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## SUBJECT : MATTER

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# Subject: Matter

# *List of contents*

# Introduction: Meanings of Matter

Those of us in the privileged enclaves of Western European academia have emerged from the years of COVID-19 into a world defined by the physical violence of war on the European continent, the increasing destruction of the world's material heritage, and a new appreciation for physical connection with the world beyond the home. Studying in Leiden but coming from across the world, the members of the editorial board are reminded of the significance of matter and its insistent claims on us all. The 'material turn' that took place across the humanities in the 1990s was driven by precisely the opposite forces, by a seeming rise of immateriality in a decade witness to the digital transformations that have come to condition the contemporary experience: the internet, the mobile phone, and the digitization of culture.[1] The theoretical insights that emerged from this 'new materialism,' however, paradoxically link the historical experience of the 1990s to our present moment. These insights give us new tools to understand the connections behind these seemingly divergent periods, much as they break down binaries more broadly: between matter and immateriality, between biology and society, between the human and the natural.[2]

This collapsing of binaries can be traced back to the theoretical origins of the material turn in post-Marxist, post-Hegelian, Foucauldian, and feminist approaches. The breakdown of a binary between economics and culture, for example, can be found in the post-Marxist argument that material conditions extend beyond mere economic relations to include symbols, discourses, and everyday practices, which are all pivotal in shaping society. Similarly, post-Hegelian thought, emphasizing materialism and the actual conditions of existence, questions the binary between abstract philosophical ideas and concrete material realities.

[1] Wurth, "The Material Turn," 248.
[2] Dolphijn and Van der Tuin, *The New Materialism*, 94.

Foucault's theories enhance the material turn by examining the power/knowledge nexus and demonstrating how discourses are shaped by and shape material practices. Binaries like male/female and nature/culture are a critical focus in feminist approaches, which argue that these distinctions are not inherent but socially constructed and perpetuated through material practices. These theoretical traditions were deployed during the material turn as part of a focus on the distinctive materialities and efficacies of things, their lives, and their potential capacities.

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's assemblage theory, introduced in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), is often regarded as the genesis of new materialism. Deleuze and Guattari argue that human behavior is not primarily driven by individual agency. Instead, they suggest, we rely on material interdependencies and a network of discursive devices that span across legal, geographical, cultural, and economic infrastructures.[3] This focus on the role of networks inspired many authors in the new materialism tradition, including Bruno Latour, who details actor-network theory in *Reassembling the Social* (2005). Latour's book explores the mediation of agency by objects and serves as a framework to examine interactions between humans and nonhumans. Latour posits that all entities, whether living or non-living, operate as 'actants' within networks that affect social and environmental realities.[4] Similarly, Manuel DeLanda builds on Deleuze and Guattari's assemblage theory in *A New Philosophy of Science* (2006), which suggests that a genetic and linguistic influence also contributes to material interdependencies.[5] From a feminist perspective, Donna Haraway's influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) argues that technology and biology are intricately linked in forming society and identity, taking a viewpoint that considers the conceptual aspects of technology and power.[6]

The authors contributing to this special issue of LEAP draw on this new materialist tradition in a wide variety of ways, with a broad understanding of 'matter' serving as a framework for

[3] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 3–25.
[4] Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 1–9.
[5] DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society*, 1–8.
[6] Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 149–151.

categorizing the diverse contributions into three groupings: culture, environment(s), and politics. While there are many possible ways to organize the contributions in this issue of LEAP, these three key themes seem particularly pertinent to our contemporary concerns, deploying the insights of the material turn in newly relevant ways. Central to all of the contributions in the first section on culture, is the question of the broader relationship between material objects, their symbolic meanings, and their effects. The articles in the second section on environment(s) share a concern with how matter impacts physical spaces and/or ecologies, returning us to the eruption of the physical into contemporary consciousness with which we began this introduction. The third section, on the role of politics in shaping the concept of 'matter,' is particularly crucial in a period when 'reality' itself can often seem in dispute in political debates, including those with the potential to turn violent.

The journal opens with the theme of culture and Rajae El Morabet Belhaj's article "Taking on the Black Trauma of Vietnam: Spike Lee and *Da 5 Bloods*," which engages with matter and meaning through an examination of the 2020 film *Da 5 Bloods*. Directed by American filmmaker Spike Lee, the film highlights the experiences of Black veterans during the Vietnam War, who often experienced discrimination and mistreatment both on and off the battlefield, both during and after the war. El Morabet Belhaj reads *Da 5 Bloods* through the concepts of trauma and memory, arguing that the film matters as a cultural object because it sheds light on a neglected part of American history that remains relevant, especially since the film came out at a pivotal moment in the United States. In the summer of 2020, the murder of George Floyd forced the world to confront the systemic racism and police brutality that have plagued Black communities for centuries. El Morabet Belhaj focuses on how trauma and memory are represented in the film through three techniques: the use of characters, flashbacks, and combining historical footage with contemporary scenes. New materialist thinker Rosi Braidotti argues that moving beyond the dialectics that oppose difference to the notion of sameness, encourages a more nuanced understanding of cultural

representations.[7] In the context of *Da 5 Bloods*, this means recognizing the complexities and nuances of the characters' experiences and identities rather than reducing them to simplistic categories or stereotypes.

Engaging with similar themes, Zeno Grootenboer's article "Matter as a Tool of Critique" focuses on the political impact of Japanese *nishiki-e* (multicolored woodblock prints) before the Meiji Restoration (1868). These prints, Grootenboer shows, critique the declining government of the shōgun and its conservative stance through anthropomorphic animal satirical imagery. Grootenboer provides chronological context for the emergence of parody and political satire in late Edo-period (1603–1868) *nishiki-e,* drawing on Katsuya Hirano's theory of 'grotesque realism' to highlight the political implications of grotesque depictions, in particular those of animals and insects. In doing so, Grootenboer examines how artists such as Utagawa Kuniyoshi and Kawanabe Kyōsai utilized animal imagery to voice their opinions and affect their audience. Grootenboer is influenced by new materialist thinker Alfred Gell, who argues that we can recognize intentions—or agency—in matter such as artworks because the mental responses provoked by an artwork closely mirror those we associate with social interactions.[8] Through this lens, Grootenboer explores how the agency of the mass-produced satirical woodblock prints affected the social lives of commoners, unlike unique paintings.

The journal's culture section concludes with Eloise Huai-Yung Huang's "Experiences that Matter," a review of Kazuo Ishiguro's 1986 novel *An Artist of the Floating World*. Huang analyzes sensorial and material aspects of the narrator's memories of Japan in the 1930s and 1940s, arguing that the novel's approach reveals the narrator's attachment to the values these memories represent. Huang then contrasts this attachment to the perspective of the other characters, who have come to repudiate the 1930s and 1940s in Japan's history. In so doing, Huang suggests that the materiality of memory in *An Artist of the Floating World* is intimately involved with the novel's presentation of another type of

[7] Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects*, 1–41.
[8] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 13–23.

matter: 'what matters' for society more broadly, represented through those experiences that Ishiguro presents as meaningful during Japan's post-war reconstruction. Drawing on the notion of affect as a link between the social and the material, Huang's reading joins a tradition of writing that can be traced back to the origins of the material turn in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

While the first set of pieces in this issue examines the correlation between tangible items and their symbolism within culture and memory, the second thematic set redirects attention toward the physical environment. The first article in this set is Rebecca Billi's "Following *Psychylustro*: An (Imaginary) Travelogue Through the Matter of the City," which follows the author's journey on a train ride through Philadelphia, exploring the city's infrastructure and the relationship between art and the matter of the city through a reading of Katherine Grosse's 2014 public artwork, Psychylustro. Billi draws a comparison between the Benjaminian arcade and the train corridor, turning the passenger into a contemporary flaneur. Philadelphia's Northeast Corridor line and Grosse's artworks create a space where knowledge is unveiled through active engagement with the surroundings. Billi's reading aligns with Tim Ingold's 'dwelling perspective' approach, a mode of learning and understanding that is participatory, situational, and contextual, deeply enmeshed with the material conditions of life.[9] Billi emphasizes the importance of art in reawakening attention and imagination and the way the infrastructure supporting our built environment is lined with clues about society, inviting us to expand our sense of what makes up the matter of the city.

Mikko Pekkonen challenges the traditional idea of a clear distinction between wasteland and wilderness, particularly in Alaska. In his article "What's the Matter with Arctic Alaska?" Pekkonen explores how Alaska's North Slope is portrayed in advertisements and landscape photography, contrasting how the two genres communicate space and matter. He implicates Isabelle Stengers' concept of 'cosmopolitics,' influenced by Latour, in which geological formations are perceived to exert agency, by covering the

[9] Ingold, *The Perceptions*, 172–189.

role this agency plays in the world's ecological crisis.[10] Pekkonen examines how oil companies portray their operations in the best possible light using marketing techniques inherited from more traditional art forms. In this way, photographic techniques can tell stories about a place that has been both denigrated and revered. Despite controversies over resource extraction in Native Alaskan territories, modern life in the Arctic is upheld by the opportunities that oil extraction provides, shaping both Alaska's media landscape and its physical one.

