The Merchants of Heavenly Grace: On Academic Journals and Cultural Difference

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The increasing standardization, specialization and monetarization of academic publishing is designed to foster quality in research and expression. But these tendencies also pose serious challenges to the expression of cultural difference, particularly with regard to philosophy and religious studies. Scholars from various cultural backgrounds outside of mainstream universities often find themselves marginalized when the quality of their work is judged through the metrics of mainstream academic publishing. Smaller journals which give a forum to local research are gradually disappearing or becoming irrelevant. The corporate control of publishing limits the access and distribution of information making it difficult for smaller regional universities to access and conduct research. But these challenges to the expression of cultural difference also reflect the deeper tendencies of the information age. To approach this problem, we need to consider the conflict between culture and spirit on the one hand, with the flows of information and capital on the other. I will introduce this problem through an idea of hermeneutics presented by George McLean. I will then discuss the approaches to this problem by such writers as Michel Serres, Jean Francois Lyotard, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida. I will show that these latter writers devise strategies to reach something outside of the cybernetic flows of information in the media age, but that their solutions are incomplete because they rely on intellectual concepts of redemption and ignore the concrete practices of spiritual redemption. The issue that cross-cultural journals must consider is how to emphasize something beyond the merely intellectual; how to amplify practice within its expression. I will address this issue in the spirit of a poem by Emily Dickinson entitled "Publication – is the Auction" which supplies the title of this essay.

Keyword: Academic Publishing; Cultural Difference; Spirituality, Cybernetics, Practice

Introduction

This paper was originally written to be presented at a RVP conference planned for Bandung, Indonesia. In my planned presentation, I wanted to address the ideas presented at the 1953 Bandung conference of the nonalignment movement concerning respect for and preservation of cultural difference. I wanted to discuss the founder of the RVP – George McLean – and his ideas concerning the hermeneutics of cultural difference. And I wished to discuss my own experience in academic publishing and the challenges posed to the expression of cultural difference by the increasing control of publishing. So the paper would have been a weaving

together of themes related to place, to an institution, and to my own experience. However, the conference was cancelled (and my presentation uprooted) by the recent "pandemic".

I was kindly invited by Dan Chitoiu to present a paper at the conference "Spiritual Values and the Challenges of Today's World," and since he and I are both editors of journals that deal with diverse cultural and spiritual perspectives, I thought this would be a good opportunity to revive this paper and the question of cross-cultural and cross-spiritual expression in academic journals.[1] I will begin with a poem by Emily Dickinson entitled "Publication – is the Auction."

Publication – is the Auction[2]

by Emily Dickinson

Publication – is the Auction
Of the Mind of Man –
Poverty – be justifying
For so foul a thing

Possibly – but We – would rather
From Our Garret go
White – unto the White Creator –
Than invest – Our Snow –

Thought belong to Him who gave it –
Then – to Him Who bear
It's Corporeal illustration – sell
The Royal Air –

In the Parcel – Be the Merchant
Of the Heavenly Grace –
But reduce no Human Spirit
To Disgrace of Price –

Dickinson's poem was written back in 1863 and addresses the profanation of the spiritual in the commodification of a poem. The spiritual expression is reduced if it is diminished if it is reduced to measurement by price. Our research as academics has always been a part of the

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[1] This paper was delivered at the conference: "Spiritual Values and the Challenges of Today's World," organized by Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Romania, and the Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality, Romania/USA, in partnership with Dokuz Eylül University, Turkiye, held between 22nd and 23rd of June 2023 in Iaşi, Romania.

[2] Emily Dickinson, *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. R. W. Franklin (Harvard University Press, 1999)

publishing industry with all its negative aspects and compromises. But we academics have always liked to tell ourselves that academic publishing is somehow more noble than other forms of publishing. We like to think of the university as a space insulated from the commercial noise of the outside world. But with the developments of the media, online publishing and the various commercial tendrils which have penetrated the space of the university, we cannot avoid the increasing convergence between pure knowledge and commercial knowledge and the problems that emerge.

