Conclusion

Yours Faithfully

[AU1]   The research for this book, developing out of my doctoral studies, did not begin as an inquiry into the notion of 'faith', but an inquiry into the ethico-political significance of Buddhist spirituality and meditation practice within the context of neoliberal governmentality. However, about one-third of the way into my doctoral studies, it became impossible to ignore a tugging felt at the heartstrings of this project of the authoring-I: the realisation that I'd been uncomfortable and, yes, *afraid* of stating openly my curiosity about the nature and role of faith in my reciprocal pursuits of Buddhism and academia. Why was I afraid? This discomfort was surely generated by the thorniness and irresolvability of the question of faith. But a significant degree of trepidation also stems from the tensions surrounding this authoring-I's attempt to understand his Buddhist faith *with and through* academic labour, from the tensions constituting my emergent subjectivity as a religiously committed, if conflicted, postcolonial 'Western Buddhist' convert working within the secular knowledge practices and perceived expectations of the university. Perhaps I was, and still am, afraid of the disapproval or, worse, the ridicule I might face in professing the faith I bring to and discover through Buddhist *and* scholarly practice.

As recounted in Chap. 2, my expressed academic interest in matters of faith was met with jests and incredulity. Was I being overly paranoid? In those situations, or any other situation, who decides, how does one decide, how does one *know*, once and for all, if the encounter between self and other has

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been hosted with reciprocal good faith or not? What is a responsible response in the face of undecidability? Without going so far as to accuse the professor in question, and others who have joked about my curiosity about matters of faith, of being deliberately dismissive, I have attempted through the autoethnographically informed analyses of this book to elucidate how this inaugural scene of undecidability might be at once an obstacle to and an opening for both 'paranoid' and 'reparative' modes of inquiry. So even though this study was not initially conceived as an inquiry about faith, and specifically the role of faith in academia, it did not take long before the undercurrents of discomfort erupted as a wave of curiosity and even exasperation: why are academics not willing to consider that a commitment to knowledge may also involve faith or, at least, be *hospitable* to the question of faith, and therefore the possibility that religious or spiritual pursuits may have contributions to make to some of the questions cultural studies research grapples with, like those concerning ethics, (inter)subjectivity, the body and affect?

In following this curiosity, I find it irresponsible to maintain a facade that holds that faith does not or cannot also support my making of a profession in academia. But why bother to profess faith? What purpose does it serve? To draw this book to a close—or, rather, to expose it as *an opening* for incalculable alterity (or, if I may, to offer it as a dedication of kammic merits to the Awakening of innumerable beings)—I want to connect the making of this profession with current concerns about the micropolitics of an increasingly corporatised academic regime, or what has been described as the neoliberal university. To recap, the question of faith I have developed in the making of this profession entails a two-pronged proposition: that faith enables a relation with the other and is necessary for the fostering of intellectual hospitality and relations of reciprocity within academic discourse and beyond; and that the ethical and political implications of faith be investigated in relation to the affective and visceral dynamics of experience. The purpose, *the hope*, of making this profession of faith should become clearer if we consider this two-pronged proposition through critical discourses that foreground the academic's experience of the vicissitudes of the scholarly profession, with the aim of exposing and transforming the anti-critical, depoliticising, injurious and silencing effects of the neoliberal academic regime.

THE MICROPOLITICS OF THE NEOLIBERAL UNIVERSITY

I trust that I am not the only one who is increasingly troubled by, and struggling to maintain conviction and hope in, the direction in which academia is moving in Australia, where I presently reside, and internationally. As I

