own subculture (the academy, for instance), and yet retaining the capacity to assume a critical stance of skepticism, of inquiry, a willingness to test beliefs and values.

Texts and meanings are fragile because they are multivocal, and the scholar's position is precarious because it is always dialogic (even when we act as if it were not). But multivocality is something more than a social or literary phenomenon—it is also linguistic and psychological. Multivocality is built into language, and, I would argue, in our narratives and fantasies about subjectivity, intentionality, and authorship.

Roman Jakobson (quoted in Ginzburg 1986, 159) recognizes "two cardinal and complementary traits of verbal behavior": that "inner speech is in its essence a dialogue, and that any reported speech is appropriated and remolded by the quoter, whether it is a quotation from an alter or

from an earlier phase of the ego (said I)."[14] One would have to add, if in dialogue, then in conflict, if in conflict then precarious.

I trust my audience's familiarity with Buddhist notions of change and causality will make them more receptive to a description of the discipline as groundless and a prescription for opening the discipline to radical self-examination. We will not be destroying or betraying the tradition by opening ourselves to a revision of our view of the field. The fact that there is no substance (*svabhava*) to Buddhist Studies is good news, but it requires that we abandon our persistent thought habits (*abhiniveśa*).

Roles and Methods

The future of Buddhist Studies is very much in its past (meaning, of course, both the past of Buddhism and the past of the Western academy), not in the sense that we will return or that we must return to the past, but in the sense that the past reveals both the flaws and the strengths of the scholar's many roles. Our weaknesses are those of our genres, our guilds, and ultimately of what we call our method, and how we imagine it through the metaphors of our discourse ("definitive," "accurate," "ground breaking," etc.). Method, as I have argued, is to a great extent the formulation of the limitations of certain genres and the formulation of roles and skills, and of guild interests as constraints on what can be said. What are these roles which allow us to form societies of craftsmen? What have they been traditionally in the humanities, and, by extension, in Buddhist Studies?

We hear much talk about methods as if they were somehow theoretically based, or based on ultimately absolute philosophical reasoning. Such talk overlooks the extent to which a method is a posturing or the expected behavior of a role. The academic student of Buddhism, for instance, may appear in the guise of the "scholar" as "curator" or "diviner." The first is the scholar who understands his or her role as the custodian of a cultural object, or an idea, perhaps a "truth" Often the object that is being guarded has been "restored" by a process of divination that, the scholar would argue, guarantees that what is now in the curator's show case is the genuine object.

This role of course overlaps with that of the "cleric," the custodian of standards, values, truths. The cleric is no longer charged with the cure of souls but serves as a true "clerk," the custodian of grammar and the

14. I suggest the reader juxtapose this quotation with the passage from Saint Bonaventura quoted below.

proper genres of scholarship. Perhaps, if this clerk is up to date he or she will also be the custodian of "method" (constraints).

But scholars can still be "priests" in the sense that they can assume the role of the theologian and the mystifier. Carefully avoiding the external trappings of the priest, the scholars can nevertheless declare, for our benefit, what the truth of Nagarjuna's "mystical" experience is (or was?).

More common among contemporary scholars is the role of the anti-priest: the guardian of "secular authority." I do not refer here to the common iconoclasm directed at the consecrated work of other scholars, rather, I refer to the scholar's interest in undermining the authority of the tradition he or she studies. Seldom is this role part of the scholars public role. The motives remain a mystery to me, but it is clear that it is polite to pretend that scholarship is perfectly neutral. We would advance considerably in both the goals of scholarship and (paradoxically) the goals of belief and practice if we stopped once and for all the pretense that our scholarship is never inimical to Buddhist belief and practice. It often is, as it should be. It is also a competing authority.

The scholar's avowed neutrality is supposed to be a sign that he or she is a scientist. This role allows us to avoid the dangers of a public recognition of our role as critics. It also places us in the safe position of those who can claim that the ideas they explore are not their own. Interestingly enough this myth reinforces the idea that the scholar is not an author, that the scholars role is totally other than that of the creative artist. Yet, the scholar is supposed to be "original"—hence the inappropriate use of the metaphors of science: "data" and "discovery."

This is ironic, for here we have, as in the case of philology, a conception of truth that remains only vaguely articulated but has the potential for problematic contradictions. On the one hand, the scholar denies his roles as literary creator and craftsman, on the other hand he or she claims to be "original." On the one hand, the scholar elevates his role to that of the primary creator (devaluating the standpoint of the voices he is claiming to report), on the other, he or she skirts the responsibilities that come with usurping the primary voice.