Completing this section's complication of the relation between matter and environment, Rik J. Janssen interviews Rosanne van der Voet, a lecturer at Leiden University, whose academic pursuits bridge Urban Studies and Environmental Humanities. Recently awarded a PhD from the University of Sheffield for her innovative exploration of marine narratives, Van der Voet's research focuses on the oceanic environmental crisis through nonhuman perspectives. Van der Voet's PhD dissertation "Tentacular Textuality and Anthropocenic Seas: A Medusa Poetics," uses the techniques of creative writing to foreground marine animals' experiences in ecological discussions, utilizing the metaphorical complexity of jellyfish to navigate through these narratives. This approach is reminiscent of Thomas Nail's new materialist thought, in which he advocates for a dynamic perspective on ecosystems within environmental philosophy, emphasizing the continuous movements of air, water, animals, and plants as essential to maintaining ecological balance.[11] Van der Voet highlights the role of materiality in understanding the environmental crises and advocates for a profound shift toward inclusive, non-human-centric discourses in humanities research.

The final set of pieces in this issue delves into the relationship between politics and matter. In "Faith and Power," Nicolás Vargas Varillas examines the concept of matter in its physical sense and its relation to politicians' promises of material improvements. Vargas Varillas' analysis is consistent with Arturo Escobar's critique of the development paradigm, which highlights the limitations of material

[10] Stengers, *Cosmopolitics II*, 219–233.
[11] Nail, *Theory of the Earth*, 1–18, 177–190.

improvements as a means to address social and political issues. Escobar argues that focusing on material progress often obscures the underlying social and political structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice.[12] Specifically, Vargas Varillas delves into the political alliance formed between Jair Bolsonaro and evangelical Christians in Brazil during the 2018 election, which ultimately led to Bolsonaro's victory. With the increasing influence of evangelical Christians in Brazilian elections, Vargas Varillas highlights the importance of understanding the factors that shape their voting behavior. He argues that in the 2018 Bolsonaro campaign, the focus shifted from promises of material improvements to a 'non-material' approach, centered on values and morality rather than living conditions. This shift in rhetoric highlights the evolving role of religion in political campaigns and the need to further explore its impact on voting patterns.

In this issue's closing article "Mao Zedong's Dialectical Materialism: A Matter of Translation," Berkant Isaev examines Mao Zedong's concept of dialectical materialism as an act of translation. Isaev claims that Mao's concept of dialectical materialism is dynamic and autonomous (and thus different from those of Marx, Engels, and Lenin) as it always refers back to its 'origin' while at the same time employing Confucian and Daoist concepts to 'read' and articulate Marxist theory. Mao's translation naturally creates tension between the Marxist and traditional Chinese concepts and it is in this tension that Mao's dialectical materialism thrives. Mao's dialectical materialism remains Marxist while at the same time becoming a concept of its own, a unique interpretation of Marxist dialectics. Although Mao's dialectics does not fall into a category of new materialism, it shares some similarities with new materialism. It emphasizes contradiction as the primary interaction between and within all the constituents of reality, which are not reducible to binaries but to correlating elements. This similarity implies the need for multifaceted analyses of society, history, and reality as a whole.

Zeno Grootenboer, Eloise Huai-Yung Huang, Rajae El Morabet Belhaj, Nicolas Turner

[12] Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 3–20.

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# PART ONE

# CULTURE

# Taking on the Black Trauma of Vietnam: Spike Lee and *Da 5 Bloods*

Rajae el Morabet Belhaj

*We fought an immoral war that wasn't ours*
*for rights we didn't have.*

Paul, *Da 5 Bloods* (2020)

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The majority of Vietnam War films produced by Hollywood since the late 1960s have centered largely on depicting the perspectives and encounters of American soldiers in Southeast Asia.[1] The Vietnam War was a significant period in American history, especially for Black soldiers. Black soldiers were more likely to be drafted into the war, as they were disproportionately represented in the lower-income bracket. This was due to the fact that poverty and race were closely intertwined, and for many Black Americans, joining the army was often seen as the only way to escape poverty. However, even in the army, they faced discrimination and prejudice, both from their fellow soldiers and the locals in Vietnam. Despite their significant contributions and sacrifices, the stories of Black veterans have been largely overlooked in Hollywood's mainstream narrative of the Vietnam War, either through stereotypical depictions or a lack of representation. The mainstream narrative in Hollywood tends to focus more on the experiences of white soldiers, such as in *Platoon* (1986), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), and *We Were Soldiers* (2002).

This article offers a comprehensive analysis of Spike Lee's *Da 5 Bloods* (2020), a narrative film that explores the experiences of Black soldiers and veterans during and after the Vietnam War. This movie stands out as a significant contribution to the genre of 'Vietnam War films,' as it sheds light on the neglected aspect of the

[1] Woodman, "Represented in the Margins," 38.

Black soldiers' experiences. The story follows Paul (Delroy Lindo), Otis (Clarke Peters), Eddie (Norman Lewis), and Melvin (Isiah Whitlock Jr.), four Vietnam War veterans who return to contemporary Vietnam in search of the remains of their fallen squad leader, "Stormin'" Norman (Chadwick Boseman) and a locker of gold bars they left behind in the jungle. While the film is set in present-day Vietnam, flashback sequences effectively transport the audience back to the horrors of the war, contextualizing the experiences that formed these men.[2]

Since Lee's film was released only recently and under suboptimal circumstances, it has received limited scholarly attention. *Da 5 Bloods* was released in the summer of 2020, at a time when COVID-19 restrictions prevented it from receiving an official premiere, despite having been selected to premiere at the 2020 Cannes Film Festival. As a result, the film's theatrical release was canceled, and it was exclusively distributed on the streaming platform Netflix.[3] These circumstances may have contributed to the film's limited scholarly attention, as scholars may have had fewer opportunities to view and analyze the film in a traditional theatrical setting.

Brian J. Woodman has investigated how Vietnam War films misrepresent or stereotype African Americans in five films: *The Green Berets* (1968), *The Boyz In Company C* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), *Platoon* (1986), and *Hamburger Hill* (1987). Woodman contends that while these films may not accurately portray African American combat soldiers, they still shape worldviews.[4] Building on Woodman's research, this article focuses on the depiction of Black soldiers and veterans, through the lens of 'trauma' and 'memory,' following Maurice Halbwachs' definition of both concepts. Collective memory, as a group's shared understanding of the past shaped by experiences, values, and beliefs, is dynamic and evolving. Traumatic events can challenge established narratives, affecting collective memory.[5] Thus, films like *Da 5*

[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Brown, "Spike Lee's Forever War."
[4] Woodman, "Represented in the Margins," 38–39.
[5] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 21–28.

*Bloods* illuminate the complexities of collective memory in marginalized communities and their experiences of trauma and remembrance.

In keeping with the general theme of this special issue, this article argues that *Da 5 Bloods* matters as a cultural object because it illuminates neglected history that remains relevant today. Released in 2020, during a period marked by protests after the killing of George Floyd and heightened political tensions under the administration of Donald Trump, the film sheds light on racial injustice and the lasting impacts of the Vietnam War on Black veterans. Furthermore, *Da 5 Bloods* holds significance in relation to the themes of trauma and memory by portraying the enduring psychological and emotional wounds carried by Black veterans of the Vietnam War. The film delves into the complexities of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the challenges of processing and remembering past traumatic experiences, highlighting how these issues continue to affect individuals long after the war has ended. By addressing these themes, *Da 5 Bloods* underscores the importance of acknowledging and confronting trauma, while also exploring the power and limitations of memory in shaping personal and collective identities.

This article, situated at the intersection of trauma, memory, and film studies, critically examines representations of Black soldiers in Hollywood films through the lens of *Da 5 Bloods*. While acknowledging the film's historical context, the analysis primarily adopts a film studies approach, exploring the representations themselves rather than their historical accuracy. In other words, the film uses history insofar as it can be helpful to create a narrative framework. In this article, I will argue that *Da 5 Bloods* portrays the enduring effects of trauma and memory on the lives of Black Vietnam War veterans, highlighting the complex interplay between individual and collective experiences, the psychological and physical toll of war, and the ongoing struggle for racial justice and reconciliation. This essay incorporates insights from studying relevant academic literature on the intersection of race, masculinity, and memory; furthermore, it conducts a close reading of the film by studying paratexts.

## Stormin' Norman and Hanoi Hannah

In *Da 5 Boods*, the characters of Stormin' Norman and Hanoi Hannah play important roles in representing the themes of trauma and memory. These two characters serve as mirrors to one another, reflecting the deep wounds of the Vietnam War and its lasting impact on those who experienced it. Stormin' Norman, played by Chadwick Boseman, is a central figure in the film, both in the past as a leader of the Bloods during the war and in the present as a memory and a guiding force for the surviving members of the group.

