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# A Life between the Finite and Infinite: Remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Western Buddhism

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## Abstract

This article explores the resonances between certain concepts of Deleuze and Badiou and a Western Buddhism that is figured, in Foucault's terminology, as a particular 'technology of the self'. In particular Deleuze's readings of Bergson and Spinoza are brought into encounter with Buddhist doctrine and practice alongside a consideration of the figure of the *bodhisattva* who is further compared to Badiou's account of the subject. At stake in these enquiries and experimental conjunctions is the laying out of a particular—and liveable—diagram of the finite–infinite relation, or, we might say, a specifically Western *dharma* for a contemporary production of subjectivity.

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Badiou, Bergson, Spinoza, meditation, ethics

## I. Introduction: Deleuze and Buddhism

This article serves as a brief appendix, or after-thought, to my recently published monograph *On the Production of Subjectivity* (2012). Therein I staged a number of philosophical—and psychoanalytical—encounters and attempted to draw a series of diagrams of the finite–infinite relation that followed from the latter. In general, I was interested in exploring certain aspects of post-Kantian thought which, rather than positing a gap, or bar, between the finite and the infinite suggested some kind of continuum or passage between the two. I was especially interested

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in how these composite diagrams might offer up different possibilities for a contemporary subjectivity beyond those lifestyle options typically proffered by neo-liberalism. In philosophical terms the key opposition I explored was between Deleuze (and Guattari) and Alain Badiou, pitching their particular and different ontological statements and concomitant theorisations of the subject against each other (although, it has to be said, Deleuze's own writings are not concerned with the subject *per se*, but rather with a kind of pre- and post-subjective state). I knew whilst writing that book that Buddhism, especially as it is practised in the West today, offered a different perspective on this particular philosophical contretemps, and indeed the themes of my book in general, but it seemed to me that such a consideration would require more than footnotes, hence the present article which returns to both Deleuze (and specifically his Bergsonism and Spinozism) and Badiou – and brings these into a further and somewhat experimental encounter with a Buddhism that is figured as what Michel Foucault might call a 'technology of the self'.<sup>1</sup>

Before turning to Deleuze's own writing, however, it is worth noting that the collaboration with Guattari, and especially *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), has itself many, perhaps more explicit, resonances with contemporary Buddhism albeit, of course, it is without a Buddha (I will return to this important omission below). Certainly with concepts like 'faciality', Deleuze and Guattari have theorised the human as a particular mode of organisation that is, as it were, set against the world (a moment of fixity in a world of change). Likewise the emphasis on pragmatics – that *A Thousand Plateaus* is a book to be used and not just read – resonates with Buddhist texts that are, precisely, manuals for a subject's transformation. In this pragmatic function *and* in its own ontological pre-suppositions – which affirm becoming over Being – *A Thousand Plateaus* has profound resonances with Eastern thought in general, and, indeed, Deleuze and Guattari reference Taoism in the especially constructive and pragmatically orientated plateau 'November 28, 1947: How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?'. To a certain extent the final chapter of my above-mentioned monograph explores this area through an application of the concept 'probe-head' (taken from *A Thousand Plateaus*) to the contemporary production of subjectivity. We might make the claim in the present context that probe-head names an experimental Western Buddhism released from any debt to a Buddha (or indeed to traditional Buddhism itself). In fact, we might say further, that such concepts are less Buddhist *per se* and more simply *dharmic* when this names the ontological conditions of existence, the

transitory state or mode of our own particular being, and an ethics that leads from the conjunction of these two (as we shall see this has profound resonances with Spinoza's own *Ethics* (1989)).

Buddhism then offers a particularly practical solution to a problem: simply put, our desire for permanence in a world characterised by impermanence (hence our particular existence is marked by *dukkha* – or 'unsatisfactoriness'). Indeed, Buddhism offers an ethical programme aimed, ultimately, at a kind of self-transcendence, at least of a self that is fixed and set against the world. Traditionally this has also meant a certain asceticism and, indeed, a desire to negate all sense of self. But, and this is especially the case in more Westernised practices, it also implies a constructive project – an experimental testing, in resonance with Spinoza's own ethical programme, of what our bodies are capable, and, indeed, into what we might become as individuals. Again, in Spinozist terms, this is the exploration of different modes of being, or, as Guattari might have it, simply the production of a different kind of subjectivity. Hence, for myself, the resonances between Buddhism and *A Thousand Plateaus*, and, indeed, the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project more generally. But what about Deleuze's single-authored and more philosophically involved writings themselves? Is there a sense in which these can also be brought into useful conjunction with a Western Buddhism (I will keep to this term in what follows), especially around this question of the finite–infinite relation?

Once again, it can be remarked straight away that Deleuze and Buddhism both hold to a similar ontology (although Buddhism is not a philosophy *per se*, it still makes ontological claims): of a kind of groundless ground of being. For Deleuze, in *Difference and Repetition* (1995), this is the thesis of difference in itself (an original difference as it were), and an idea of repetition that names a kind of generative moment/movement of this difference. It also informs his philosophical dyad of the virtual/actual and, indeed, the important thesis of their reciprocal determination (this being Deleuze's Univocity).<sup>2</sup> In the Buddhist tradition this ground that is not a ground is approached in different ways, but perhaps most usefully for the purposes here it can be characterised in terms of the tri-concept of impermanence–interpenetration–insubstantiality, or 'conditioned co-production'. Here, ultimately, there are only conditions producing other conditions; a web of interconnectedness that has something in common with Henri Bergson's own thesis on all matter being in constant contact and 'communication' with all other matter. Man, insofar as he has a body, is part of this 'global' network, but also, in Buddhist terms, stands

against it (in Bergson's terms man is a subtraction; he is a 'centre of indetermination', or veritable hole in the universe).