write this, I have been working as a casually employed academic (or an adjunct, as it is known in the United States) for almost nine years. I have no savings and live with constant anxiety about my ability to meet basic material needs. Because of the decline in continuing or tenured appointments and decreasing state funding to higher education, I am part of the growing population of 'para-academics' (Wardrop and Withers 2014) who are labouring at the centre of the system and delivering the bulk of classroom activities to secure benchmarks of 'teaching excellence', while also marginalised at the periphery without professional support or security or any clear prospects of ongoing employment. I observe myself and others—doctoral students, new PhD holders, research fellows, senior professors, along with support staff—being subject to managerial surveillance at every turn, all having to meet the endless demands of technologies of audit, feedback, performance and risk management. Under this regime, research quality is measured according to the income it secures for the university-as-business, and teaching is evaluated according to student retention numbers and 'client satisfaction'. Aspirations of collegiality, collaboration, altruism or activism are suffocating in this climate of competitive individualism and precarity; though some individuals more than others are capitalising on the rise of managerialism and entrepreneurship in knowledge brokering as an opportunity for careerism.

I witness the blank faces of bodies that pass me in the corridor without noticing me, as they navigate their way on autopilot to teach their next class or attend yet another faculty meeting; I witness the Facebook posts of fellow para-academics who share their anxieties about juggling the desire to read and write with overloaded teaching workload, while others vent frustration at the prospect of facing yet another extended period of unemployment over the summer holidays without assurance of work in the next teaching year; and I witness the sigh of a senior professor and former supervisor as she tells me that her disciplinary stream and research cluster is undergoing yet another review, and that they have to again crunch the numbers and redefine their key performance indicators (KPIs) to justify their place in the school. But amidst all of this, I also witness glimpses of relief and reciprocity as professors and would-be professors extend a welcoming hand to one another at reading groups, seminars, symposia and conferences, as they gather to reassess shared concerns and remake decisions to repledge commitments.

Upon the completion of my doctoral studies, I began to research into the critical discourses on the neoliberal university and discovered that there is growing awareness of the necessity for a 'counter-culture against

neoliberalism' (Couldry 2012), the need to collectively act on the fact that 'resistance is not futile' (Callinicos 2006).[1] My hope, therefore, is that this book's reconsideration of the politics of spirituality and the question of faith will make a small contribution to this larger task of countercultural resistance against neoliberalism from within academia. Of particular relevance are micropolitical analyses of the university that understand that neoliberalism is contested 'in here' as much as 'out there'. As Stephen Ball (2012: 18) puts it, 'neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others'. I have shown in my discussion of the politics of spirituality that the analytic of governmentality offers a way to interrogate the workings of power that is sensitive to Foucault's dual understanding of subjectivity as being 'subject to someone else by control and dependence', and as the cultivation of 'identity by a conscience and self-knowledge' (Foucault 1982: 781). From this perspective, neoliberalism is not simply a political economic programme that can be traced through the 'Chicago School' of economics to the political thought of Friedrich Hayek. Nor is it simply an ideological framework seeking to convince us of the veracity or inevitability of the neoliberal programme. Rather, the second aspect of Foucault's understanding of subjectivity alerts us to the need also to be mindful of how neoliberal governmentality acts on affective and relational capacities, how certain 'negative affects' are normalised such that the sustained and collective critique or outright refusal of neoliberalism is inhibited (Gilbert 2013: 15). What neoliberal hegemony thrives on is not consensus on its political economic programme per se, but rather acceptance of the pervasive experiences of insecurity, perpetual competition and individual isolation as 'what life is really like'.

Using a Foucauldian framework, Bronwyn Davies and her collaborators have interviewed academics about the impacts of corporatism on academia. Their findings reveal that despite difficult and stressful conditions, academics still regard academic work as a reward in itself; there is a consensus that ethical commitment to truth, free enquiry, collegiality and public responsibility is crucial for intellectual life, and that the freedom to critique received ideas or to disagree with the decisions of authority is important. But the studies also indicate that academics have, to a large degree, taken up the entrepreneurial and managerial discourses of neoliberalism. Subjectivated as free, autonomous and responsible individuals, they have shown a marked tendency to 'disavow their own docility and see themselves as *choosing* to work in the ways they are working—as *responsible* for their own misery and

for the inferior nature of their products' (Davies et al. 2006: 315). In other words, under a neoliberal regime of power the academic's *passionate investment* of hope and trust in the commitments of the scholarly profession is being targeted as the object and objective of control.