Cyberspace has brought every cultural tradition within easy access. Exhaustive information is instantly available to us. And certainly online academic publishing allows scholarly work on diverse cultural and spiritual traditions to be available to academic researchers from all over the world. But there are also philosophical problems connected to this absorption of all diversity within cyberspace.

The increasing standardization, specialization and monetarization of academic publishing is supposedly designed to foster quality in research and expression. Research is submitted to various metrics such as impact factors, h-indexes, peer reviews and journal rankings. Journals become increasing monitored and their content monetarized by indexing companies. These tendencies pose serious challenges to the expression of cultural difference, particularly with regard to philosophical, cultural and religious studies. Scholars from various cultural backgrounds outside of mainstream universities often find themselves marginalized when the quality of their work is judged through these metrics. And the corporate control of publishing limits the access and distribution of information making it difficult for smaller regional universities to access and conduct research. Sometimes research in smaller universities around the world is only possible with the aid of pirate websites that makes publications and research accessible. And much of the research around the world which is interesting, creative, and which deals with deeper cultural and spiritual issues, is often either rejected or exiled to the backwaters of the internet.

These challenges to the expression of cultural difference in the publication industry also reflect the deeper tendencies of the information age in general. As participants in this conference, we are a part of this cybernetic flow – we will report our participation in this conference in on our yearly reports as a measurement of our productivity. But yet, at the same time, we here in this conference – like the poet – wish to speak of something which lies beyond this cybernetic

flow. We wish to gesture back to some source and wish to be conveyors of heavenly grace. And so a question emerges – a philosophical and hermeneutic question – namely, how can the cultural or spiritual 'Other' express itself and have an impact in our corporate media age, when all information swims in the same cybernetic pool?

Hermes and Hermeneutics

George Mclean was founder of the CRVP (Council for Research in Values in Philosophy) and he was actively involved in the organization of philosophy conferences around the world. Although he was a Catholic Oblate priest, he actively promoted the voice of philosophers from around the world. In my experiences teaching at Catholic Universities, I have gradually developed an admiration of his work and feel that I am in many ways a spiritual descendant of his work. The many conferences he has organized have given voice to diverse philosophical traditions and provided a platform for dialogue between them. This is what I considered to be the mission of the journal which I am involved with. In series of lectures in Qom, Iran, McLean speaks about the meaning of Hermeneutics. He points out:

> The reference to the god, Hermes, in the term 'hermeneutics' suggests something of the exalted character of the meaning which is sought and its implication for the world of values. For the message borne by Hermes is not merely an abstract mathematical formula or a methodological prescription devoid of human meaning and value. Rather, it is the limitless wisdom regarding the source and hence the reality, and the goal and hence the value, of all.[3]

Notice that McLean sees hermeneutics as being not merely the transmission of messages or communication across horizons, but it is something deeper; related both to a connection back to a "source" and a projection forward towards a goal. It is a transmission of information, but one that connects us to both tradition and change which was a continuing concern for McLean throughout his writings in the face of increasing globalization.

Another thinker who deals with these themes in connection with the figure of Hermes is the French philosopher Michel Serres. He sees human history as involving a movement from

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[3] George McLean, *Hermeneutics, Faith, and the Relations between Cultures,* (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2003), 8.

myth to science. Myth and culture involve a connection or weaving of various elements.[4] And gradually with the movement of history, the final outcome of this weaving is science.[5] So *mythos* gives birth to *logos*, reason and ultimately science. Yet in its historical triumph, science arrogates to itself the role of control over discourse and diminishes deeper human concerns of earlier times.

So notice that if myth and culture are themselves structures of meaning created by connecting the disconnected, globalization would be the continuation of this process by weaving cultural identities into larger more universal structures. It would ultimately create a condition or a 'space' where there are no more encounters.