Throughout the film, Norman is portrayed as a charismatic and fearless leader, revered by his fellow soldiers for his bravery and ideals. Portrayed through flashback sequences, he is particularly central to the exploration of trauma and memory in the film. As the squad leader and a figure of inspiration for the Bloods, Norman appears in flashbacks as a symbol of courage, integrity, and idealism. This becomes clear from a flashback that shows the Bloods discussing what to do with the stash of gold they recover from the crash site of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) airplane. This gold was intended to be used as payment for the Lahu people for their assistance in fighting the Viet Cong. Gold plays an important role in the film. After some back-and-forth, it is Stormin' Norman who suggests that they keep the gold for themselves:

> NORMAN: We bury it. For now. They ask, we say the [Viet Cong] got it. Then we come back and collect.
>
> PAUL: Steal it?
>
> NORMAN: We ain't stealin' Shit! WE were the very First People to die for this Red, White and Blue. It was a Soul Brother, Crispus Attucks at The Muthafuckin' Boston Massacre. We been dying for this Country from the very Get-Go, hoping someday they'd they give us our rightful place but all we got was a Foot up our Black Asses. No Mule, No Forty Acres, No nothing! Fuck dat! The USA owe us! We built this Bitch!

> OTIS: What you sayin'?
>
> NORMAN: We abscond this Gold for every single Black Boot that never made it back home. For all the Brothers and Sistas that were Stolen From Mother Africa to Jamestown, Virginia way back in 1619. We give this Gold to our People not us.[6]

This scene demonstrates that Norman shows courage: he is willing to defy authority and take action that he believes is right, even if it means facing consequences. At the same time, Norman shows integrity by insisting that they are not 'stealing' the gold but rather reclaiming it as reparations for the injustices suffered by African Americans throughout history. He believes that the United States owes them this compensation for their sacrifices and contributions to the country. In the broader context of the film, the viewer may conclude that with 'them,' Norman refers to African Americans in general. Lastly, Norman's vision of a more just and equitable society is evident in his statement that the gold should be used to benefit 'our people' rather than for personal gain, which demonstrates his idealism. He believes that justice and equality are worth fighting for, even if the struggle requires sacrifices. The gold itself becomes a symbol of the value and worthiness of African Americans. Norman sees it as a tangible representation of the sacrifices they have made and the contributions they have made to the nation. By reclaiming the gold, he is symbolically asserting African Americans' right to dignity and equality. The flashbacks featuring Norman highlight his charismatic leadership and the impact he had on the Bloods, as well as the lasting influence of his memory on their lives.

In contrast, Hanoi Hannah, played by Veronica Ngo, represents a different kind of trauma and memory. As a propaganda broadcaster for the North Vietnamese government during the war, Hannah served as a tool of psychological warfare, broadcasting

[6] Lee, *Da 5 Bloods*. All quotes from *Da 5 Bloods* as in the original screenplay, available here: https://deadline.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/DA-5-BLOODS-Script.pdf.

messages intended to demoralize American troops and sow discord within their ranks.[7] Hannah repeatedly addresses Black soldiers during the flashbacks to the war. While her role may seem minor in the grand scheme of the film, the audience gains insight into the efforts of the Vietnamese to incite rebellion and dissent among African American soldiers, which is further emphasized in the broadcast announcing the tragic passing of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.[8]

Hannah's character is complex and multifaceted, challenging the audience to consider the impact of war on all those involved, not just the American soldiers on the front lines. As a seductive figure, Hannah uses her voice as a weapon, manipulating and undermining the morale of opposing forces. Her role in the film highlights the impact of propaganda and the power of words in shaping perceptions and opinions, as the example below demonstrates:

> HANOI HANNAH: Black G.I., In Memphis, Tennessee, a White Man Assassinated Dr. Martin Luther King who heroically opposed the cruel racial discrimination in the USA. Dr. King also opposed the US War in Vietnam.
>
> HANOI HANNAH: Your Government sent 600,000 Troops to crush the Rebellion. Your Soul Sisters and Soul Brothers are enraged in over 122 Cities. They kill them while you fight against us so far away from where you are needed.
>
> HANOI HANNAH: The South Vietnamese People are resolute against these Fascist acts against Negroes who struggle for Civil Rights and Freedom. Negroes are only 11 percent of the US Population but among Troops here in Vietnam you are 32 percent. Is it fair you serve more than the White Americans that sent you here!

[7] Whittaker, "Psychological Warfare in Vietnam," 171–177.
[8] Ó Briain, "Songs of the Golden Age," 73–74.

> HANOI HANNAH: Nothing is more confused than to be ordered into a War to DIE or to be MAIMED for Life without the faintest idea of what's going on. I dedicate Brother Marvin Gaye's WHAT'S GOING ON to the Soul Brothers of the 1st Infantry Division. Big Red One, 2nd Battalion 136th Regiment.[9]

This scene shows Hanoi Hannah addressing Black soldiers directly, using their struggles for civil rights and freedom in the United States to sow doubt and resentment towards their own government. Hannah brings up the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and emphasizes the overrepresentation of Black soldiers fighting in Vietnam. Through this portrayal, Lee alludes to the propaganda spread by the Viet Cong. Moreover, Hannah embodies the paradoxes of the war. Despite being the voice of the enemy, she is portrayed as a sympathetic character who is not entirely evil. This scene demonstrates how Hanoi Hannah aims to highlight the unique experiences and challenges faced by Black soldiers within the broader war context.

Both Stormin' Norman and Hanoi Hannah serve as symbols of the ways in which trauma and memory can shape individuals and communities in the aftermath of war. Norman represents the heroism and sacrifice of those who fought in Vietnam, while Hannah represents the psychological toll of war on all those involved. Their characters highlight the complexities of memory and trauma, as they wrestle with the legacy of the war and its impact on their lives.

## Flashbacks

As stated above, Norman and Hannah only appear in the film during flashback sequences to the war era. Flashback scenes are a common narrative technique that provides the audience with a glimpse into the characters' past and helps them understand the events that have shaped their lives.[10] *Da 5 Bloods* employs flashbacks

[9] Lee, *Da 5 Bloods*.
[10] Grainge, "Introduction," 1–2.

to showcase the characters' experiences during the war and to explore the lasting impact of those memories on their present-day lives. One of the primary ways in which the film uses flashbacks is to illustrate the contrast between the past and the present, highlighting a contrast between the idealized memories of youth and the harsh realities of the characters' current situations.

The younger characters in the film's war flashback scenes are played by the same actors, aged in their sixties and seventies, as in the present-day scenes. The decision adds a layer of authenticity to the film and highlights the idea of 'living memories.' This means that the memories and experiences of the characters are still very much alive and relevant in their present lives. By portraying the characters as both their younger and current selves simultaneously, the film blurs the boundaries between the past and present, highlighting how the memories of youth are intertwined with the realities of adulthood. This technique effectively conveys the idea that our past experiences shape who we are in the present and continue to influence us throughout our lives.

By featuring the actors at their present-day ages in the war flashback scenes, without makeup or de-aging effects, Lee is able to show how the characters' current dilemmas color their recollections of their former selves. The flashbacks are not presented as a nostalgic trip down memory lane, but rather as a means for the characters to confront their past and come to terms with the trauma they experienced. This artistic choice adds a layer of authenticity to the story, as the actors are able to draw on their own experiences and emotions to bring their characters to life. It also shows that the Bloods are still deeply affected by their wartime memories, despite reaching middle age.[11] The use of older actors also adds a sense of urgency to the film, as the characters are running out of time to make peace with their past.[12] The use of flashbacks in this way emphasizes the contradiction between memory and reality, as the characters come face-to-face with the differences between their idealized visions of the past and the harsh truths of the present.

[11] Brown, "Spike Lee's Forever War."
[12] Ugwu, "Spike Lee and the Battlefield of American History."

In addition to this, I would also like to suggest that the use of the same actors in both time frames allows for a smooth transition between the present day and the flashback sequences. This technique contributes to the fluidity and unity of the narrative, as viewers are able to perceive the characters' past and present identities as interconnected. This also allows for a deeper exploration of the characters' psychological states as the audience is able to witness the impact of the war on their lives and how it has shaped them into their present selves.

The flashbacks in *Da 5 Bloods* reveal the trauma and psychological impact of the war on the characters, showing the horrors and brutality of combat, the bonds of brotherhood forged among the Bloods in Vietnam, and the moral complexities of war. These scenes blur the boundaries between past and present, highlighting how memory and trauma are intertwined. As the characters revisit their wartime experiences, the past seeps into the present in a visceral and disorienting manner, as the characters relive their wartime experiences, causing a sense of temporal dislocation that invites the audience to experience the characters' memories and traumas.