For those of us in academia who are concerned about the will to knowledge-power working through the scholarly profession, along with the interrogation of the structural conditions shaping the neoliberal university, it is important also to collectively examine how we inhabit this environment—with feelings of hope, disappointment, pride, shame, confidence, anxiety and so forth about our capacity to honour (or not) the commitments and promises of the profession. An important first step is to not ignore the affective dimensions of academic life and labour that influence conscious intellectual activity and decisions. Inasmuch as this first step invites us to articulate and share our feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty as well as our hopes and aspirations—in short, *a necessary turn or appeal to the other*—the notion of 'faith' could serve as a guiding rubric for such affective micropolitical struggles of (un)becoming, which could arguably be described as a contestation over the spirituality of academia, if we take a Foucauldian understanding of spiritual corporality/political spirituality as the conduit for both subjectification and desubjectification in the art of government.

The affective micropolitics of (un)becoming or the spiritual struggles of academia are illustrated in Rosalind Gill's essay 'Breaking the Silence: the Hidden Injuries of Neo-liberal Academia' (2009), even though she doesn't couch her discussion in these terms. Gill begins by recounting a conversation with a female academic friend. The conversation revealed that they were both overworked and sleeping badly, and, because it was impossible to take time off from administrative and teaching duties for 'reading' and 'thinking', both were feeling 'awful' (Gill 2009: 228–229). Her friend also revealed that the berating comments by a reviewer for a journal article submission had left her feeling like a 'complete fraud'. Gill (2009: 229) suggests that this fragment of conversation about 'exhaustion, stress, overload, insomnia, anxiety, shame, aggression, hurt, guilt and feelings of out-of-placeness, fraudulence and fear of exposure within the contemporary academy' would strike 'deep chords of recognition' with academic readers. Yet, these experiences remain largely secret and silenced in the public exchanges of academia. We typically speak about these experiences informally in the corridor or during coffee breaks but not in publications or at conferences or faculty meetings. So despite widespread interest in reflexive scholarship

(as exemplified by the genre of autoethnography), it is as if the vicissitudes of academia are somehow exempt from critical attention.

By way of Elspeth Probyn's work, I have explored the reciprocal development of Buddhist critical-constructive reflection and spiritually engaged cultural studies.

With the help of an enunciative practice of 'speaking personally' and of 'finding a voice', I narrated and interrogated the lived tensions I grapple with within academia and beyond. In narrating her own struggles and encounters with the vulnerabilities of others, Gill makes a plea for collective critical interrogation of the vicissitudes of academic life and labour that itself performs such an enunciative practice as a form of the care of self. But this is not a self-indulgent exercise. For the 'I' in this enunciative practice figures as the emergent and contested outcome of the mutualising dynamics between power relations, discursive regimes and ethical sensibilities that cohere between self and others and between the individual and institution. This enunciative practice performs 'in-here' activism and is 'a crucial first step in making it possible (and even desirable) for academics to have fulfilling lives inside and outside the academy, and to engage in diverse forms of caring, support and activism' (Klocker and Drozdzewski 2012: 4). 'In-here' activism can also be performed via group activity, like the experimental collective biography organised by Zabrodska et al. (2011), which examined how bullying is implicated in the processes of subjectification within the neoliberal university. Their study shows that by articulating stories about bullying and then rewriting those stories in the light of the encounter with the stories of others, the participants were able to better rewrite the self and recognise that their afflictive experiences of shame, humiliation and failure are not symptoms of innate personal shortcomings, but are rather the normative effects of power circumscribing academic life and labour.

To give an account of oneself whilst accepting that any account is already crossed many times over by others not 'my own', is 'to accept a sense of self that is necessarily suspended "in tension", internally inadequate and unstable' (Couldry 1996: 328). To persist in speaking of the self in spite of irreducible complexity is implicitly to rely on a larger 'community' of other reflective agents. Or, as Probyn (1993: 169) underscores, self-reflexivity should open a 'perspective which allows us to conceive of transforming ourselves with the help of others.'