Both of these ontological claims—of Deleuze and Buddhism—can be brought under the umbrella term of immanence. Deleuze himself refers to Spinoza as the 'prince of immanence', and himself as a Spinozist before anything else insofar as his philosophy, like Spinoza's, specifically orientates itself against any form of transcendence. Buddhism's own 'turn' to immanence is perhaps what best distinguishes it from other pantheist religions that still hold to a certain transcendence (simply, God or gods). Indeed, Buddhism, we might say, is the eruption—and affirmation—of the plane of immanence within history. Or, to say the same differently, Buddhism announces the relegation of God to a minor player in man's destiny centuries before Nietzsche announces God's death. Of course, Buddhism does not stop here, that is, with the assertion of a certain ontology, but, again, as a pragmatics, offers various techniques and technologies for the subject's transformation that follow from the ontology. In Deleuzian terms we might say, Buddhism provides instruction on how to access—and in a sense determine—this groundless ground of our being: meditation, for example, that allows for a contact with an infinite potentiality that lies behind our habitual, and finite, being (following Deleuze's thesis in *Difference and Repetition*, we might say that this is contact with the third synthesis of time—the time of Aion, 'hidden' behind the first synthesis—the habitual sense of time formed by the reactive mechanisms of the organism). Paradoxically, this is not an experience a given subject can have if we understand such a subject as a bundle of habits and volitions (indeed, Deleuze very much has this conception of the subject—or individual—in common with Buddhism). But it is a state achievable by man, under his own efforts.

Buddhist meditation then allows access to an outside, to that from which our subjectivity has itself been formed or folded. Once more, in Deleuzian terms, this is to 'access' a certain virtual realm. If Deleuze's thought allows for different actualising machines—different forms of thought—then Buddhism suggests that the very virtual itself might be directly 'experienced' in some sense, albeit this experience will have to be 'translated' once a subject 'returns' to the actual. We might also say that in the different practices Buddhism advocates we also see the reciprocal determination of the actual back to the virtual (through certain processes of selection and repetition that in themselves foreground different relations of intensities). Indeed, the virtual and the actual are co-determinate in this sense. They are two sides of the same coin (and it is in this sense, ultimately, that there is no path in Buddhism,

no journey: nowhere to go). I will return to this important, but counter-intuitive 'movement' in a moment.

## II. Bergsonism and Buddhism (the Gap and the Mystic)

For Bergson, especially in Deleuze's reading of him, this virtuality is accessed through a certain gap—between stimulus and response—that is opened up in experience and as a result of the increasing complexity of the brain-body assemblage. It is this gap that defines the human since it implies the possibility of moving beyond pure animal reactivity. The resonances with Buddhism are striking in this specific area and are worth tracking through. In Buddhist terms we are in contact with the world through our sense organs (and mind is also considered a sense organ in this understanding). This contact involves perceptions which then produce sensations. We are in fact very close indeed to the Bergson of *Matter and Memory* (1991) here. These sensations are themselves accompanied—we might even say, at this stage, are followed—by feelings, of either pleasure or pain. In the Buddhist understanding of the conditioned self (our transitory mode of being) all this is given. The feelings, the sensations, the perceptions, indeed, even the sensory organs themselves are the result of previous actions and volitions (they are 'old karma'). The next stage, however, is crucial: feeling produces craving and aversion, which then produces grasping and so the whole wheel of rebirth—or 're-becoming'—continues (we set up the same conditions which in the future will produce the same reactions). We might say that this is the point at which signification comes in (with the articulation of desires, or simply the affirming/negating of the world). It is also the instalment of a judging subject (who, in the terms of *Anti-Oedipus* retroactively identifies him- or herself with these judgements).

We might also, with Bergson, see this as the moment of memory, at least in its habitual sense (in Buddhist terms, these habitual reactions are our *samskharas* that, again, actually constitute our selves). However, it is also at this point that the cycle can be broken—precisely at the point between feeling and the acting on that feeling (again, the craving). Meditation, at least in one of its forms (*samadhi*), is simply the cultivation of awareness of this point, this moment of 'decision'—and the prolonging of a certain pause, a dwelling 'in' the gap. Again, for Bergson, it is also through this gap (Bergson calls it a 'hesitancy') that memory, this time in the sense of the 'pure past' (or, again, a virtuality), pours in. In itself this allows for a certain creativity to replace our more reactive modes of behaviour; a kind of liberation from the (utilitarian)

concerns of the organism. In Buddhist terms we might think of this pure past, that is also the ontological background of our limited being, as a kind of vast storehouse of memory, when this is also the memory of other humans, of animals, of plants – of all life (going further, this might also include the non-organic life of Deleuze's thesis); a veritable teeming reservoir of life worlds.

We might jump ahead slightly here and bring Deleuze's Spinozism, and specifically the concept of affect, to this Bergsonian virtual. For Deleuze–Spinoza affects are a prior moment, even before feeling. They are, as it were, themselves virtual. But in fact one does not come without the other: sensations and feelings go hand in hand (just as the virtual and actual always come together). Affects are always present in our experience albeit never in a pure state. As Brian Massumi has it in his essay on 'The Autonomy of Affect' (1996) they are not transcendent, but immanent to experience. This realm of affect is a non-personal place, before the mechanisms of the ego – the likes and dislikes (the habits) – have kicked in. Crucially, it continues to exist alongside our typical sense of self (we might say our signifying self). Indeed, this other non-human state that always and everywhere accompanies our typical sense of ourselves is what Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, call the 'body without organs'. Buddhist meditation, this time as insight practice (*vipassana*), allows an experimental encounter with this other place – of forever changing relations of intensities – that in itself produces a self-overcoming (again, the self here understood as a bundle of volitions). This 'knowledge' – of impermanence – insubstantiality – interconnectedness – is not solely intellectual but is, precisely, bodily. It is a direct experience, registered on the body – of the rising and fallings, the comings and goings, of sensation. This is an inhuman experience that our typical sense of a fixed self tends to obscure in the very production of that self. In Buddhism this wisdom-insight also implies an ethics insofar as an understanding of this impermanence and interconnectivity leads to compassion (I am everything, and everything is I). I will return to this properly inhuman ethics below.