The contemporary emphasis on "originality" which is held as an ideal even as we presume that the scholar is not adding anything to his or her sources, the emphasis on discovery in humanistic disciplines, and the denial that the scholar is a creator like a writer is not only ironic, it is a fundamental contradiction that hides the knotty problem of what is authorship and whose is the authoritative voice. The complex industry of producing books has many dimensions that we choose to ignore in our

public discourse—although they are often the object of much discussion during our private conversations. Central to this is the myth of the author as creator and the scholar as scientist.

In the 13th century, Saint Bonaventura debated the questions of what is an author and whether or not anyone other than God could be an author. The Seraphic Doctor wrote:

> [The] ways in which one writes a book are four. Someone may write down the works of others, adding and changing nothing; and this person is simply called "scribe" *(scriptor)*. Another one may write down the works of others adding elements that are not his own; and he is called a "compiler" *(compilator)*. Another one may write down both others' work and his own, but in what is essentially the work of others, adding his own for purposes of clarification *(evidentia)*; and he is called a "commentator" *(commentator)*, not an "author." Another one may write down both his own work and that of others', but in what is essentially his own work, adding the work of others' for purposes of confirmation; and such a one should be called an "author" *(auctor)*. (Bonaventura 1882, 14-15)

John Burrow, quoting this very same passage (1976, 615) notes how Bonaventura assumes that a thoroughly original composition, which is for us the mark of the true writer, is not possible. The passage is emblematic of the medieval conception of authorship, in which "a writer is a man who 'makes books' with a pen, just as a cobbler . . . makes shoes on a last" (Burrow, 1976). But we may learn much from this conception (a conception which was after all only displaced by the printing press, which may itself be soon displaced by the electronic medium). This is a conception of human agency and individual creativity very different from our own conceptions, but this is most likely a conception very similar to that of classical Buddhist sources.[15]

We cannot expect anyone among us to simply jettison his or her cultural baggage and return to a Medieval conception of individuality and human agency, but we can increase our awareness of the role of the scholar as craftsman and writer. We can come to understand that our task is neither the creation of something wholly new nor the accurate reflection of solid

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15. And I note, in order to highlight the ironies that nuance my arguments, that I quote Bonaventura's text from the Quaracchi edition, a true monument of 19th century text criticism.

"facts." We cannot pretend that humanistic scholarship is the gathering of accurate data (which, of course, is only the accountant's view of science) where there is in fact very little measurable data. Rather we have to understand our roles as different degrees of balance between writing one's own work and adding the work of others, or the work of others, adding one's own.

It is in the quest for this balance that issues of "method" and criticism become relevant. Theory and method are propaedeutic, pedagogic, and corrective. They are part of the ways by which we prepare scholars, transmit values, and keep ourselves honest. There is, therefore, an element of preparation, an element of transmission, and an element of integrity. One way of viewing these three is to conceive of them as three different forms of controlling for self-deception. Another way is to imagine them as dimensions of the investigation of knowledge itself. In these roles the scholar is a critic of his or her own métier.

Our critical goals, however, include unveiling the role of our audiences. These audiences, real or imagined, include the power-base of our discourse: the university, the religious institutions of our cities, town and nations, and the presence of our own individual communities of friends and acquaintances whose suspicion of our work shapes the caution with which we perform it (to say nothing of those parts of the world or the academy where speaking freely can cost position or advancement, if not life itself).

I would add, moreover, yet another audience (imagined yes, but all important): the audience as source, or the source as audience. Our images ("scholarly scenarios") of who the audiences of our sources were or of how these audiences may have used and understood our texts and objects are in fact part of the Buddhism that acts as a control or constraint on our scholarship.

But, "Buddhists" as audience are not always a silent or imagined audience. Contemporary Buddhists, wherever they may be, are also an audience for our scholarship. This neglected audience, which I am sure nevertheless affects our discourse, exists in three different roles. They can be audience in the most common meaning of the term—that is, they read our books. They are audience as target of the suasive power of our discourse (we try to influence their way of thinking). They can be a source (however maligned and deprived of authority they may sometimes appear), because, inevitably, they speak to us and make demands on us.