> Linked homogeneity erases catastrophes, and congruent identity forgets difficult homeomorphisms. Reason, as the saying goes, has triumphed over myth. No, it is Euclidean space that has *repressed* a barbarous topology, it is transport and displacement without obstacles that have suddenly taken the place of the journey, the ancient journey from islands to catastrophes, from passage to fault, from bridge to well, from relay to labyrinth. Myth is effaced in its original function, and the new space is universal, as is reason or the *ratio* that it sustains, only because within it there are no more encounters.[6]

We lose the various forms of cultural wisdom which relate to the spiritual, to mystery and to the dramas of being human. And gradually we no longer encounter that with what lies beyond a homogeneous rational space.

But Serres also in his writings also wishes to reassure us that this process should never be complete. He assigns 'literature' the role of addressing this movement, to create new passages between domains that are separated or lost.

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[4] Serres writes: Cultures are differentiated by the form of the set of junctions, its appearance, its place, as well as by its changes of state, its fluctuation. But what they have in common and what constitutes them as such is the operation itself of joining, of connecting. The image of the weaver arises at this point: to link, to tie, to open bridges, pathways, well or relays amoung radically different spaces.", *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 45

[5] Serres writes: "Mythical discourse undertakes a weaving together, a junction, a connection of places that are closed, isolated, inviolable, inaccessible, dangerous, or mortal-disconnected, in any case. Once the weaving together is accomplished, one can speak of science." (*Feux et singaux de brume* (Paris: Minuit, 1975), 169. Cited by Josue V. Harari and David F. Bell in the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982), xxxiii

[6] Ibid, 52.

"We have to change laws. Henceforth the global does not necessarily produce a local equivalent, and the local itself contains a law that does not always and everywhere reproduce the global"[7]

Serres' approach helps us with our concerns about hermeneutics and cross-cultural dialogue. We academics place great importance on this process of mutual understanding and cross-cultural encounters, but this process is itself a form of weaving which reduces cultural practices and spiritualities to a pool of information. When we publish our articles and try to create encounters, are we merely weaving cultural and spiritual difference into a homogeneity, or are we hoping for something deeper and more challenging?

For us, the very idea of writing articles and publishing in cross-cultural journals is the potential for 'real' encounters between reason and local mythologies, and the potential for disruptions of our particular ways of seeing the world. Serres recognizes that these 'passages' to a 'plurality of local spaces' are becoming difficult if not impossible.[8] And here we share Serres' understanding of the problem, but we should also be aware of his limitations. Serres' solution – literature – understood through the figure of Hermes, is a merely aesthetic model of redemption. It is a process of cybernetic weaving to effect a passage between local spaces and create new possibilities for the system itself – a function which he will later assign to 'parasitism'. Such a merely 'aesthetic' approach wishes to navigate a passage to some 'outside', but it ends up being a passage within the cybernetic system itself. Cultural or spiritual diversity remains merely an illusion created by the cybernetic flow of information.

Bildung and Cybernetics

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[7] This passage is from Serres' work *Hermes V, 'Le Passage du Nord-Ouest* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), it is cited in the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy,* xiv.
[8] In the introduction to *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, Josue Harari and David Bell characterize Serres' problem of passage as follows: "Until recently, science had convinced us that in the classification of the spaces of knowledge the local was included in the global, in other words, that a path always existed between one local configuration and another, that from local configurations one could always move without break or interruption to a more encompassing global configuration. Clearly this assumption implied a homogeneous space of knowledge ruled entirely by a single scientific or universal truth that guaranteed the validity of the operation of passage. Such a space differs qualitatively from a more complex space in which the passage from one local singularity to another would always require an arduous effort. Rather than a universal truth, in the more complex case one would have a kind of truth that functions only in the context of local pockets, a truth that is always local, distributed haphazardly in a plurality of spaces." *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*, xiii.

McLean stressed the idea of Hermeneutics as being related to a 'source.' Heidegger too understood hermeneutics as relating to an ultimate source – Being. In his later writings, Heidegger lamented the fading of the awareness of Being into oblivion, and predicted that in the future, philosophy will be reduced to the mere flow of information.