Buddhist meditation is then itself an essentially creative act that is ethical (a self-overcoming), but also aesthetic insofar as it involves cultivating a certain kind of profound disinterested attitude towards the world (in fact, it is our typical craving – grasping and pushing away – that constitutes our world). Indeed, it is this 'letting be' that reveals a certain reality that was masked by our instrumental attitudes and intentions. For the Buddhist such a mode of being must involve great

mindfulness (hence, again, meditation; dwelling in the gap) but also, again, wisdom; an understanding—that might, in fact, be intellectual in the first instance—of the conditionality of all things (the arising and passing away of all phenomena, thus the futility of grasping). Hence the specific purpose of study within Buddhism. These two (meditation and study), alongside an ethical practice in what we might call a molar sense (the cultivation of a lifestyle that allows for a quieting of the mind that itself allows for the necessary focus) constitute at least one understanding of the Buddhist path. To put this in Deleuzian terms: Buddhism can be understood as an ethico-aesthetic strategy for accessing the virtual realm of affects, and in so doing producing what we might call a *transhuman* becoming.

We might turn to another of Bergson's books to develop these apparent resonances with Buddhism. Indeed, Bergson's writings on the mystic, it seems to me, are a further bridge between Deleuze's own writing and Western Buddhism, for although in *Matter and Memory* Bergson only posits, as a demonstrative technique, the existence of a someone who 'experiences' the pure image and the pure past (that is, a pure virtuality), in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1935) he describes the mystic as precisely someone who inhabits the gap (in this case 'in-between' the fixed rituals and morals of society) and thus, as it were, accesses the infinite. This insight might only be temporary, but nevertheless it can transform the subject who experiences it, and indeed the world in which a mystic returns and acts. The important point here is that an individual subject, as a finite being, can experience the infinite *directly* even if only temporarily. For Bergson intelligence cannot achieve this (the latter serves the ends of a particular organism, or, simply put, is instrumental), hence, intuition, which we might characterise as the world 'thinking' through man. Here is the crucial passage on Deleuze's own take on this mystical experience—the accessing of 'creative emotion'—from towards the end of *Bergsonism*:

The little interval 'between the pressures of society and the resistance of intelligence' defines a variability appropriate to human societies. Now, by means of this interval something extraordinary is produced or embodied: creative emotion. This no longer has anything to do with the pressures of society, nor with the disputes of the individual. It no longer has anything to do with an individual who contests or even invents, nor with a society that constrains, that persuades or even tells stories. It has only made use of their circular play in order to break the circle, just as Memory uses the circular play of excitation and reaction to embody recollections in images. And what is this creative emotion, if not precisely a cosmic Memory, that actualises all

the levels at the same time, that liberates man from the plane (*plan*) or the level that is proper to him, in order to make him a creator, adequate to the whole movement of creation. (Deleuze 1988a: 111)

Here the mystic is an individual that moves beyond the human when the latter is defined as being pinned to the plane of matter. Indeed, the typical human, in *The Two Sources*, is a being predominantly of habit and reactivity – and is further defined by a specifically utilitarian memory (as well as by the fixed codes and morality of a given society). The mystic, on the other hand, actualises all the levels of the cone of memory, or, we might say, lives – *feels* – all of life in its plenitude and complexity (we might say that the mystic is a specifically intensive being in this sense). Crucially, this mystic is also a creator and, indeed, assumes responsibility for the creation of his or her own self. As Deleuze puts it right at the end of *Bergsonism*:

This liberation, this embodiment of cosmic memory in creative emotions, undoubtedly only takes place in privileged souls. It leaps from one soul to another, ‘every now and then’, crossing closed deserts. But to each member of a closed society, if he opens himself to it, it communicates a kind of reminiscence, an excitement that allows him to follow. And from soul to soul, it traces the design of an *open* society, a society of creators, where we pass from one genius to another, through the intermediary of disciples or spectators or hearers. (Deleuze 1988a: 112)

In Buddhist terms this is the *sangha* – the community of those who follow the *dharma*. In Buddhism this defines any community of Buddhists (when this is a community defined also by friendship), but it also names the community of *arahants*, or those who have achieved ‘awakening’. In the last sentence of *The Two Sources* Bergson himself suggests that it is these exceptional individuals who fulfil ‘the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods’ (Bergson 1935: 317). This, it seems to me, is Bergson’s own thesis of reciprocal determination in which man can come to determine the very conditions that had determined him.

This question of reciprocal determination in relation to actual Buddhist practice itself is more complex, but what can be said, in Buddhist terms, is that both the conditioned (actual) and unconditioned (virtual) are, ultimately, the same. At a certain level of understanding or awareness (we might even suggest a knowledge such as that of Spinoza’s third kind) the actual *is* the virtual, just as the virtual *is* the actual. In this ‘place’ to speak of a subject who has this other kind of experience is no longer accurate insofar as dualisms, such as subject–object,

conditioned–unconditioned, but also, crucially, virtual–actual, no longer hold. Or, if they do hold, they are in a constant state of interpenetration—or a reciprocal relation. It is in this sense, again, that the actual determines the virtual out of which it has itself been determined. Another way of saying this is that Deleuze's 'virtual Ideas' (relations of intensity) are determined by the life that lives them (depending on how we live, certain virtual Ideas become clear and distinct, others retreat into a darker obscurity). Or, what I am determined by is in turn determined by how I live.

### III. Badiou and the *Bodhisattva*-subject

For an alternative take on this question of mysticism, and its relation to a specifically Western Buddhism, we might turn briefly to Alain Badiou and to his book on *Saint Paul* (2003), for, of course, Paul has a mystical experience—an event happens to him in Badiou's terms—that results in a dramatic conversion. Not surprisingly, however, for Badiou, it is not this experience itself that is the defining moment for Paul. Rather, it is the consequences of this experience (following the logic of *Being and Event* (2005) and *Logics of Worlds* (2009) it is the what happens *after* the event that is crucial in terms of the subject). In Badiou's case this is so pronounced that the actual content of the experience (in the case of Paul, the resurrection of Christ) is at one point in *Saint Paul* figured as superfluous to the real business of maintaining a fidelity to it through actions in the world. Paul operates then, for Badiou, as a paradigmatic case study of the production of a subject insofar as he is produced as one through an event and, crucially, an ongoing active fidelity to it.