Compare this mode of 'truth-telling' with that demanded by technologies of feedback. Whether it be feedback from governmental audit processes circulated to management and staff or feedback from teaching evaluation

surveys, 'feedback is situated as an unequivocal good, as providing naturally emerging truth accounts that reveal, for good or bad, the state of the university and the status of academic workers within it' (Davies and Bansel 2010: 11). Through such circuits of feedback, staff members are enjoined to work with the university management to meet targets of 'quality', 'progress' and 'entrepreneurship' and other markers of fundability. But, as Davies and Bansel note, this 'collusion' (rather than cooperation) does not play out as a game of equals pragmatically responding to unavoidable governmental pressure: 'After all, such truth telling [between equals to interrogate the pressures stemming from the prevailing regime of power] might lead to collective resistance. Instead, technologies of audit are mobilised to generate the level of vulnerability that will guarantee the right performances, without resistance' (2010: 11).

In contrast, the 'truth-telling' of 'in-here' activism involves equals who are exploring countervailing responses to the neoliberal university. By speaking frankly about the anti-critical, depoliticising and/or injurious effects that are perpetuated but effaced by the positioning of technologies of audit as an unequivocal good, these enunciative practices reveal the equivocal feelings and attitudes that academic workers have towards normative demands of 'quality' or 'professionalism'. These accounts about the vicissitudes of academia are not articulated as naturally emerging truths. Rather, they willingly foreground the irreducible complexity that circumscribes their 'truth-telling', revealing that their accounts of the academic self are dependent on the self-reflexive accounts of others for their truth value. Thus, it is not simply the objects of study in scholarly research (e.g. the activities of subcultural formations or institutions like the university) that are of heuristic and political value. Rather, the *mode of address* also holds critical, ethical and political potential. In this instance, the mode of address performs an *act of witnessing*. For inasmuch as the work of 'truth-telling' necessarily presupposes a turn or appeal to the other, enunciative practices of the self are constituted by a testimonial relation. Is any testimonial relation possible without the solicitation of trust, a profession of faith—of good faith?

A Profession of Faith for the University Without Condition

The deconstructive understanding of a promissory, quasi-transcendental condition of trustworthiness anterior to every speech-act has provided the basis for the first aspect of my two-pronged proposition about

faith, as that which enables a relation with the other and is necessary for the fostering of intellectual hospitality and relations of reciprocity within academic discourse and beyond. This Derridean reading of an elementary 'bare' faith as the shared 'source' of religion and (techno) science has been a key source of inspiration for the making of this profession. In fact, the subtitle of this book was drawn from Derrida's lecture/essay, 'The Future of the Profession or the University Without Condition (thanks to the "Humanities," what could take place tomorrow)' (2001), where he insists on upholding the value of performative declarations that promise as they profess. Speaking specifically of a European-derived model of the university, Derrida says that this 'university claims and ought to be granted in principle, besides what is called academic freedom, an *unconditional* freedom to question and to assert', as well as 'to say publicly all that is required by research, knowledge, and thought concerning the truth' (Derrida 2001: 24). The university without condition, or the unconditional university, has not yet come into existence, even though its received-but-unfulfilled promise inherits a legacy that can be traced through the Enlightenment to the theological tradition of scholasticism.

For Derrida (2001: 28–29), the unconditional university has to be distinguished from 'all research institutions that are in the service of economic goals and interests of all sorts'. He does not examine the 'neoliberal university' as such, but he effectively situates his 'profession of faith' within this context when he says that the university today 'sometimes puts itself up for sale [and] risks becoming a branch office of conglomerates and corporations' (Derrida 2001: 28). What Derrida delineates instead are certain possible directions in which the 'new Humanities' could be cultivated for the university to come. The new Humanities must be capable of undertaking the task of deconstruction *ad infinitum*, beginning with the deconstruction of their own history and axioms. For example, this could involve the rethinking of their own history with regard to 'the act of professing' and 'the theology and the history of work, of knowledge and of faith in knowledge, the question of man, of the world, of fiction, of the performative and the "as if," of literature and of *oeuvre*' (Derrida 2001: 49). Importantly, the purpose of developing the 'new Humanities' is not to contain them within the limits of traditional disciplines. Rather, Derrida professes hope in that the new Humanities will 'cross disciplinary borders without, all the same, dissolving the specificity of each discipline into what is called, often in a

very confused way, interdisciplinarity or into what is lumped with another good-for-everything concept, "cultural studies"' (2001: 50).