### Combining historical footage and contemporary scenes

The use of historical footage alongside contemporary scenes in *Da 5 Bloods* is yet another narrative device that Lee employs to effectively communicate trauma and memory. By blending actual footage from the Vietnam War era with fictionalized scenes featuring the characters, the film creates a seamless tapestry of past and present, illustrating the enduring impact of the war on the lives of the Bloods and portraying the complexities of memory and trauma. In *The Spike Lee Brand*, Delphine Letort argues that in Spike Lee's filmmaking, factual and fictional elements are intricately woven together, a style exemplified by the title sequences of his movies, which employ a specific editing technique.[13]

The incorporation of historical footage serves multiple purposes, adding layers of meaning and complexity to the narrative. Firstly, as also argued by Letort, the use of archival footage creates a

[13] Letort, *The Spike Lee Brand*, 12.

sense of authenticity and realism in the film. The footage anchors the film in the late 1960s, providing a historical background to the narrative.[14] By using real-life footage from the Vietnam War, the film transports the audience back in time to experience the events of the war as if they were there themselves. The film starts with a sequence that cuts from the archival footage to the Bloods arriving at their hotel in Saigon. This helps to immerse the audience in the story and creates a stronger emotional connection to the characters and their experiences.

Moreover, the archival footage acts as a visual representation of the characters' memories and traumas. Through the use of flashbacks and archival footage, we are given insight into the characters' past experiences in the war and how this war continues to haunt them in the present. This adds depth to the characters and helps to humanize them, making their struggles and motivations more relatable to the audience. Another effect of combining historical footage and contemporary scenes in the film is the sense of immediacy it lends to the storytelling. As Letort argues in *The Spike Lee Brand*, Lee uses archival footage to ground the narrative in his documentaries in historical reality.[15] This seems to be the case with most of his fictional films as well. With *Da 5 Bloods*, the archival footage shown at the beginning anchors the film in the late 1960s, providing a historical background to the performance. By interweaving this footage with the fictionalized scenes featuring the Bloods, the film blurs the boundaries between documentary and drama, inviting the audience to witness the war through the eyes of those who lived it.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of historical footage and contemporary scenes allows the film to explore the ways in which memory shapes our understanding of the past. The use of archival footage helps to contextualize the characters' experiences during the war, providing a visual and historical framework for their memories and traumas. Just as Letort notes how Lee's documentaries merge various modes—including the expository through archival footage—to construct a representation that is simply an illusion of unmediated

[14] *Id.*, 14.
[15] *Ibid.*

access to reality, the use of archival footage in the context of war films like *Da 5 Bloods* serves to ground the characters' experiences in historical fact and visual evidence.[16] This technique helps viewers understand the context and significance of the characters' memories and traumas, creating a more layered representation of their wartime experiences.

The archival footage serves as a form of collective memory, representing the shared history and experiences of the Vietnam War era that continue to shape the lives of the characters. While primarily focusing on Lee's documentary work, Letort contends that—although the witnesses may have moved on—archival footage will always be able to depict scenes of chaos that have not been forgotten.[17] By integrating this footage into the narrative, the film acknowledges the broader social and political context in which the Bloods' experiences unfold, underscoring the larger forces at play during the war and its aftermath. The historical footage shows the extreme violence, chaos, and devastation of the war, grounding the characters' stories in a larger historical framework and highlighting the enduring legacy of the conflict.

The use of historical footage in *Da 5 Bloods* also serves to amplify the emotional impact of the characters' experiences and the trauma they carry with them. The visuals evoke the past and the use of archival footage allows the viewer to imagine the context of the Bloods' past in Vietnam. Although the viewer may have moved on from that past, archival footage depicts scenes of chaos that have not been forgotten.[18] The archival footage captures the raw intensity and horror of war, immersing the audience in the chaos and brutality of the conflict. By juxtaposing this footage with the contemporary scenes featuring the Bloods, the film creates a sense of intergenerational trauma, illustrating the ways in which memories of the past continue to resonate in the present.

The blending of historical footage and contemporary scenes allows the film to explore themes of race, identity, and collective memory, confronting the legacy of racism and injustice that the

[16] *Id.*, 28.
[17] *Id.*, 35.
[18] *Id.*, 46.

Bloods faced during and after the Vietnam War. The juxtaposition of past and present serves as a reminder of the ongoing struggle for racial equality and social justice in American society. Furthermore, the use of historical footage in the film serves as a powerful depiction, blending the documentary-like realism of archival footage with the stylized and cinematic nature of the contemporary scenes, capturing the complexity and nuance of the characters' experiences and emotions in a rich and textured visual landscape.

## Conclusion

This study has been premised on the idea that Hollywood has whitewashed conflict. *Da 5 Bloods* represents an interesting break with this tendency. The reading of Lee's *Da 5 Bloods* through the lens of trauma and memory offered here is intended to provide an opening for a new critical approach to the study of Black trauma in Vietnam War films, with a strong focus on representation. This article has illustrated the portrayal of trauma's impact on Black Vietnam War veterans in *Da 5 Bloods*, emphasizing both individual and collective experiences through various narrative techniques employed by Lee. The incorporation of characters symbolizing the profound influence of trauma and memory on individuals and communities post-war, as well as the unique choice to depict older actors playing their younger selves, underscores the concept of 'living memories' and the enduring effects of past experiences. In addition to this, the use of historical footage within a fictional narrative enriches the film's storytelling, adding layers of depth and complexity. Delphine Letort's research on Spike Lee's documentary approach has informed this study significantly, shedding light on Lee's innovative use of historical footage alongside modern scenes. However, it is evident that further scholarly attention is needed to fully appreciate Lee's groundbreaking fusion of history and fiction in cinematic storytelling. To continue building on this opening, further research could consider other key representations of Black Vietnam War veterans in conventional Vietnam War films.

This study has laid the foundation for further research on the effects of not de-aging actors in flashbacks, particularly in exploring the nuanced impact this creative choice has on storytelling and

viewer engagement. A pressing area for investigation would be the implications of showcasing older actors in flashback sequences to emphasize the authentic representation of aging individuals and their lived experiences. Comparative research could be useful in contrasting this approach with the use of CGI to de-age actors, as in films like *The Irishman* (2019), where technology alters the appearance of actors to depict them in their younger years. This contrast raises intriguing questions about memory construction and the portrayal of character development through visual representation. Additionally, examining how Spike Lee combines documentary footage with fictional scenes in other films such as *Malcolm X* (1992), *Clockers* (1995), and *BlacKkKlansman* (2018) could offer valuable insights into his distinctive storytelling methods and the intersection of reality and fiction in cinematic narratives. A comparative study of these films could reveal the effects and thematic significance of merging documentary elements with fictional storytelling, contributing to a deeper understanding of Lee's directorial style and thematic explorations.

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# Matter as a Tool of Critique: The Grotesque Anthropomorphic Animal Representations of Samurai in Visual Art during Japan's Bakumatsu Period

Zeno Grootenboer

During the twelfth century, Toba Sōjō, a Japanese Buddhist priest, painted four scrolls of anthropomorphic animals performing human activities. It is widely speculated that Toba created them as a commentary on Buddhist rituals, or as a satirical representation of court and religious life. Others believe that the scrolls are a comment on the changes that occurred during the late Heian period (794–1185). During this time, the nobility's refined high culture was losing its grip on the government, and the warrior class was gaining power. Toba depicted animals to satirize an elite.[1] Similarly, the *otogi-zōshi* (illustrated short story) genre called *irui-mono* employed anthropomorphic animals to parody and arguably satirize various events during the Muromachi period (1336–1573). One of the numerous examples of *irui-mono* is the fifteenth-century illustrated handscroll *Jūnirui Kassen Emaki,* which depicted anthropomorphic animals enjoying a poetry contest, waging war, and achieving religious awakening. It has been argued that the *Jūnirui Kassen Emaki* was a parody that either satirized or praised the warrior class it depicted.[2] Throughout Japanese history, humor and satire in the form of anthropomorphic animals have been employed to express concerns about political, social, economic, and cultural changes.