Bergson's mystic is likewise active and very much 'in' the world. In fact, Bergson places the Christian mystic (though Paul himself is not mentioned), who re-enters and engages with the world, above, for example, the realised Buddhist, who, Bergson argues, withdraws from the world. In this sense we might say Bergson's mystic, like Badiou's Paul, also maintains a militant fidelity of sorts to their 'experience' insofar as it determines a future course of action. We might want to argue, however, given what I have written above, that meditation is certainly not a withdrawal from the world (it would seem, rather, to be a direct engagement with the world as it is incarnated in our very being), but nevertheless the point is well made that accessing the infinite has a very real impact on the finite in terms of what happens after this 'experience'. I will return in a moment to a figure in the Buddhist tradition for whom this return is defining.

In passing, it is worth noting that the content of the event for Paul–Christ’s resurrection—is, in actual fact, that which allows for the infinite to enter the finite (it is, after all, a conquering of death). As such, Badiou is somewhat inconsistent in his treatment of this particular event. The resurrection allows for a thorough reordering of the relations between life and death; simply put, after the ‘resurrection-event’ a different course is open to any subject who wishes to ‘escape’ mortality or the finite—simply because he or she can ‘decide’ to accept the fact of resurrection (Badiou here writes of a thought of life pitched against a thought of death). To quote Badiou: ‘Only a resurrection redistributes death and life to their places, by showing that life does not necessarily occupy the place of the dead’ (Badiou 2003: 85). It is in this sense also that the resurrection-event—or, we might even say the ‘Christ-event’—is the ‘abolition of the law, which was nothing but the empire of death’ (86). The latter law determines and protects a certain partiality (and particularity) against a truer universalism (and the ‘greater’ law of love that leads from the latter, for, as Badiou remarks, ‘No truth is ever solitary, or particular’ (90)). It is this true universalism—that the Christ-event is for all (this being precisely the ‘Good News’) that characterises Paul’s fidelity (and, indeed, the interest of Christianity for Badiou). The subject then, as mapped out here, is precisely a ‘universal singularity’ (13). All events are for all in this sense (although specific to certain situations or ‘Conditions’ in their occurrence, nevertheless, they are always *transpositional*).

In *On the Production of Subjectivity* I have gone into more detail about how this thesis of the event—and of the subject attendant on it—maintains a certain gap between the finite and the infinite (despite what Badiou himself might claim). In fact, for Badiou, the event, as otherworldly occurrence, paradoxically produces this gap. We might note here, briefly, that for Deleuze events, on the other hand, are precisely worldly—when they are thought of as the reciprocal passage between the virtual and actual. In relation to Paul it is then no accident that Badiou’s paradigmatic example of an event is transcendent (the hand of God as it were). In *Being and Event* itself the event is figured as precisely *not* from God (indeed it is from a not-God, or, a not-One), but there is still a definition of the event as outside the situation/world as given, and, precisely, outside of any given individual. Hence also the chief *modus operandi* of such a subject is necessarily faith.

In fact, there is a figure in the Buddhist tradition that somewhat parallels Badiou’s Paul *and* Bergson’s Christian mystic and yet—and this would make such a figure of particular interest to Badiou—is a figure

of immanence rather than of transcendence (that is to say, it is a figure for whom the excess that the event announces is an excess of the world rather than a beyond the world). A figure for whom resurrection is not the defining event, but who nevertheless offers a different thought of life 'beyond' the finite: the *bodhisattva*. We might say, in fact, that the *bodhisattva*—a later Mahayana construction—is conjured as a solution to the problem of the finite–infinite relation, or, in more Buddhist terms, of time and eternity. The *bodhisattva*, by definition, is a kind of not-quite-Buddha (not quite dwelling in eternity), who chooses to remain in, or, precisely, return to, this world. This is to remain in *samsara* (time), forgoing *nirvana* (eternity), until all other sentient beings have themselves passed over to this farthest shore.<sup>3</sup>

In Badiou's terms there is an event—or experience—that provokes this militant and compassionate activity of the *bodhisattva*: the arising of the *bodhicitta*, or, simply 'the will to enlightenment' (itself attendant on a certain tension—again, a desire to withdraw from the world versus a desire to be militantly involved with the world). It is this that sets the *bodhisattva* off on the way. It is what we might call the 'bodhisattva-event'. This event, by definition, is universalising in that it is open to all (anyone can make the decision to follow the path of the *bodhisattva*), and also, more profoundly, it is a will to *nirvana for all*. In Badiou's terms it is a thought of the generic. This, a kind of enlightenment for all beings or for none, is again the Mahayana correction to the individualist spiritualism that the earlier Hinayana tradition became susceptible to (the retreat from society, the private thinker, and so forth). Hence, we have the 'bodhisattva vow' to actively engage oneself in the welfare of all beings situated within time and to relinquish enlightenment until all have also achieved it. We might figure this as an extreme fidelity to an event that itself is a demonstration of the generic (and that, again, asserts a life outside of simple finitude). In terms of Badiou and *Saint Paul* it is a thought of life (the interconnectedness–interpenetration–insubstantiality of all things) pitched against a moribund thought of death (a general nihilism).

In Badiou's terms the *bodhisattva* is then precisely a subject in that he or she maintains an extreme fidelity to an event albeit it is not, strictly speaking, one that occurs in one of Badiou's four Conditions (art, science, politics and love). Indeed, it implies, we might say, a fifth Condition—or, more specifically, a kind of modification of Badiou's Condition of love insofar as here it is less the love of another individual than the love of the world itself that constitutes the event. This 'spiritual event'—the arising of the will to enlightenment *for all*—is itself dependant

on the prior event of the Buddha's enlightenment (just as Paul-as-subject, in Badiou's account, experiences his own event that is dependent on the 'Christ-event'). This fidelity is also premised on a faith of sorts—in the Buddha's enlightenment. Simply put, it is a faith that human enlightenment is possible. In relation to what I have already said about meditation it seems to me that, crucially, it is also a faith that can be tested in and against experience. In Buddhism it is never blind faith, but more a working hypothesis that is then decided by experience. The bar—between the finite and the infinite—is also configured here more as a decision than an actual bar; a decision to remain subtracted from the infinite as it were.

In fact, Western commentators have commented that the Buddha, as a figure of eternity, and the *bodhisattva*, as a figure in time, are indeed ontologically separate (one cannot get to the eternal via time), but that nevertheless it might be possible to hold both perspectives at once, a kind of holding of the two in tension (see Sangharakshita 1988). From a Deleuzian perspective we might say, in fact, that the *bodhisattva* is the site of a finite–infinite weave, or, again, of the reciprocal determination of two fields. We might say, further, that this is the difference between the two dominant models of Buddhist practice in the West: one of the path, and one of the non-path (put simply, enlightenment, from a certain perspective, is a long way off and yet, from another, is right here, right now).