I cannot tell if Derrida is deriding cultural studies or alluding to the varied ways in which it may be used to trivialise or celebrate academic work that transgresses disciplinary boundaries or scholarly conventions. Regardless, my sympathies are with Spivak's response to his seeming dismissiveness: 'Mend Cultural Studies, don't just scorn it; it won't go away' (2005: 165, 166). Noting how 'Cultural Studies' may be variously performed via engagements with (though not necessarily its finding a home in) literature, philosophy, anthropology, political science and history, and how these disciplines are variously grouped under the 'humanities' or 'social sciences' in different national and institutional contexts, Spivak proposes that it at least points 'vaguely in the direction of the human sciences', and that by working patiently and persistently to 'whittle away at this vagueness [the cultural studies] impulse could be retrained to go to work for the kind of things—to come—that Derrida invokes' (2005: 165).

This idea of the continuous whittling-away at the vagueness of cultural studies' proper relation to the traditional disciplines of the university recalls Zylinska's conceptualisation of cultural studies as always-in-the-making, as always retaking a double-vector decision to rethink and recommit its relation to its objects of study and its own limits and exclusions. The 'vagueness' inherent in the definition and status of cultural studies is what solicits and sustains a pledge of response-ability towards incalculable alterity. In lieu of the more thoroughgoing cross-disciplinary conversations to come on those lines of inquiry outlined by Derrida, my point here is simply to highlight how a foundation-less ethics of cultural studies can demonstrate the pertinence of a performative faith across the disciplines of the university. Derrida professes:

> The declaration of the one who professes is a performative declaration in some way. It pledges like an act of sworn faith, an oath, a testimony, a manifestation, an attestation, or a promise, a commitment. To profess is to make a pledge while committing one's responsibility. 'To make profession of' is to declare out loud what one is, what one believes, what one wants to be, while asking another to take one's word and believe this declaration. (Derrida 2001: 35–36)

To make a profession as a (would-be) professor of the university, it is 'neither necessarily to be this or that nor even to be a competent expert; it is to promise to be, to pledge oneself to be that on one's word …. [and] to devote oneself publicly, to give oneself over to …. [the declarative commitment], to bear witness, or even to fight for it' (Derrida 2001: 36). More importantly, 'what matters here is this promise, this pledge of responsibility, which is reducible to neither theory nor practice' (Derrida 2001: 36). For Derrida, the ethicopolitical force of pledges of commitment consists in their performativity. And this deconstructive understanding of performativity is very different from the moral system and disciplinary technology of performativity instituted within the neoliberal university. The latter links effort, values, purposes and self-understanding to comparative measures of output in order to produce the docile, compliant academic subject. For the deconstructive itinerary, by contrast, the force of the performative derives from 'its decontextualization, from its break with a prior context and its capacity to assume new context', and thus offers a means 'to break with prior contexts, with the possibility of inaugurating contexts yet to come' (Butler 1997a, b: 147, 152). The university without condition is one such possible context *to come*, a praxis-ideal for an affirmative, futural politics: *unconditional unconditionality unconditionally.*

I opened this book by committing it to a deconstructive conceptualisation of a performative ethics of cultural studies as a promise, as a messianic-project-in-the-making that pledges response-ability towards incalculable alterity. If a deconstructive, foundation-less normativity is presupposed and performed by cultural studies' interventions to keep the future open, I asked if this does not also invite a necessary response of faith, embodied one way or another with certain existential sensibilities or spirituality. Inasmuch as this pledge of commitment still finds a home within academia, even as it remains ever out of place as it seeks to always extend a welcoming hand to 'the outside', in relation to a futural politics for a different university to come, I would say 'yes, yes'—that the struggle for a university without condition is nothing less than a practice of faith in this performative sense. For the movement of temporality, the possible interruption of every 'now' by an incalculable future to come, implies that we are always and already given over to and held by faith—or 'good faith', at any rate. It is as if the struggle against the current neoliberal academic regime, as if every decision to 'speak personally' in order to expose the injurious effects of prevailing apparatuses of control, is signed off with 'Yours faithfully'.