In the decades before the beginning of the Meiji period, in 1868, and its associated program of modernization, Japan experienced another period of transition marked by significant

[1] Imamura, "Chōjū Giga," 21.
[2] Thompson, "The War of the Twelve Animals," 296.

social tensions resulting from the decline of the authoritative power of the shōgunate (i.e., the military dictatorship of the samurai). As in earlier periods, this upheaval prompted artists to express their opinions on the government and its conservative stance through depictions of anthropomorphic animals. This article explores the effect these critiques had through matter, specifically *nishiki-e* (multicolored woodblock prints), in which the Japanese political changes of the early- and mid-nineteenth century were criticized in an artful manner through parody and satire. This strategy offered effective ways of critiquing the shōgun's government, which enforced numerous censorship measures during the period. While the theme of parody and satire has been widely debated in English academic literature on Japanese early modern visual art by scholars such as Timothy Clark, Noriko Brandl, Sepp Linhart, and Alfred Haft, in this article I focus specifically on the anthropomorphic animal depictions in the *nishiki-e*, which have not been discussed in this scholarship. Although Minami Kazuo has written extensively on this subject in Japanese, I won't be merely translating his work but approach it from a new materialist perspective. In this article, I take a unique approach by using Alfred Gell's anthropologic art theory, which asserts the agency of matter, in combination with Katsuya Hirano's theory of grotesque realism, which he argues is a way to articulate social critiques by deconstructing dominant values and exposing the subjects' hypocrisy through grotesque imagery. I argue that the shōgunate's decline did not uniformly lead to increased grotesque animal depictions of samurai across Japan; regional variations of shōgunate authority levels were key influences. Moreover, animal portrayals evolved into a distinct genre, independent of censorship. Lastly, I use Gell's theory to argue that the material agency of woodblock prints and their critical contents directly contributed to the fall of the shōgunate. To do this, I chronologically contextualize the rise of satire in late Edo period (1603–1868) popular print culture and conduct a close reading of contemporary events depicted in several Bakumatsu period (1853–1868) woodblock prints and paintings through a visual analysis, selected for their depiction of anthropomorphic animals.

The images that I analyze are not the only prints and paintings from the period to depict anthropomorphic animals, but I focus on

them because they exemplify key points of my argument. These images are: Utagawa Kuniyoshi's prints "Fish with Faces" and "Pale Moon, Cats in Season" from the 1840s, which pioneered the use of anthropomorphic animal imagery in *nishiki-e* to circumvent the censorship laws; Nishiyama Hoen's painting *A Samurai Procession Depicted as Bugs*, which exemplifies the regional and material differences in the use of this animal imagery; Kawanabe Kyōsai's print *Fashionable Picture of the Great Frog Battle* from 1864, which showcases the evolution of this imagery; and *Battle of Insects on a Summer Night*, a print by an anonymous artist, which I use to show how the genre became a concept of its own.

## Agency, Parody, and Satire in Japanese Art History

Multicolored woodblock prints, also called *nishiki-e*, were a form of popular art in Japan, specifically in Edo (modern-day Tokyo), from the beginning of the eighteenth century until the end of the nineteenth century. The subject matter of *nishiki-e* covered a wide range of possibilities. Many depicted subjects drawn from popular culture such as *kabuki* theatre, beautiful women, courtesans, and actors. In these cases, *nishiki-e* would fall into the genre of *ukiyo-e,* pictures of the floating world, depicting popular pastimes of the people of Edo. Other subjects not considered *ukiyo-e* included landscapes, battle scenes, and folk tales. Since the prints were cheap mass-produced items, large numbers of ordinary people—the commoners or non-samurai caste—could obtain them. Their rising popularity led to an increased demand for more colors and complex techniques, causing the art form to evolve over time. As the medium was mass-produced, Alfred Gell's anthropological theory of art and agency, which foregrounds the impact that art (as a form of matter) has on its audience, is helpful for my argument.

Gell argues that art, as a form of matter, has its own agency and induces its spectator to perform particular actions. Similar to humans, artworks have physiognomies reflecting the character of the subjects they depict. Whenever we see a smiling person we attribute to them an attitude of friendliness. In art too, we attribute certain attitudes to the depicted subjects. Gell's argument is that the mental triggers provoked by the artwork are almost identical to the ones we attribute to social others. Thus, he argues that we can discern

intentions and meanings from matter such as artworks. This intention is what Gell calls 'agency,' which then sparks a reaction in the spectator. He distinguishes between primary agency, that of the artist with an intention, and secondary agency, that of the artwork that consequently inhabits the artists' agency.[3]

*Mitate*, a visual rhetorical technique imbuing images with a double meaning, was often employed in *nishiki-e* prints.[4] Scholars such as Timothy Clark and Noriko Brandl explain *mitate* in simpler terms as a method of linking contemporary subjects to past or mythical figures (or the other way around) through referential visual clues.[5] Doing so, artists invoke certain implications about the depicted subject, often a humorous parody, or a satirical depiction. The difference between parody and satire is a minor one, but important for this discussion. While parody and satire both mimic and exaggerate certain aspects of a work, parody's aim is to create humor or mock its subject.[6] In contrast, satire has the goal of critiquing and revealing the shortcomings of society through humor, irony, and exaggeration.[7] The visual riddles in *nishiki-e* were considered a humorous amusement by the people of Edo.

Katsuya Hirano builds on this understanding of *mitate* and investigates a unique form of satire that intertwines disparate elements to form a grotesque aesthetic. The notion of a grotesque aesthetic originates from architectural ornaments in Renaissance Europe that merged human figures and animal parts, representing a blurred line between humanity and nature. Such grotesque forms, which were hard to define because they existed between established categories, often left viewers feeling unsettled. This style frequently depicted bodies containing irregularities and inconsistencies, lacking clear shape or proportion.[8] Independent of its European origins, these motifs became prevalent in *kabuki* plays and *nishiki-e* prints,

[3] Gell, *Art and Agency*, 13–23.
[4] Haft, *Aesthetics Strategies of the Floating World*, 91.
[5] Clark, "Mitate-e," 7–8; Brandl and Linhart, *Ukiyo-e Caricatures*, 9–10.
[6] "Parody."
[7] Elliot, "Satire."
[8] Hirano, *Dialogic Imagination*, 159–61.

illustrating the irony of a decadent ruling class that sought to reclaim respectability through further degeneration.[9]

Hirano points out that grotesque realism is not merely artistic expression. It poses a fundamental challenge to societal constructs by questioning and rejecting core values such as righteousness, loyalty, and wisdom. Grotesque realism not only recognizes and exposes human contradictions and imperfections but also challenges the foundational values that uphold binary constructs, revealing a self-destructive tendency within its subject matter. In doing so, grotesque realism brings to light immoral societal aspects usually hidden or ignored by society, thereby critiquing the hierarchical order. This systematic negation of fundamental moral values is a key aspect of grotesque realism's symbolism, highlighting the disintegration of the ruling class and the total bankruptcy of the moral values that once supported their dominance. Thus, grotesque realism's power lies in its ability to deconstruct principal values, exposing the subjects' hypocrisy.[10] Ultimately, Hirano implies that when the socioeconomic prosperity in a country decreases, the appearance of grotesque realism in art increases. In Japan, the Bakumatsu period represented such a period of disintegration of moral values and socioeconomic decline in which grotesque realism could develop.

## Tenpō Reforms and Kuniyoshi's Animals

Once Tokugawa Ieyasu put an end to the Warring States period in 1603, Japan entered a new age of peace and prosperity with the Edo period (1603–1868). To conceal the period of political divisions in the sixteenth century, the newly formed shōgunate employed a Neo-Confucian ideology. The concept was based on social determinacy as human nature and suggested that society reflected the balance and order present throughout the universe. The shōgunate's Neo-Confucian ideology created the impression that society was a natural unity where its various components were arranged hierarchically. A key goal of Neo-Confucianism in Tokugawa Japan was to minimize the negative impact of private interests like emotions and desires,

[9] *Id.*, 164–65.
[10] *Id.*, 166–68.

which might lead to disagreements and conflicts. It is important to recognize, however, that Neo-Confucianism's proposed vision was not universally embraced by the Japanese population.[11]

During this time, the *edokko* (a specific type of Edo resident) emerged as the antithesis of the Neo-Confucianist ideals of Edo. The *edokko* were usually commoners, and were known for their lavish lifestyle of cultured consumption and cockiness, looking down on people that worked hard and saved their earnings. The *edokko* often spent their money the day they earned it, using it for extravagances. They spent their time in Edo's Yoshiwara district (the pleasure quarters), attended *kabuki* plays, and were often the ones to buy prints of said subjects. Thus, the *edokko* were the primary audience of *nishiki-e's* material agency. Most *nishiki-e* artists were also part of the *edokko.*

Around the turn of the eighteenth century, urban centers such as Ōsaka and Edo witnessed a departure from the moral principles of Neo-Confucianism. The Tokugawa regime enforced various regulations restricting attire, business practices, and the content of printed materials. Artists were particularly targeted by this form of censorship, often facing severe consequences for violating the Confucian code. In response, artists resorted to symbolism as a means to circumvent these regulations, employing covert methods of expression to convey their messages.

Between 1833 and 1836, as a result of bad weather, Japan suffered from the major Tenpō famine. This led to starvation and riots in the major cities. Officials called for reforms to keep the peace. On the level of daily entertainment, a lot of themes were abolished. This was the height of *nishiki-e* censorship*,* as the depiction of the most traditional subjects—*kabuki* actors, courtesans, and geisha—was now banned. Artists had to find new creative ways to evade the bans, none of which were as creative as the approach of Utagawa Kuniyoshi. Kuniyoshi was drawn to the twelfth-century *Chojū-giga* (scrolls of frolicking animals) mentioned in the introduction. These scrolls inspired Kuniyoshi to evade the ban

[11] Thompson and Harootunian, *Undercurrents in the Floating World*, 11–12.