The object of our study, like the object of any other science worth pursuing, is ever present and shifting. But in our field the object is also a

voice that speaks to us and hears us. It is present not only as object but as a set of voices that demands something from us. In fact our "object" has had a biographic presence in all of our lives—especially on those of us who can remember moments in our life narratives in which we have "felt Buddhists" or "have been Buddhists" or have "practiced," as the contemporary English expression has it. I would venture more, even for those who at one time or another have seen in some fragment of Buddhist tradition a particle of inspiration or an atom of insight, Buddhism is an object that makes claims on their lives. For those who have failed even to experience this last form of interaction with the object, there must have been at least moments of minimal encounters with seeking students or, after a dry and erudite lecture, one of those emotional questions from the audience that make all scholars nervous.

The plurality and complexity of our audience can also be imagined in terms of the diversity of our pedagogical goals . The didactic dimension of our work is something that involves not only our colleagues, not only our younger colleagues (graduate students), but also our younger students, and the public at large. All of these ultimately become colleagues insofar as they shape in one manner or another our work, our expectations as to what an audience wants or does not want to hear, and even our mental models of what Buddhists may have desired, practiced, or imagined.

Among the ancient Mexicas, the métier of the scholar was the province of the *tlamatinime*, the wise men among the nahuas, who Bernardino de Sahagún called "sabios ó filósophos," but who were also the custodians of oral and written texts. A true *tlamatini*, according to the Códice Matritense, "lifts up a mirror in front of others, making them persons of sound judgment and circumspection, and giving them a face" (León-Portilla 1993, 65).

It would be presumptuous to compare the scholar with the wise man, but the scholar's knowledge nevertheless should serve as a mirror to others—and serve as the foundation for good judgment and circumspection. Good judgment in matters of scholarship is the domain of the scholar, but such good judgment should extend to other domains. Scholarship also may (and we hope will) serve the humanistic purpose of helping to shape persons, helping to shape a more humane being, a more humane face in all of us, thus giving us a face.

But, why should I say that comparing the scholar to the sage is presumptuous? Or with what effect in mind have I said this? First there is a "technical" difference: the scholar is open to a plurality of methods, the

plurality advocated in this paper. Second there is a social difference: the scholar, we would hope, has no aspirations to a position of authority comparable to that of the ancient sages. Third, there is a spiritual difference: in principle the respectability and validity of our efforts should not increase or diminish with our personal spiritual and moral growth or decay (which is not to say that there are no moral constraints to the intellectual enterprise).

These differences notwithstanding, we have a mirror to hold up. We would do well to remember that we must hold this mirror up in front of ourselves and that the face we thus form will have to be a changing face—not necessarily changing by spiritual growth, but changing by critical growth. The mirror is also held up in front of our audience. We provide our audience, in fact, with a variety of mirrors. This is the service of scholarship. Part of the message of this paper is a reminder that we must consider the services that we can render. these are services rendered by the field of Buddhist Studies to a broader field—responding to needs derived from our own cultural experiences, and responding to distinct cultural "choices."

We render a service to the Academy. First, to present and preserve another voice or another family of voices (what we call, in shorthand, "Buddhist traditions"). Second, to model a style of evidence.

We render a service to Buddhists and their ideals. First, by understanding their perspective on their traditions, their sense of continuity, and their sense of belonging. Second, by helping preserve their traditions. Third, by keeping a critical eye on criticism, seeing clearly when an arrogant eagerness to censure and ridicule appears under the guise of critical thought.

We render a service to criticism and its role in contemporary Western culture. First, by the mere fact that we help preserve alternative voices. Second, by insuring the preservation of alternative voices *within* Buddhism. Third, by questioning the same limitations and constraints that we believe are established by previous moments of critical reflection.

Humanistic scholarship stands in a no-man's land between tradition and criticism, between community and individual preferences. It cannot seek and cannot lead to agreement. The greatest mistake we can make is to try to be the fabled "last man" who has "the last word" (the "definitive" this or that). Our role vis a vis community is not one of deciding the issues once and for all but one of keeping more than one voice alive. Recognizing the power of voice, we must be careful not to seek to establish a single voice.

As in other myths of creation, the Popol-Vuh tells us that the creators created by naming, but they did so only after two creators had spoken to each other:

> Then came the word, Tepeu and Gucumatz came together, in darkness, in the night, and they spoke among themselves Tepeu and Gucumatz. They therefore spoke consulting each other, and meditating, they agreed among themselves and combined their words and their minds....
>
> Then Tepeu and Gucumatz came together; then they held council on life and light, what should be done so that dawn and daybreak would come, and who would produce food nourishment. (Popol Vuh 1994, 23-24)

Of course we are not Tepeu and Gucumatz, but we have a small world of our own to preserve and maintain, if not create, and we are still in darkness and need much more light. Conversation and deliberation may be the only tools at our disposal.

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