Whether, in fact, an individual temporarily accesses the infinite before returning to the mundane, or it is possible to hold the two coextensively—as meditation would seem to imply—the crucial issue is that there is a two-way passage, at least of sorts, between the finite and the infinite; or to say this differently, the finite and the infinite are part of the same reality and are thus, again, in a relation of reciprocal determination. Nevertheless, as I mentioned above, the finite 'accessing' of the infinite—as Enlightenment—is paradoxically not an 'experience' one can have. In Badiou's terms a subject of this experience cannot be reduced to the 'organisation of sense experience' that defines a given individual 'in the world'. That said, such an experience can happen to one, and, indeed, and this is crucial, can and must be prepared for. This is why Buddhism places such emphasis on ethics, or what one might call in this particular context, following William Blake, the cleansing of the doors of perception—seeing the world free of *kleishas* (or 'defilements'). In terms of what we might call a subtractive ontology, it is not as if 'more' needs to be added to the subject in order that he or she transform and 'achieve' the infinite, but rather that a series of blinkers need to be

taken away (again, this would return us to Bergson's definition of the human as a series of shutters closed against the universe). There is then a further difference with Badiou here, for this notion of preparation and of the various practices implied by it, that links Buddhism to the stoics, would seem to be at odds with Badiou's notion of the unbidden nature of the event. Indeed, for Badiou no preparation is possible – it being the nature of an event to arrive unannounced and unexpectedly.

#### IV. Spinozism and Buddhism (Ethics and Immanence)

Our final philosophical figure can be brought in at this point as a contrast to Badiou and in resonance with Buddhism, namely, Spinoza, who is, of course, a key precursor, along with Bergson, for Deleuze. For Spinoza, preparation is not only possible, but necessary (Badiou's understanding of Spinoza, at least in *Being and Event*, seems to wilfully ignore this determining rationale of the *Ethics*, that is to say, that it is a *programmatic* text). To very briefly summarise the programme of the *Ethics* (following Deleuze's own reading): the first kind of knowledge names our typical way of being in the world in which we are ignorant of the true causes of our experience and thus subject to random encounters and the affects produced by them (this, we might say, is *samsara*, though we might also suggest that it is Bergson's plane of matter – the terrain of the reactive sensori-motor schema). The second kind of knowledge entails beginning to understand the causes of our experience and thus the concomitant organisation of life so as to produce specifically joyful encounters and the construction of 'common notions' attendant on these (this, we might say, is the Buddhist path; in relation to Bergson, we might suggest that it is also a path away from the plane of matter via the gap I mentioned above – a disjunctive synthesis in Deleuze and Guattari's terms – that thus allows a certain amount of freedom from habit).<sup>4</sup> This second kind of knowledge, although, as Spinoza suggests, producing a joyful life in and of itself, is but the preparation for a further third kind of knowledge, where all the world is a joyful encounter, in fact, where there is a sense of identification with the world, a veritable beatitude. This third kind of knowledge is also, according to Spinoza, 'under the aspect of eternity' – or, we might say, is an 'experience' of the infinite (in relation to my discussion of Deleuze's Bergsonism above this is a kind of dwelling in the base of the cone, the third passive synthesis of a still time in which past, present and future are equally present). Insofar as this progression in knowledge implies an ethical programme, precisely

of experimentation, selection, repetition, then we might also say that it is an example of the actual determining the virtual.<sup>5</sup>

Deleuze's lecture on 'The Three Kinds of Knowledge' (2003) is useful here in pointing out that the three kinds of knowledge might equally be thought as three kinds of body that we already have, or three ways in which we might relate to our existing bodies. As such, it is not so much that we 'go' anywhere with Spinoza's ethical programme, but rather that we realise certain things that are already here. The same goes for Buddhist practice: there is a path, but on reaching the end, one understands that there was never anywhere to go (after all, where could one go?). In fact, we might usefully compare Deleuze–Spinoza's three bodies with the traditional three kinds of body of the Buddha (the *trikaya* doctrine): first, the *nirmanakaya* or 'created body' that functions on a human/historical level (this is a transitory mode of being, subject to change); second, the *sambhokaya* or 'body of mutual enjoyment', an archetypal body that 'represents' different aspects of Buddhahood (we might say that this is the joyful body of the second kind of knowledge); and third, the *dharmakaya* or 'body of truth', an 'aspect of Absolute reality' that 'exists' in eternity (see Sangharakshita 1988: 6–11). The *dharmakaya*, like Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, is an experience of eternity (or, again, more precisely, *sub specie aeterni*) that is discontinuous with time but also coterminous with it. It is in this sense that Buddhism is not exactly an eternalism (believing in an immortality of the soul or, as it were, an afterlife for that soul), but rather, like Spinoza, posits an eternity that is here and now, albeit occluded.

Spinoza's 'labour' of the second kind of knowledge has its correlate in Buddhism with the 'Noble Eight Fold Path', or simply ethical living (involving 'training principles': right speech, right action, *sangha* or community, and so forth). Traditionally, these are foundational practices aimed, again, at quieting the mind, allowing for focus. Both Buddhist and Spinozist systems of ethics are then, ultimately, about the creation of the conditions that might allow for the possibility of the arising of insight or truth, which, in fact, they determine insofar as such an insight, following Spinoza, is insight into the particular modal essence that we 'are'. Again, the actual programme determines the virtual destination. The path, in this sense, determines the goal. Or, again, through this ethics we paradoxically become a cause of ourselves.

There is a discontinuity of sorts between the second and the third kinds of knowledge (they are different in kind), but there is also a passageway between them (this technology of passage being, precisely, joy). In fact, the third kind of knowledge is similar to the second (both

are, after all, a knowledge of modal essences), albeit with the former it is more immediate knowledge, instantaneous, the result of a realisation, or insight, rather than of the processual construction of concepts or, strictly speaking, of the 'ethical life' itself. Insight is then an event of sorts, but one that needs careful preparation (discipline and training) and, we might remark, supportive conditions in order to work through its consequences.