Figure 1: *Fish with Faces*「魚の心」Utagawa Kuniyoshi. Late Tenpō period. Gallery Beniya, Tokyo. Original in color.

on depicting *kabuki* actors by drawing humanized animals with the discernable faces of specific actors.[12]

A good example that shows a hidden critique is *Fish with Faces* (fig. 1), where several famous *kabuki* actors were depicted as fish. This not only successfully evaded the censorship rules but also included a hidden critique against the Tenpō reforms delivered in a humorous way. The print shows several aquatic lifeforms with very distinct human faces. The fish are depicted on a backdrop of a stormy sea, with white foamy waves, and their faces are contorted in angry *kabuki*-esque emotions. Kuniyoshi's depiction of these expressions and the surging water suggests that the fish (*kabuki* actors) are cold and angry because the water is ruthless. The print conveys that the *edokko* were not happy with their surroundings, governed by the shōgun and his reforms.[13]

*Pale Moon, Cats in Season* (fig. 2) depicts the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, showcasing how humorous animal parody could be used for a positive sentiment. Because it had been deemed immoral to depict courtesans, Kuniyoshi chose to humorously represent the courtesans and their *edokko* patrons as human-like cats. Kuniyoshi was known to be an ailurophile and made many cat prints during and after the Tenpō reforms. The fan print portrays a night scene in the Yoshiwara district with many cats, male and female, enjoying their night out. The Yoshiwara had a strict etiquette—the courtesans had to sit still while customers looked on from the outside. The cat courtesans, adorned in their beautiful kimonos, are seated behind lattices. They entice the male cats, while three others bear a smaller palanquin carrying a samurai. One of the cat courtesans approaches the front and is talking directly with a customer. All eyes are captivated by this spectacle, while other female cats point toward the scene and burst into laughter.[14] Kuniyoshi utilizes the unruliness of animals, in this case cats, to portray the endearing nature of the *edokko* and their charming tendency towards slight unruliness.

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[12] *Id.*, 82.
[13] Hōri, "Ukiyoe Hanga to Jijiteki Jōhō," 47.
[14] Nobuhisa, *Cats in Ukiyo-e*, 181.

Figure 2: *Pale Moon, Cats in Season*「おぼろ月猫の盛」 Utagawa Kuniyoshi. 1846. Gallery Beniya, Tokyo. Original in color.

The harsh measures and punishments implemented by the authorities in the city resulted in increasing dissatisfaction among the townspeople, and the streets were filled with town criers and storytellers who condemned the reforms and proclaimed the downfall of the city. Not only did Kuniyoshi and similar artists capitalize on this discontent by using humorous parody in *nishiki-e* to circumvent the reforms and provide laughter. They also conveyed important political criticisms through the agency of the mass-produced medium of *nishiki-e* on its audience, where it was well-received.[15]

These examples show that Kuniyoshi had an interesting take on circumventing the Tenpō reforms, one that would set a precedent for animal parody in popular culture in the decades to come. Rather than grotesque parodies, these are amusing portrayals of *edokko* disguised as cats. But this is the first move towards a grotesque realism of anthropomorphic animals. Kuniyoshi created

[15] Hōri, "Ukiyoe Hanga to Jijiteki Jōhō," 46–48.

these prints not only to evade censorship but also to present edokko values and identity in a favorable light. Artists such as Kuniyoshi celebrated the floating world of edokko culture through cute and humorous animals.

## Animals Ridiculing the Shōgun in the Kansai Region around the 1860's

As the ban on depictions of the shōgun and current events was ongoing in Edo, artists refrained from criticizing the government outright, including in the form of animal ridicule. In the Kansai area (Kyōto and Ōsaka), however, there was a very different attitude toward being critical of the shōgun. The emperor of Japan resided in Kyōto, where—unlike in the capital Edo—the reach of the Tokugawa government was limited. The people in the Kansai area were more inclined to support the emperor.[16] There, artists were outspoken in expressing disdain for the shōgunate through their artworks. In this section, I analyze a painting of the shōgun's procession to Kyōto in 1863.

In contrast to *nishiki-e*, paintings required expensive materials such as silk and costly paints, were made with painstaking care, and were rarely reproduced. This one-of-a-kind quality meant that paintings were primarily intended for the samurai elite, to be displayed in their homes or tea houses, and were seldom seen by the broader public. Because of this, paintings had a less impactful agency compared to *nishiki-e,* since they weren't seen by many people. The material of the artwork is key to the discussion in this section, as it significantly influences the extent of its cultural impact. While paintings were not considered popular culture and thus any grotesque realism they contained had no impact on societal values, Nishiyama Hoen's anthropomorphic animal satire paintings demonstrate the lax censorship rules outside of Edo.

The marriage between Imperial Princess Kazunomiya and Shōgun Tokugawa Iemochi in 1862 was deeply entwined with foreign relations and internal politics. The shōgunate's abandonment of seclusion, marked by new treaties with foreign powers, created a rift between Kyōto and Edo. The imperial court

[16] Lee, "The Kazunomiya Marriage," 299.

demanded the annulment of these treaties as a condition for approving the marriage, viewing it as a step towards restoring imperial political authority.[17] The union was intended by the shōgunate to symbolize peace and cooperation, but the opposition residing within the imperial court highlighted deep divisions. Ironically, while the marriage aimed to unify Edo and Kyōto, it aggravated existing tensions, inadvertently paving the way for the eventual overthrow of the shōgunate and the restoration of imperial rule.[18]

After the marriage, Shōgun Iemochi made a journey to Kyōto to demonstrate respect to the court in 1863, marking the first time in over two hundred years that a shōgun had traveled from Edo to Kyōto. A new thematic trend emerged in woodblock prints, referred to as "prints of the shōgunal progress to Kyōto." These prints incorporated elements from the popular "road prints," which depicted people traveling along roads and passing through landscapes, especially along the Tōkaidō highway, as well as from "procession prints."[19] The processions were magnificent displays that garnered significant interest and were held in the utmost esteem. The prints depicting these imposing hierarchical events consistently mirrored their grandeur. As a result these artistic depictions became symbolic of shōgunate authority.[20]

Nishiyama Hoen (1804–1867), an Ōsaka-based artist, arguably portrayed the 1863 shōgunal procession in the painting seen in fig. 3. The painting shows a samurai procession, but the humans have been turned into insects and their tools have been turned into organic objects such as grasses and flowers. It is unknown when exactly Hoen painted it, but Imahashi Riko interprets it as an allusion to the wedding of Princess Kazunomiya and the Shōgun Iemochi in 1862, which would indicate it was painted in the early 1860s.[21]

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[17] *Id.*, 295–97.
[18] *Id.*, 303–4.
[19] Sugimoto and Burtscher, "Shifting Perspectives," 9.
[20] Vaporis, "Lordly Pageantry," 9–10.
[21] Imahashi, *Edo No Dōbutsuga*, 147–65.

Figure 3: *A Samurai Procession Depicted as Bugs*「虫行列図」Nishiyama Hoen. Ca. 1863. The British Museum, London. © The Trustees of the British Museum. Original in color.

The procession moves from the bottom right corner up to the top left. There is no background imagery, placing the focus solely on the anthropomorphic insects, while the tall plants bring the small size of the insects into perspective. The samurai have been transformed into insects containing multiple legs, their pulsating thoraxes and enlarged abdomens vividly imagined. The most important piece of the procession, the large palanquin in which the shōgun presumably sits, is depicted as an insect cage carried by six large crickets. In Japan at the time, cicadas and crickets were kept in these enclosures and prized for their singing. It is possible that Hoen intended to portray the shōgun as a loud and bothersome nuisance who seldom ventured out of his shōgunal palace and chirped commands to little or no effect.

The various plants depicted in the painting are noteworthy. Next to the shōgun, a large Japanese grasshopper carrying a soybean is surrounded by beautyberries symbolizing luggage, rice plants, and nut grass with field chrysanthemums fashioned as spears. Another palanquin is depicted as a wasp's nest, while floral spears comprised of burner, pink thoroughwort, maiden flower, and limonium stand guard, accompanied by two wingless crickets and two wasps carrying the personal luggage of their lord, artistically rendered as blooming morning glory and rose hip. The flowers depicted in Hoen's

painting are all autumnal plants, indicating that the procession takes place in autumn. Autumn is also a time for harvesting crops, which might also be indicated by the rice plants carried by the insect samurai. Crickets and grasshoppers are notorious for eating and damaging crops ready for harvest, often decimating entire fields and instigating famines. Furthermore, people in Japan often paid taxes and rent to the upper caste of samurai in rice. It is easy to deduct a meaning from this imagery, as Hoen likely intended to tell a story of samurai taking the people's food or money for their own enrichment.