SCHOLARLY AFFECT AND THE WORK OF FRIENDSHIP

With the help of Buddhist teachings, the second aspect of my two-pronged proposition suggests that the ethicopolitical implications of this open-ended movement of faith be investigated in relation to the affective dynamics of embodied sensibilities. In the micropolitics of the neoliberal university, the question of faith traces through contestations over the role of 'scholarly affect' in enabling relations of reciprocity and solidarity. The idea of scholarly affect is drawn from Melissa Gregg's *Cultural Studies Affective Voices* (2006), which is predicated on the understanding that academia is a passionate vocation suffused with visceral experiences. From the 'hopeful trajectories' we might encounter in a writer's voice, to 'the stimulus and provocation of peers' and 'the confidence a mentor can inspire', to 'the fear and adrenaline' accompanying public presentations, to 'the ferocity with which disciplinary ideologues stake out their turf', to 'the indignant soliloquies' of aging colleagues exhausted by bureaucratic demands, to 'the consuming doubt' that haunts even the most gifted writers—'The immense range of affective scenarios in academia is formidable' (Gregg 2006: 6–7).

To speak mindfully and openly about the affective nature of scholarly practice is a way to signal 'the importance of collegiality and community in assisting the difficult choice which is to make a living from thinking seriously and differently' (Gregg 2006: 7). For those of us who are still invested in the university as the appropriate location for the making of a profession—or, to put it more starkly, for those of us who do not yet have the means to extricate ourselves from the neoliberal academic regime—the challenge is 'to communicate the continued worth of scholarly life despite the difficulties of present conditions' (Gregg 2006: 25). One way to meet this challenge is to take 'seriously the idea that writing in the humanities can be affirmative or inventive' (Massumi 2002: 17). Such a move may help strengthen the capacity to resist 'the dominant mode of investment at work in scholarly practice' (Gregg 2006: 19). Gregg examines the writings of eminent cultural studies figures who have inspired her, making the case for modes of address in our discourses that might serve the function of 'strengthening' and 'catalysing' others. This, she notes, would be a form of the 'specific' intellectual practice Foucault spoke of. Becoming attuned to the 'affective voices' that arouse passionate commitments amidst the vicissitudes of academia could serve to 'encourage solidarity and continuity in scholarly work' (Gregg 2006: 8). As Brett

Neilson and Angela Mitropoulos (2005) have observed, 'an excess of passion has served as an ostensibly non-coercive means to bind academic labourer to the university system', but 'there is no necessity which decrees that it cannot be otherwise, facilitating an exodus, a demand for another university, here and now'. *Is this a call of and for faith? Perhaps?*

This book has attempted to narrate the affective voices of multiple others that make possible this enunciative practice of the authoring-I. But I have to accept that it is not up to me to decide whether my writing has been successful in doing so. This is not simply a matter of (im)modesty. The fact is that it is not, and never will be, up to me to decide: *I do not know*. I may have taken a decision to attempt a certain mode of address, but, since this decision is made from the space of undecidability, as all decisions are, it is no longer within my grasp the moment I make it. As Derrida might say, for a postcard to be deliverable to a recipient, it must always be possible for the postcard not to reach its destination. It is because of this impossibility of foreknowledge that the signatory and addressee are exposed in advance to incalculable alterity. The 'you' and 'I' of any mode of address, and certainly of this enunciative practice of 'speaking personally' and 'finding a voice', are already given over to and embraced in advance by one another with intellectual hospitality and good faith.