Spinoza's *Ethics* is then remarkably similar to a Buddhist system of ethics seeing as both emphasise a kind of programme for man, but then ultimately something more inhuman. Indeed, it is as if there are two ethics: the one of the path—human, mediated, requiring effort; and the one of the goal—inhuman, immediate, effortless. The two are connected insofar as the former builds a platform towards the latter, but they are also qualitatively different because the first is a technology of the subject, whereas the second is, properly speaking, 'of' the object—or, we might say, is the becoming-world of the subject. Indeed, for myself, Spinoza's *Ethics* reads like a treatise of a future Buddha, and a specifically Western one, insofar as it is written the other way around: whereas the Buddha, having achieved insight, then attempts to put in place a system that will allow others to reach the same destination (from goal to path), Spinoza works from the path, from a rigorously worked out ethics based on reason—that then arrives at the same place almost despite itself: two different perspectives producing two similar ethics (and two similar ethical destinations).

We might briefly turn here to Deleuze's last essay on 'Immanence: A Life' (2001) in which Deleuze's indebtedness to Spinozist formulations is made explicit, and in which we can see further resonances with Buddhist insight and experience. Deleuze writes:

We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss. (Deleuze 2001: 27)

For Deleuze this is also what he calls the 'transcendental field', which is 'distinct from experience in that it neither refers to an object nor belongs to a subject ... It therefore appears as a pure pre-subjective current of consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self' (Deleuze 2001: 25). For Deleuze it is on the thresholds of life that this transcendental field becomes perceptible, but, we might say, this is also precisely the terrain of meditation. In this essay, perhaps Deleuze's most mysterious, the question of reciprocal determination

is again posed insofar as the ‘virtualities, events, singularities’ of this impersonal life ‘are actualized in a state of things and of the lived *that make it happen*’ (31; my emphasis). There is also, once more, the suggestion that this ‘life’ implies ‘the immensity of an empty time where one sees the event yet to come and already happened, in the absolute of an immediate consciousness’ (29). It seems to me that the same immediate consciousness is at stake in Nietzsche’s eternal return; at least as Deleuze understands it, but also in the Buddhist idea of insight that precisely offers a way out from our own linear temporality and with it our finitude.

Indeed, we might say that a life of immanence is also a life of Buddhism—or, perhaps more accurately, a life of *dharma* when this names the truth of condition co-production but does not identify this with an actual figure that lived its truth—and which can thus remain tied to a particular historical moment and geographical location. Perhaps, ultimately, this is what a Western Buddhism needs to be: a *dharmic* practice released from any debt (or homage) to the Buddha, but one that is also not entirely abstract, at least insofar as this means non-corporeal, but that is, again, tested ‘in’ experience, on the body—when the latter is itself rethought as the site of an actual–virtual interface. A life of pure immanence then, but, crucially, also a life that needs to be lived, which is to say, a plane of immanence that must also be constructed:

This plane of immanence or consistency is a plan, but not in the sense of a mental design, a project, a program; it is a plan in the geometric sense: a section, an intersection, a diagram. Thus, to be in the middle of Spinoza is to be on this modal plane, or rather, to install oneself on this plane—which implies a mode of living, a way of life. What is this plane and how does one construct it? For at the same it is fully a plane of immanence, and yet it has to be constructed if one is to live in a Spinozist manner. (Deleuze 1988b: 122–3)

Later, in his small book on Spinoza, *Practical Philosophy*, from where the above quote is taken, Deleuze gives a more specific description of the ‘experience’ (when this is not an experience of a subject) on and of this plane:

There is no longer a form, but only relations of velocity between infinitesimal particles of unformed matter. There is no longer a subject, but only individuating affective states of an anonymous force. Here the plan is concerned only with motions and rests, with dynamic affective charges. It will be perceived with that which it makes perceptible to us, as we proceed. (Deleuze 1988b: 128)

As individuals, we are, as it were, folds in this plane—looking back at it. In fact, we are a product of this plane (what else could we be?), but we are also a kind of extraction—or transcendent capture—of certain parts of it (hence, precisely, *dukkha*). We might compare this strange description above with the words of the Buddhist Heart Sutra that likewise articulates a certain ‘experience’—or intuitive understanding—of impermanence—insubstantiality—interconnectedness as that which produces form, but also non-form. A certain kind of post-human perspective on, but also of, immanence:

Here then,  
Form is no other than emptiness,  
Emptiness no other than form.  
Form is only emptiness,  
Emptiness only form.

Feeling, thought, and choice,  
Consciousness itself,  
Are the same as this.

All things are by nature void  
They are not born or destroyed  
Nor are they stained or pure  
Nor do they wax or wane.

So, in emptiness, no form,  
No feeling, thought, or choice,  
Nor is there consciousness.  
No eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind;  
No colour, sound, smell, taste, touch,  
Or what the mind takes hold of,  
Nor even act of sensing.

No ignorance or end of it,  
Nor all that comes of ignorance;  
No withering, no death,  
No end of them.

Nor is there pain, or cause of pain,  
Or cease in pain, or noble path  
To lead from pain;  
Not even wisdom to attain!  
Attainment too is emptiness.  
(Sangharakshita 1990: 14–15)

## V. Conclusion: Towards a Western *Dharma*?

I suggested in my introduction that a Western Buddhism might be less motivated by the abolition of the self than by a more constructive project—to make the self anew and in accordance with certain truths about the world (not least its impermanence). This constructive attitude is an important feature of Deleuze's reading of Spinoza, precisely that it offers an aesthetics of living, or 'an Art, the art of the *Ethics* itself: organizing good encounters, composing actual relations, forming powers, experimenting' (Deleuze 1988b: 118). It seems to me, ultimately, that Badiou's own philosophy also lends itself to this perspective insofar as to be a subject in the world is also to create oneself anew in that world. Indeed, despite the differences I have highlighted (on the other side of the event as it were), there do seem to be further resonances between Badiou and Buddhism on this other side of the event—in terms of fidelity. In fact, from a certain perspective, insight itself is secondary to what one does with it. For both Badiou and Buddhism it is this fidelity itself that changes the situation (in Buddhism, the situation of an individual life).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Spinoza's second kind of knowledge might, at least in one sense, be productively brought into encounter with Badiou's 'subject-knowledge' that is produced by grouping those positive 'post-evental' encounters that follow the logic of the event. In these terms Badiou's theory of the subject also implies an art of living, at least of a sort.