It is also easy to think of the insects in Hoen's painting as pests, since all of the depicted insects have a reputation for being a nuisance. This suggests that Hoen is portraying the samurai as pests to the country. Given that processions were typically depicted as impressive hierarchical events, the diminution of the subjects into small insects represents an inversion of hierarchy. The inclusion of the shōgun, in particular, emphasizes this idea. By literally looking down upon the unimpressive procession of tiny insects, the viewer receives a satirical take on the grandiosity usually associated with such events. Hoen's humorous painting uses the shōgunal procession as a subject to highlight the absurdity of a samurai parade. By satirizing the established visual language of samurai processions, the painting exposes the decline of the shōgunate's authority by portraying the samurai as tiny grotesque insects holding grasses and flowers.

The shōgunal marriage and the procession to Kyōto were seen by many as evidence of the growing political weakness of the shōgunate. While Edo-based artists had to be discreet to avoid prosecution for slander, artists in the Kansai area were inspired by these events to make overtly political works. As the shōgun and his ban on the depiction of current events and high officials did not hold much sway in Kyōto and Ōsaka, artists were less restricted from painting their political attitudes. Hoen openly satirized the samurai and even went as far as depicting the shōgun through animal imagery. And although the painting wouldn't have had a large audience, the deformity of the subjects brings about a grotesque realism that devalues the normative authority of the samurai.

## Animal Imagery in Late Bakumatsu Battle Prints

In 1864 the Satsuma and Chōshū domains rebelled, leading to skirmishes between loyalists and shōgun forces in the countryside. In the next section, I contextualize the reaction of the general populace to this crisis and show how from 1864 Edo print artists such as Kawanabe Kyōsai also started depicting the battles in a grotesque manner using animal imagery.

The shōgun launched an expedition against Satsuma and Chōshū in 1864 to gain control over these outer loyalist domains, leading to increased traffic and strain on villages along main roads. These villages faced the burden of increased taxation for post station expenses. During these tumultuous final years of the shōgunate, riots erupted in Edo and rural areas, high commodity prices drove people to theft, and *rōnin* (masterless samurai) attacked villages. With the shōgunate preoccupied with larger rebellions in the south, many villages established self-defense forces. Some villages, exploiting the weakening Tokugawa authority, pursued social justice, economic equality, and political freedom. Their defense forces served dual purposes: as protection against bandits and *rōnin,* and as a tool for asserting independence from central governance.[22]

Almost two decades after Kuniyoshi first introduced anthropomorphic animal imagery to circumvent censorship laws, Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831–1889) used such imagery to portray shōgunal forces fighting a rebellion in a triptych print (fig. 4) produced in 1864. Although the shōgunate strictly forbade the depiction of political events, numerous prints were still published without legal permission. Kyōsai and his publisher had to sign the print with pseudonyms to avoid legal problems.[23]

Starting on the right side of the triptych, we see a large army of blue frogs along a shoreline in the top right corner. The frogs wear leaves as armor and hold bulrush as spears. In front of them sits a larger brown frog, presumably the army's commander, riding another frog as a human would ride a horse. In the middle of the right print, a morbid scene takes place as several enemy frogs are beheaded, with blood gushing out of their bodies. Kyōsai made sure

[22] Steele, *Alternative Narratives*, 36–38, 49.
[23] Sadamura, *Kyōsai*, 92.

Figure 4: *Fashionable Picture of the Great Frog Battle* 「風流蛙大合戦之図」 Kawanabe Kyōsai. 1864. Photograph © 2024 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Original in color.

to include morbid scenes to show the destructiveness of these battles and included clear symbolism to show that these frogs represented specific real-world figures. In the lower right corner of the image, canons made out of organic sacs and lotus wheels shoot water jets at the frogs' enemies while others gather munition in the form of lotus seeds. On the wheels are a crest indicating who Kyōsai is depicting here. This emblem, containing six hollyhocks, was a symbol often used in satirical prints to represent the Aizu, a close ally of the Tokugawa.[24] The centerpiece of the triptych is thematically cut in half: at the top is a sea battle with the opposing armies of frogs on leaf boats shooting reed arrows at each other while others jump from boat to boat. In the lower half of the print, we see a continuation of the battle depicted on the right print of the triptych, with various gruesome executions as enemy frogs trip over each other in outright chaos. The grotesque realism of the anthropomorphic frogs lays bare the Tokugawa's destructive and unrighteous authority.

Finally, the left print of the triptych shows the opposing faction of frogs, which are slightly browner in color. In the lower-left corner, the frogs from the battle on the beach are being pressured into the river, jumping in the blue water in search of rescue on one of the leaf boats while spears prick them from behind. In the middle of the left print, a large impact from the water cannons on the right print smashes multiple frogs through the air. Finally, on a hill in the top

[24] *Ibid.*

left of the print, we see the opposing army behind leaf walls bearing a crest of three-leafed arrowhead plants, which represented the Mōri clan who ruled the Chōshū domain.[25]

It is unclear if Kyōsai chose to pick a side in this print as strong arguments could be made for both factions. On the one hand, the Tokugawa are depicted as ruthless killers but victors. The Mōri, on the other hand, face defeat but still stand proudly for their ideals. The people in the villages would have been interested in these prints as the events depicted affected them directly. Whether these villagers were interested in the prints for their comic relief or for their opinions about the opposing sides, it would have been clear that the prints satirized the political sphere. Moreover, the agency these prints had on the villages could have directly influenced their stances on the conflict with the ultimate outcome of inspiring villagers to establish the self-defense forces.

During the mid-1860s, as the Tokugawa shōgunate suppressed rebelling samurai clans, rural life became increasingly challenging. Farmers, either aligning with the Satsuma and Chōshū domains or striving for survival, faced a hostile political landscape. In contrast, the *edokko* enjoyed a relatively comfortable life under Tokugawa rule. They were reluctant to see "country-bumpkins," perceived as undermining moral values and distinguished by thick accents, take control of their city. However, the shōgunate's failure to repel foreign intruders led to widespread disenchantment in Edo by 1868, exacerbated by harsh living conditions due to natural disasters, epidemics, riots, and wars.[26] The onset of the Boshin War in January 1868, a civil conflict between the emperor's loyalists and the shōgunate, marked a turning point. As the imperial army approached Edo, lax censorship amidst the chaos spurred a surge in satirical publications and free political criticism. During this period, until stricter censorship was reinstated by the new government around May 1868, approximately 300 satirical political prints were produced.[27] These prints, technically still illicit, were often published anonymously to avoid retribution. Brandl suggests

[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Steele, *Alternative Narratives*, 61–63.
[27] *Id.*, 68, 71, 73.

that Kuniyoshi played a pivotal role in this explosion of caricature during the Boshin War.[28]

The final print I analyze—published during this three-month period of free political expression—showcases that even in a time with no censorship, anthropomorphic animal satire was still utilized (fig. 5). Based on the intricate style it is clear that this print was made by a renowned artist, but it is unclear who, as there are no seals from the artist and publisher. The print is a diptych diagonally cut into two opposing anthropomorphic insect factions waging a battle in tall grass, which brings a perspective that highlights the small scale of the print's subjects. The symbolism of the insects and their kimonos sporting the *kamon* (familial crests) of the different clans is very intricate, but not my primary focus here. The important factor is that the *kamon* on the right faction indicates loyalist forces and the *kamon* on the left faction indicates Tokugawa forces. I would note two specific individuals. Directly under the title of the print, on the right side of the diptych, is a firefly with a human body riding a praying mantis. The firefly's kimono is decorated with

Figure 5: *Battle of Insects on a Summer Night* 「夏の夜虫合戦」. Unknown artist. 1868. Waseda University Library, Tokyo. Original in color.

[28] Brandl and Linhart, *Ukiyo-e Caricatures,* 63–64, 131.

a chrysanthemum, indicating that this should be understood as the new emperor Meiji. This is further confirmed by the text above the firefly, which reads "Don't be afraid of the light" implying the country's bright new modern path under emperor Meiji's rule.[29] The other insect I would like to highlight is the cricket in the top left of the print. It too wears a light blue kimono with a chrysanthemum. This is supposed to be Princess Kazunomiya, who still resided in Edo castle at the time of the war and helped negotiate a peaceful transfer of power to the Meiji emperor.[30]

The anonymous artist of the print depicted both sides of the conflict as grotesque insects, not indicating his own preference but instead exhibiting an overall disdain for the chaos that the revolution brought to Edo. Many of the illegal prints produced during this short timeframe had similar rhetoric, which, if we follow Gell's theory, was imbued with an agency influencing the perspectives of people in Edo on current events. This may have sparked either side to action, as their future livelihoods depended on it. Furthermore, this print shows particular evidence that even in a time with few repercussions for direct political satire, artists still chose to use anthropomorphic animal imagery to depict political actors. This imagery had evolved from its first iterations by Kuniyoshi as a way of evading censorship. This means that consciously or unconsciously, artists must have felt the power of grotesque realism as a weapon to satirize the samurai.