> Maybe history and tradition will fit smoothly into the information retrieval systems that will serve as resource for the inevitable planning needs of a cybernetically organized mankind. The question is whether thinking too, will end in the business of information processing.[9]

History and tradition are no longer something external – that thinking needs to be continually engaged with – but they are now absorbed into the flow of information itself. Heidegger believed that eventually, cybernetics will supplant philosophy. In his book *The End of Philosophy*, he writes:

> Cybernetics transforms language into an exchange of news. The arts become regulated-regulating instruments of information. The development of philosophy into independent sciences that, however, interdependently communicate among themselves ever more markedly, is the legitimate completion of philosophy. Philosophy is ending in the present age. It has found its place in the scientific attitude of socially active humanity. But the fundamental characteristic of this scientific attitude is its cybernetic, that is, technological character.[10]

This is also a problem connected to the influence of technology on contemporary education. It must be remembered that Jean-François Lyotard's famous work, *The Postmodern Condition*, was a report on the contemporary state of the university. Much of the work involves a refutation of the older organic models of knowledge and the university found in writers like Wilhelm von Humboldt and F.W.J. Schelling. Their idea of learning or *Bildung*, according to Lyotard, is replaced by the production and consumption of knowledge.

> We may thus expect a thorough exteriorization of knowledge with respect to the "knower," at whatever point he or she may occupy in the knowledge old principle that the acquisition of knowledge is indissociable from the training (*Bildung*) of minds, or even of

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[9] Martin Heidegger. Preface to *Pathmarks*. (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 56

[10] Martin Heidegger, *The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking* (Chicago: Harper and Row, 1973), 434.

individuals, is becoming obsolete and will become ever more so. The relationship of the suppliers and users of knowledge to the knowledge they supply and use is now tending, and will increasingly tend, to assume the form already taken by the relationship of commodity producers and consumers to the commodities they produce and Consume – that is, the form of value. Knowledge is and will be produced in order to be sold, it is and will be consumed in order to be valorized in a new production: in both cases, the goal is exchange. Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its "use-value."[11]

Training and formation is something important in spiritual traditions. So even Humboldt's secular idea of *Bildung* still had spiritual overtones, or can be conceived to be the secular replacement for spiritual formation. But these last remnants of cultural and spiritual training are being replaced by isolation, fragmentation and consumption. Lyotard goes on to suggest with the increasing global control of knowledge, the nation-state itself will be eclipsed and seen as an obstacle.

> The ideology of communicational "transparency," which goes hand in hand with the commercialization of knowledge, will begin to perceive the State as a factor of opacity and "noise." It is from this point of view that the problem of the relationship between economic and State powers threatens to arise with a new urgency.[12]

And of course we can apply this "opacity" to the idea of culture and religion as well.[13] The more radical idea of hermeneutics as giving voice to something radically other or disruptive which challenges even our systems which organize our interactions, is replaced by the easy flows of cross-cultural information. And of course, this is a model of communication based on the exchange principle of capital and 'investment knowledge.'[14]

Lyotard's idea of resistance to these developments – his idea of redemption – is his embrace of the imagination. In a manner similar to Serres consideration of literature, he sees it as an opening of possibilities through a connecting together of disparate elements. It is a performative creation of new truths.

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[11] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 4-5.
[12] Ibid, 5.
[13] For the globalists, culture and religion are obstacles to a construction of a single rules-based order where the allegiance of human subject is not to local traditions but to the cybernetic flow itself.
[14] Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 6.