I have to also admit that the concluding of this book has been a very emotional affair. As I was finalising the manuscript for submission, I found myself seized by anxiety and despair. I rationalised that this would be a problem of 'letting go' that most authors face as they try to bring closure to a piece of work. But, as I reread and revised what I had written for the umpteenth time, it crept up on me that these feelings are a reaction of doubt and uncertainty about this profession I am making. It is habitually assumed that the publishing of a first book by an early-career academic will greatly boost their portfolio and improve their employment prospects. But my personal observations and research findings on the current state of the higher education sector suggest that any such hope should be tempered by a sober assessment of the present situation: the fact is, things are not looking good. If an excess of passion has served as a seemingly non-coercive means of control in the neoliberal academic regime—and I have certainly rationalised to myself that the toil of researching and writing this book as a para-academic living in precarity (not to mention the impact of so doing on loved ones) is worth enduring, because I get to at least do what I am passionate about—what if this affective investment of hope and trust is precisely the thing for those of

developing a profession in the university to interrogate and maybe even refuse, or at least to steer in a different direction? Yet, without this affective investment of hope and trust in a pledge of commitment, how does one make a profession in the university and beyond to invite change?

So I accept that the decision to make a profession of faith with this enunciative practice of the self must remain exposed to the threat of betrayal and failure if it is to become response-able. And instead of chasing my tail around the constricting question of what is in it for me, let me end on a Buddhist note to affirm the promise of the profession for others. I trust that this forthcoming display of commitment to the promises of Buddhism will not be dismissed offhand as irrelevant or antithetical to the scholarly commitment of the secular academy. In a discourse in the Pāli Canon, the Buddha is said to have corrected a disciple who misevaluated what is described as *kalyāna mittatā*, admirable or spiritual friendship, as secondary to the task of Awakening. The Buddha impressed upon him instead that admirable, spiritual friendship is 'the whole of the holy life' (Thānissaro 1997). The Buddha also explains that one cultivates admirable, spiritual friendship by nurturing companionship with those who are 'consummate' in 'conviction', 'virtue', 'generosity' and 'discernment' (Thānissaro 1995). I want to profess faith in this advice here, but not because I claim to be consummate in these skilful habits. Rather, it is because I recognise that the making of a profession, for the university without condition, requires a willingness to critically examine and speak personally about the vicissitudes of academic life and labour, by exposing oneself to the intellectual hospitality and good faith of others. *Might we not think of this as the work of admirable, spiritual friendship? Perhaps?*

To current friends and those I have yet to meet, known and unknown others making a profession in the university and beyond, I dedicate this question: What are the mutualising dynamics of embodied sensibilities, ethical adjustments in conduct, and performative faith that nourish and sustain a profession? I trust that this question and its solicitations, the endless trail of ?!?!?!, are resonant with hope. I will remain hopeful that their reverberations are being felt within and outside academia as movements-in-between, not least by those who are impossibly passionate about impossible passions: unconditional unconditionality unconditionally.

Yours faithfully

Edwin Ng

Note

1. As Gill (2009) has noted, critical discourses on the neoliberal university have taken four overarching approaches: (1) a critical or social theory approach that locates the transformation of academic work within accounts of late capitalism, network society, liquid modernity, knowledge society or post-Fordism (Beck 2000; Bauman 2000; Sennett 2006); (2) a broadly sociological approach that investigates the structural transformation of higher education, the implications of corporatisation, the instrumentalisation of education and the poor working conditions for academics (Evans 2005; Washburn 2003); (3) a Foucauldian-informed approach that problematises the apparatuses of control targeting and producing the self-monitoring, self-improving 'responsible' and 'autonomous' neoliberal academic subject (Davies and Bansel 2010; Morrissey 2013); and (4) a micropolitical approach inspired by feminist understandings that conceives of power relationally to emphasise the localised work of ethicopolitical contestations over the vicissitudes and affective investments of academia (Davies et al. 2005; Gill 2009; Zabrodska et al. 2011).

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