Crucially, however, for Badiou this does not seem to be a matter of what we might call affective-knowledge. Indeed, a theory of affects is inevitably—and conspicuously—missing from Badiou's system in *Being and Event* (and although *Logics of Worlds* goes some way to addressing the missing worldliness of *Being and Event*, it nevertheless pays very little attention to affect). It is as if the impermanence and radical 'undecidability' of the world—the emotional *mess* as it were—that actually constitutes lived life (the micro events of the virtual–actual weave) would only spoil the purity of the event and the matheme of the subject that follows from it. Likewise, there is no equivalent of Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, *except* as the inexplicable and unbidden event. The subject, in Badiou's system, is forever caught in knowledge of the second kind (and perhaps the first), but maintains a faith in the third from which he or she is barred by a narrow but unbridgeable chasm. The third kind of knowledge, we might say, is direct knowledge *and* experience of the generic, the universal.

With Deleuze's Bergsonism and Spinozism, as with Buddhism, there are then two important differences to Badiou: first, the infinite can be prepared for (the conditions of its arising can be put in place, albeit the arising itself is fundamentally different in kind to the efforts of that subject); and second, the infinite can be experienced—this being Spinoza's third kind of knowledge, a beatitude in which the whole world agrees with one, and Buddhist Enlightenment, again a complete identification with the world. Crucially, this experience—as evidenced by Bergson's mystic—is not just a private affair but involves a concomitant involvement in and with the world (put simply, compassion). We might say that this last characterisation of a mode of being firmly involved with the world, in fact a veritable becoming-world of the subject, operates as a necessary corrective to those who seek redemption in an escape from the world.

We might suggest here that the figure of the ontologist, the crucial figure of Badiou's theory of the subject (insofar as it also names Badiou himself) is also a figure who is necessarily barred from experiencing the generic despite being able to prove its existence. This is in contrast to the Buddha, at least as the latter accesses the infinite and incarnates it in their very being. Deleuze's actual/virtual dyad allows a way in to think this co-presence of the two realms, their mutual interpenetration. And the *bodhisattva* is a figure who operates on this edge between the actual and the virtual, with one foot in time and one in eternity, all the while maintaining an extreme fidelity to the 'truth' of the event of the Buddha's Enlightenment. Badiou's subject, in the world but barred from the truth which he or she nevertheless produces, is the melancholy double of this *bodhisattva* for whom there is no bar, or if there is, it is because a decision has been made to instate it as the condition of compassionate action. This *bodhisattva*-subject then is very much in the world, but not entirely of it.

I want to end these remarks on Deleuze, Badiou and Buddhism on a personal note. It is rare to find spaces, places or communities in which a genuine production of subjectivity is taking place. It seems to me that within certain practices of Western Buddhism there is something experimental going on—an attempt to think and practise the *dharma* in a modern and Western context, which does not involve a wholesale turn to the East and a plundering of exotic narratives and images. This has meant, for some, the utilisation of Western myth and specifically pre-modern images and narratives (and also a turn from Christianity to a renewed paganism). I have written about this utilisation of the past to

combat the impasses of the present (and, indeed, about a contemporary paganism) elsewhere—in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's own ideas of a mixed semiotic.<sup>7</sup> In fact, to a certain extent radically new images and narratives are required for a Western *dharma*, and, no doubt, are being drawn and written as I write (and will be based on the experiences of subjects that are themselves involved in practice). What, however, is offered here is the beginning of a more philosophical exploration of some resonances between Buddhism and certain strands of post-Kantian philosophy, when philosophy itself is to be understood, following Pierre Hadot (1995), as 'a way of life'. Indeed, this is to excavate an older model of philosophy, one that held before the splitting of the latter into theology and the more academic and hermeneutic discipline of philosophy that exists today. It is also one that is interested, following Foucault's ideas on the 'Care of the self', in spirituality—and in a transformation of the subject—rather than in a knowledge that is merely apparent to the senses as they are (and, as such, it marks a turn from the Cartesian subject). Might we also say, following François Laruelle, that this is a future-looking philosophy, or, in Laruelle's terms, a non-philosophy that is intent on renewing the conditions of thought itself (and not limiting it those to models already subsumed *by* philosophy)? If philosophy is used in this non-philosophical programme (as with my take on Bergson and Spinoza above), this will be for eminently practical ends and not as merely a further addition to philosophical discourse itself (which, as Lacan has told us, is a discourse of the master—and, as such, maintains certain power relations, or, indeed, stymies any possibility of transformation).

The next step, it seems to me, in this development of a Western *dharma* would be the integration of these different strands (conceptual and abstract—mythopoetic and embodied) and the concomitant development of different kinds of practices and new rituals that allow a subject to sidestep him- or herself, to become other. After all, it is one thing to write, or talk, about transformation but it is another to put this into practice especially in terms of an engagement with emotion—and affect—beyond the intellect. Deleuze himself offers some interesting lines of thought here, for example with his essay on Robinson's adventures on the desert island in 'Michel Tournier and the World Without Others' (1990), or, to return to the essay 'Immanence: A Life', in the cast of literary characters that themselves live different intensive states. The collaborations with Guattari go even further in this direction. Indeed, with the theorisation of the practice of schizoanalysis alongside the development of an expanded ethico-aesthetic paradigm Guattari himself,

it seems to me, has much to offer Western Buddhist practitioners (Buddhism here operating precisely between the therapeutic and aesthetic registers). Ultimately, however, although Deleuze and Guattari, alongside their philosophical precursors such as Spinoza and Bergson, offer a particular philosophical take on Western spiritual practices, the practices themselves will always operate at the sharp edge of experimentation and development. After all, a life of immanence, a life between the finite and the infinite, is always richer—and more surprising—than any philosophical account that can be given of it.