This new arrangement is usually achieved by connecting together series of data that were previously held to be independent. This capacity to articulate what used to be separate can be called imagination. Speed is one of its properties. It is possible to conceive the world of postmodern knowledge as governed by a game of perfect information, in the sense that data is in principle accessible to any expert: there is no scientific secret. Given equal competence (no longer in the acquisition of knowledge, but in its production), what extra performativity depends on the final analysis is "imagination," which allows one either to make a new move or change the rules of the game.[15]

This is also connected to his idea of "paralogy" as an embrace of the unknown. But Lyotard, by pinning his hopes on the imagination and paralogy, is merely following the trajectory of information consolidation forward. Everything is available in cyberspace; every culture, religious tradition, spirituality, mystical and mythological knowledge. Imagination for him would be what creates new possibilities within this cybernetic flow. It merely weaves these elements together in new ways.

But what of the fragmented cultural and spiritual traditions which possess their own truths and intensities that might supply a challenge or corrective to the cybernetic system itself? Is there a possibility of an authentic disruption or change supplied by the cultural other? And is an authentic disruption still possible in our media environment which carefully manufactures and manages conflict and disruption? These managed disruptions maintain both the flow and the fragmentation of information that prevents any 'authentic' movement of positive change from building any momentum.

Cybernetics of the Sacred and Profane

Giorgio Agamben foresaw this problem as well. In an essay entitled "In Praise of Profanation," Agamben investigates the very loss of the sacred when everything is reduced to use-value. He points out that according to the Roman jurists, the Sacred is "removed from the free use and commerce of men" while the profane are things "returned to the common use of men."[16] Capitalism amplifies this religious mechanism of separation.

We can say that capitalism… generalizes in every domain the structure of separation that defines religion. Here sacrifice once marked the passage from the profane to the sacred and from the sacred to the profane, there is now a single, multiform, ceaseless process of

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[15] Lyotard, 52.
[16] Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 73.

separation that assails everything, every place, every human activity in order to divide it from itself. ... In its extreme form, the capitalist religion realizes the pure form of separation, to the point that there is nothing left to separate.[17]

Agamben's 'praise' of profanation (or the profanitory power of language) would be the attempt to rescue the sacred by returning it to use. But the media works against this.

> The apparatuses of the media aim precisely at neutralizing this profanatory power of language as pure means, at preventing language from disclosing the possibility of a new use, a new experience of the word… where the pure means, suspended and exhibited in the sphere of the media, shows its own emptiness, speaks only its own nothingness, as if no new use were possible, as if no other experience of the word were possible.[18]

And certainly this reduction of language to emptiness is something we find in academic publishing. Through the metrics used to measure impact factor we subordinate the deeper truths which resist immediate comprehension. Through the peer review process, we contract the scope and expression of research and restrict it to games played in restricted domains presided over by an accredited group of 'experts.' Through the reduction of all knowledge to measurement of 'points' we create an academic culture which engages in the manipulation of points to create illusions of quality. Our goals become directed to academic promotion or the reputation and marketability of a program. And the ability of the essay to cause a 'reflection' - which challenges the exchange principle of knowledge, and allows a thinking across ruptures and gaps, is lost. Our cross-cultural and cross-spiritual research becomes empty.

Agamben, like Lyotard, appeals to aesthetic categories in his idea of redemption. While Lyotard promotes imagination, Agamben promotes "play."

> [Play] frees and distracts humanity from the sphere of the sacred, without simply abolishing it. The use to which he sacred is returned is a special one that does not coincide with utilitarian consumption.[19]

So what we see in Agamben's solution is the Western academic's attempt to preserve something of the possibilities of traditional cultural or religious experience in a secular format.

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[17] Agamben, 81.
[18] Agamben, 88.
[19] Agamben, 76.

The 'as if' of Cultural and Religious Symbolism

When we speak of cultural and spiritual ideas and concepts in our classes and our research, what kind of status can they possibly have? This is a theme considered in the writings of Jacques Derrida. In an awkwardly titled essay called "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what could take place tomorrow)" he provides a loose manifesto for the future role of the humanities. He concludes with the idea that the humanities must not be isolated but must engage with the outside world.

> One thinks in the Humanities the irreducibility of their outside and of their future. One thinks *in* the Humanities that one cannot and must not let oneself be enclosed within the inside of the Humanities. But for this thinking to be strong and consistent requires the Humanities. … This limit of the impossible, the "perhaps," and the "if," this is the place where the university is exposed to reality, to the forces from without (be they cultural, ideological, political, economic, or other). It is there that the university is in the world that it is attempting to think. On this border, it must therefore negotiate and organize its resistance. And take its responsibilities. Not in order to enclose itself and reconstitute the abstract phantasm of sovereignty whose theological or humanist heritage it will perhaps have begun to deconstruct, if at least it has begun to do so. But in order to resist effectively, by allying itself with extra-academic forces, in order to organize an inventive resistance, through its *oervres*, its work, to all attempts at reappropriation (political, juridical, economic, and so forth), to all the other figures of sovereignty.[20]

Our very idea of the 'human' is something which must be understood in its history, and yet, something which is always exposed to deconstruction. These ideas need to be provisionally accepted 'as if' they were meaningful and valid.[21] This idea of Derrida can be traced back to Kant. Like Kant, our ideas of God, moral law, while unable to be proved, need to be considered as regulative ideas of reason.

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[20] Jaques Derrida, "The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (thanks to the 'Humanities,' what could take place tomorrow)" in *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: a Critical Reader* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 55-56.

[21] Colby Dickenson in an essay on Derrida's idea of the 'as if' succinctly explains that they "are 'necessary illusions' that are essential to all acts of representation and that are rendered 'less violent' through their more or less being exposed as the illusions they are, hence as not necessarily deceptive." Colby Dickinson, "The Logic of the 'As If' and the Existence of God: An Inquiry into the Nature of Belief in the Work of Jacques Derrida." Derrida Today, 4, no. 1: (2011). Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Theology: Faculty Publications and Other Works, http://dx.doi.org/10.3366/drt.2011.0007, accessed September 30, 2023.

But it should also be remembered that Kant himself was influenced by Moses Mendelssohn who pioneered this idea of the regulative use of reason to counter Friedrich Jacobi's more extreme condemnation of reason. Mendelssohn developed the 'method of orientation' where reason adjudicates and negotiates between 'common sense' and 'speculation.' Unlike Kant, reason is situated 'between' our engagements with the world and speculations about it. I mention Mendelssohn because, unlike Kant or Derrida, this idea of reason would not pretend dominate the spiritual, or even congratulate itself for engaging with the world.

So what is needed is a model of reason within the cybernetic flow of information that allows for many spiritualities but also preserves their integrities. It is not God 'as if' existing, but many Gods existing simultaneously. It is not human rights, democracy or moral law 'as if' they are universal, but many different traditions providing interpretations, insights and resistances. The reality of traditions is that they cannot be considered in terms of mere belief or intellectual performance. Traditions (especially outside the West) involve concrete practices of sacrifice, meditation, initiation, which exceed rational beliefs, speculations and performative reason.[22] Not abstract understanding of the human 'as if,' but the human as related to particular historical cultural and spiritual dramas, passions and redemptions. Reason favors function, and even the deconstruction of concepts amounts to a kind of functional questioning of functionality. The 'impossible' is located sometimes encased within our older traditions which can be accessed not through thought alone, but also through ritual and practice. This would mean that the ability of the humanities to really engage with the world would be to embrace the radicality of cultural and spiritual traditions with all of their attendant dangers.[23]

Some might protest that cyberspace has made cultural and spiritual 'practices' from all over the world easily available to us. We can learn about meditation techniques, spiritual rituals, musical genres though videos online. But these virtual practices are removed from the real initiations and discipline that any novice would need to follow to properly enter into such a knowledge. Practice creates a deeper psychic transformation which is not possible from a virtual

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[22] See for example the very interesting attempt of Indian scholars to re-appreciate the deeper meaning the Mīmāṃsā system. Or the attempt of Buddhist scholars to move beyond the Western 'functional' explanations of Buddhist practices to emphasize the deeper spiritual meanings based on the Tipiṭaka. Or Indonesian scholars return to the spiritual concept of culture as *Budaya,* to counter the distortions of Western cultural anthropology.