## Notes

1. There have, of course, been many other comparative studies of Buddhism and Continental philosophy. As indicative see the work of David Loy, for example the volume *Lack and Transcendence: The Problem of Death and Life in Psychotherapy, Existentialism, and Buddhism* (2001). In terms of recent French thought there is now a large literature on Derrida/deconstruction and Buddhism, though still relatively little on Deleuze and Buddhism (an exception here is N. Robert Glass's essay on Tibetan Buddhism, 'The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Deleuze and the Second Light' (2000)). Although not on Deleuze and Buddhism *per se*, there is also a growing secondary literature on Deleuze and Spirituality/Mysticism. See for example the monograph by Christian Kerslake on *Deleuze and the Unconscious* (2007), the special issue of *SubStance* on 'Spiritual Politics After Deleuze' edited by Joshua Ramey (2010), and the monograph, also by Ramey, on *The Hermetic Deleuze: Philosophy and Spiritual Ordeal* (2012). In terms of Deleuze's third important philosophical precursor, Nietzsche, and the resonances with Buddhism, see Robert Morrison's book on *Nietzsche and Buddhism* (1997), and also my own comments on Nietzsche's eternal return in the third section of my first chapter of *On the Production of Subjectivity* (2012). (It seems to me that Nietzsche's overman has profound resonances with the Buddha, notwithstanding Nietzsche's own sometimes dismissive view of Buddhism which he aligns with Schopenhauer and the extinguishing of the will. It is my contention, in what follows, that a Western Buddhism—or simply *dharma*—is more usefully thought as constructive, which is to say, as offering an alternative production of subjectivity.) Finally, Hume might also be said to explore Buddhist themes, especially in his account of habit as that which, ultimately, constitutes us as individuals. My own understanding of Buddhism in what follows comes from my involvement in the Tiratna Buddhist movement and I want to thank here those Buddhist order members that introduced me to Buddhism (especially Rijumitra) or have led retreats and study days that have informed my take on it. In particular I want to acknowledge the friendship and conversations of both Nagapriya and Samudradaka and the writings of Sangharakshita whose own translation of Buddhism into the West informs more or less all of my own take on Buddhist doctrine and practice. In relation to this involvement see my two earlier attempts at bringing my understanding of Buddhism into contact with Deleuze (and Guattari) in two short articles both written for *Parallax*: 'In Violence: Three Case Studies Against the Stratum' (2000) and 'Writing on Art (Case Study: The Buddhist Puja)' (2001). The gambit of this particular essay is that Buddhism, especially in the figure of

the *bodhisattva*, figures the finite–infinite relation as a specifically liveable one. It goes without saying that my take on Buddhism leaves out far more than it contains, and, indeed, merely skims the surface of a very rich and varied tradition (and takes more than a few short cuts in its account); likewise, my accounts of Deleuze, Bergson and Spinoza, and Badiou focus solely on certain details that might be brought into productive encounter with Buddhist doctrine and/or practice. For a more sustained account of these four thinkers—specifically in relation to the production of a contemporary subjectivity—see my recent monograph mentioned above.

2. My understanding of the reciprocal determination of the actual and virtual is indebted to James Williams’s laying out of this complex terrain in his critical introduction to *Difference and Repetition* (2003).
3. For an account of the *bodhisattva* vow, in relation to the *bodhicitta* and to the nature of conversion within Buddhism, see Sangharakshita 1994 (my understanding of the *bodhisattva* in general is also indebted to Sangharakshita 1988). Sangharakshita points out that the *bodhicitta* is not the only event that might produce a conversion; it is, however, one that produces a properly altruistic orientation (a fidelity to the generic). In general, however, a Buddhist might be defined by what we might call a ‘*dukkha*-event’ (illness, old age, death, and so forth) that then begins the desire for something beyond finitude. This in itself constitutes an important difference to a thinker like Spinoza for whom the thought of death is always ethically counter-productive—although it is worth noting that it was Spinoza’s grasp of his own finitude that led him to explore the terrain of the *Ethics*. In relation to this it seems to me that a further key area that needs to be addressed in terms of the mobilisation of Buddhism as a radical ‘production of subjectivity’ today is the relation of this inherent *dukkha* of human experience to our particular capitalist mode of production.
4. Indeed, another Buddhist doctrine—of the twelve *nidanas*—links the break in the circle of re-becoming (reactivity) to the shift to a spiral upward path (towards Enlightenment). Here *dukkha*, instead of leading to further grasping, gives way to the arising of faith. The spiral path, in an echo of Spinoza, is characterised by ever increasingly joyful states (indeed, joy itself is the technology of progression on the spiral path).
5. In passing it is interesting to note that although Ancient philosophy, at least in Pierre Hadot’s account, likewise emphasises preparation and an ethical programme (precisely ‘philosophy as a way of life’), the actual ethical destination differs to Buddhism, or indeed, to Spinoza. To quote Hadot: ‘With the help of these exercises, we should be able to attain to wisdom; that is, to a state of complete liberation from the passions, utter lucidity, knowledge of ourselves and of the world. In fact, for Plato, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and the Stoics, such an ideal of human perfection serves to define *divine* perfection, a state by definition inaccessible to man. With the possible exception of the Epicurean school, wisdom was conceived as an ideal after which one strives without the hope of ever attaining it’ (Hadot 1995: 103). It seems to me that this asymptotic account of progression has much in common with Badiou’s subject who is barred from the truth although endlessly approximates it, as opposed to, for example, the mystic in Bergson’s account who, we might say, becomes divine. Might this also be figured: Plato vs Buddha?
6. A more sustained and close comparative reading of Badiou’s system with Buddhist doctrine would be a worthwhile pursuit, though not, perhaps, for *Deleuze Studies*. To point towards just one further resonance: the central importance of the ‘void’ for Badiou—the empty set that is contained within any given situation or world (and upon which the latter is constructed)—and

the centrality of *sunyata* (emptiness) within Mahayana Buddhism. This also has bearing on what I say above in my Introduction about Deleuze's ontology (of difference in itself). I have dealt with the differences between Badiou and Deleuze on these grounds (their different takes on multiplicity) in *On the Production of Subjectivity* (2012); suffice to say here that from a Buddhist perspective these ontological questions are always subsumed under the more practical concerns of a given individual's transformation.

7. See, again, the last section of the last chapter of *On the Production of Subjectivity* (2012).

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