[23] I suspect that this is the reason that Derrida reacted so strongly to Benjamin's idea of "divine violence."

distance. And as many cultural practices are made accessible through cyberspace, cultural traditions themselves are being slowly uprooted by cyberspace itself. We are losing the initiation ceremonies, the disciplines connected to learning sacred musical traditions, and the proper training and supervision in meditation practices. So extending from this phenomena, what is the role of academic research in cultural and spiritual traditions?

In this sense, to engage with the world is to submit ones thinking and writing to shocks that cannot be absorbed into the cybernetic flows of capital, indexing companies, impact factors, h-indexes, and journal rankings. Also we need to use caution in our entertainment of our ideals concerning freedom, human rights, democracy, justice and environmental protection, which are increasingly manipulated by the media in various way for various purposes. Any authentic shock from the outside can be instantly denigrated, shadow banned, or rejected by the academic media. Or they can be mollified or coopted for various purposes.

So we need to ask if our publications in pluralistic journals of philosophy and religion are merely exercises of our cultural and spiritual 'illusions conscious of themselves,' or do they represent fractured cosmologies which each challenge one another and yet contain particular promises of redemption. In an age of consolidated and curated media administered by corporate and political power, where difference can be manipulated for even greater consolidation, the only possibility for transformation is one which challenges the manipulation of flows itself.

Conclusion

We can see in the work of Serres, Lyotard, Agamben and Derrida very important insights about the use of reason in an age of cybernetic flow. But their limitation is their reduction of everything to their idea of resistance from within the movement of the system itself. In this reduction, the significance of the spiritual is secularized and reduced to ideas of weaving, imagination, play, or the 'as if.' Such an approach cannot appreciate a plurality of cosmological or ontological domains that are constituted by ritual and practice.

We can return to McLean, a Catholic priest, speaking in front of the audience in Qom. His approach to Spirituality emphasized a different kind of timeless communication. One rooted in each individual tradition but yet open to the movement of time. In his lecture, after discussing the terms culture, tradition and religion, he points out that our hermeneutical examination of these things operates for the sake of freedom and novelty.

Here the question arises whether tradition as heritage, that is, as coming from the past locks up into the past, or can it be a creative source for an evolving life? The application of a tradition is not tradition as a whole or synchronic as discussed above, but its meaning for each new time, that is, as diachronic. Time here is to be taken seriously as authentic novelty. It is neither Plato's unchanging realm of ideas, nor is it rationalism's clear and distinct, simple and eternal natures. Human freedom as the striving to realize one's life is not a detached intellection, rather, it is inextricably enabled by, and formative of, the changing physical and social universe. This effort is a matter neither of law nor of lawlessness, but of developing principles, attitudes and institutions that do not predetermine but regulate the exercise of freedom. Hence tradition achieves its perfection in its temporal unfolding or application.[24]

So what is it that we hope to accomplish when we write – something beyond the mere flows of information and metrics generated by capital? Is it possible in an academic essay or in the publication of an academic journal to gesture to something that evades its embeddedness in the flows of information? We need to consider the possibility of an academic writing which exposes the gaps of communication, and presents something unexpected which questions our own views of the world. That which evades every algorithm is precisely the spiritual in the manner in which it operates in its diverse forms.

In the words of Emily Dickenson, we would like to "go White – unto the White Creator – Than invest – Our Snow." We are vehicles of something being expressed. But when the curation of information demands our credentials, and measures our work according to our ability to create 'investment knowledge' then we are participating in a system which has destroyed the connection of our knowledge with a spiritual source. We have reduced the cultural and the spiritual to place from where we can gaze at it through a cybernetic distance, but may never be able to access it and allow it to effect any positive transformation.

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[24] McLean, *Hermeneutics*, 116.

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