## Conclusion

Artists of the Bakumatsu period captured its tumultuous times, often using symbolism and allegory to veil their critical agency and evade censorship, especially under the Tenpō reforms. Kuniyoshi pioneered the use of anthropomorphic animals in *nishiki-e* to depict taboo subjects such as *kabuki* actors and courtesans. He depicted the *edokko* as gentle animals such as cats in a humorous way. This contrasted with artists in Kyōto and Ōsaka, who were less restricted by censorship. They boldly critiqued the shōgunate, depicting samurai and even the shōgun as grotesque animals such as insects. Kyōsai's prints, such as the frog battle scene, continued this trend

[29] 「しかりのひかりでおそれるな」. [My translation]
[30] Nakura, *Etoki Bakumatsu Fūshiga to Tennō*, 152–57.

back in Edo in the mid-1860s, when the Satsuma and Chōshū rebellion spread through the countryside. In the years immediately after Kyosai's print appeared, grotesque realism was employed numerous times in woodblock printing. The 1868 anonymous insect print is one example of many.

Kuniyoshi's humorous animal depictions offered a subtle critique of the Tenpō reforms. The use of animal imagery for ridicule resurfaced in 1864 with Kyōsai's frog battle print. However, in the Kansai region, artists used animal imagery to mock the shōgun as early as the 1850s. I have argued that this contradicts Hirano's suggestion of a linear increase in ridicule, indicating that the inclusion of grotesque realism in visual art varied based on local circumstances, such as the shōgunate's authority and the subjects of satire. Furthermore, the portrayal of samurai as grotesque animals inverted the depiction of commoners. Kuniyoshi's portrayal of *edokko* as gentle animals suggested their honesty and innocence, while the depiction of samurai as insects and frogs implied their nuisance. Grotesque realism became a powerful tool of political satire, even during periods of unrestricted criticism. The insect print of 1868 exemplifies this, targeting both sides of the conflict with clear symbolism yet maintaining grotesque depictions. I have argued that this approach underscores the artist's awareness of the artwork's material agency, confirming that during the Bakumatsu period, satire, through grotesque realism, in the mass-produced *nishiki-e* influenced the audience to act, either against the status-quo, or in defense of it. Through this, grotesque realism cemented its role in shaping political opinions.

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**List of images**

*Battle of Insects on a Summer Night* 「夏の夜虫合戦」. 1868. Woodblock print. Waseda University Library, Tokyo.

Kawanabe Kyōsai. *Fashionable Picture of the Great Frog Battle* 「風流蛙大合戦之図」. 1864. Woodblock print. Photograph © 2024 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Artist: Kawanabe Kyōsai, Japanese, 1831–1889; Publisher: Surugaya Sakujirō, Japanese; Blockcutter: Katada Chōjirō (Hori Chō); Japanese Fashionable Battle of Frogs (Fōryō kaeru ōgassen no zu); Japanese, Edo period, 1864 (Bunkyō 4/Genji 1), 2nd month Woodblock print (nishiki-e); ink and color on paper Vertical ōban triptych; 35.4 × 73.8 cm (13 15/16 × 29 1/16 in.); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; William Sturgis Bigelow Collection; 11.37139a-c.

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Utagawa Kuniyoshi. *Fish with Faces* 「魚の心」. Late Tenpō period. Woodblock print. Gallery Beniya, Tokyo.

---. *Pale Moon, Cats in Season* 「おぼろ月猫の盛」, 1846. Woodblock print. Gallery Beniya, Tokyo.

REVIEW

# Experiences that Matter: Evaluating and Remembering in Kazuo Ishiguro's *An Artist of the Floating World*

Eloise Huai-Yung Huang

Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *An Artist of the Floating World* tells the story of its first-person narrator Masuji Ono, a propaganda artist who had once achieved a high social status by painting war posters for Japan's imperialist regime.[1] Reminiscing while trying to make sense of past encounters and achievements in the years after World War II, Ono recounts in a confessional monologue his struggles to perceive the downfall of his social reputation and renavigate his interpersonal relationships. His past life became a shameful taboo associated with values that people either want to condemn or to forget. Ishiguro's artistic "unreliable" narrative style in the novel has especially been pointed out in scholarly discussions as a valuable entry point into examining the different ways in which the human mind negotiates reality, self-perceived truth, and affective experiences. The narrative, characterized by Ono's non-chronological recollections of past events, frequent memory lapses, and deliberate emphasis or avoidance of certain details, emerges as a polished but censored account of the protagonist's past that borders on both remembrance and fictionalization.

Scholars of Ishiguro's works often read *An Artist of the Floating World* as Ono's memoir or autobiography, where a subjective version of the past is articulated with the narrator's intention to present an idealized self-image, thereby identifying

[1] Ishiguro, *An Artist*.

Ono's account as his active reconstruction of the past and an idealistic self.[2] Yugin Teo and Wojciech Drąg, examining Ono's narrated memories in their respective studies, read the protagonist's act of remembering as not just an attempt to articulate his loss, but also an insistence on seeking meaning and validity in his past actions against dismissals by others who hold dominant values in his present political and social reality.[3] The emotional dynamic behind Ono's yearning for a meaning to his life is further analyzed by Cynthia F. Wong, who claims that Ono's tendency towards self-deception and emotional repression stems from a desperate anxiety to "salvage his own dignity" through reconstructing himself as a successful figure, which in turn makes him largely blind to the perspectives of others.[4] These readings show that first, to Ono, the memories he narrates come to represent values to which he attaches and with which he hopes to define his life and existence. Second, Ono's affective responses and sentiments, such as pride, shame, and fear, accompanying or evoked by the memories, seem to have an undermining power in shaping what he remembers and values despite often being neglected or suppressed by him.

Inspired by these previous studies of *An Artist*, this review comments the emotions and affective experiences in Ono's memories, and how they demonstrate the value of personal memories, by exploring the tensions between one's pursuit of ideals and the more immediate experiences that affect them. I argue that the novel, juxtaposing the act of remembering with evaluations of "what matters," demonstrates how some personal experiences are more likely than others to be deemed valid and offered their own space within a society based on the values these memories represent. Ono's emotions and sensorial responses are considered in this article as an entry point to analyzing the complex materiality of memory depicted in the novel, constituting both information and affects perceived and sensed by an individual. These helps reveal the gap between presumed values and immediate, bodily

[2] Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*, 67; Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 32–5; Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, 39–41.
[3] Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, 120–121; Drąg, *Revisiting Loss,* 37–8.
[4] Wong, *Kazuo Ishiguro*, 45. See also Wong "Emotional Upheaval," 203.

experiences, as well as the distance between one's perception and another's. Focusing on human affects as an aspect of memory and experience, as the review will further demonstrate, highlights one's connection with one's surroundings and helps to create shared experiences through which social boundaries and prejudices can potentially be overcome.

## Being Somebody Who Matters: Ono's Life Narrative and Attachment to Values

In this section, I start with a close reading of Ono's self-narratives to illustrate the old artist's attachment to values that signify an individualist greatness and social influence with which he wishes to identify his life and memories. Ono's desire for a place in the society and a meaning to his life underlie his reconstruction of his past encounters and achievements, where being remembered is considered a form of being important.

Readers' first impression of Ono is most likely as a "refined," politely-spoken and humble narrator, who often calmly states that he is "very lax in considering the matter of status."[5] However, through the old artist's stroll down his memory lane, the narrative soon implies that being someone "respected and influential" has been Ono's biggest goal from the start, as he is shown constantly emphasizing with satisfaction the respect and honor he had once commanded.[6] Reminiscing about past events in a "boastful and self-congratulatory" way, Ono seems to be actively attaching meanings of greatness to the narrative of his past life.[7] The artist defines great influential figures as people who "never follow the crowd blindly" and "endeavor to rise above the mediocre" by "tak[ing] chances in the name of ambition or for the sake of a principle they claim to believe in." This is shown in Ono's admiration for the famous architect and urban planner Akira Sugimura, whose ambitions in urban planning he describes as those "of one man to stamp his mark for ever on the character of the city."[8] The ideal image calls to mind

[5] Wong, "Emotional Upheaval," 203; Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 19.
[6] Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 7, 19, 25.
[7] Drąg, *Revisiting Loss*, 38.
[8] Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 73, 133, 159, 204.

classical humanist or individualist heroism, where a person is considered powerful as a leader who constantly advances human progress by acting according to a grand ideal instead of being influenced by others' opinions or the environment. Ono's aspiration to leave his mark in history, like Sugimura with his urban plans, is also juxtaposed with his desires to occupy a 'high' social position and be remembered by others.

To Ono, there always seems to be one ideal that is both worthy of being pursued and the right path to follow, and only an influential figure of importance can tell right from wrong. Describing himself as an idealistic leading figure of this kind, Ono is careful to portray himself always as the first and only individual to make a specific life choice for the high ideal embedded in it. For him, these choices include rejecting his father's family business to take up art as a career, his artistic affiliation first with the commercial Takeda firm and subsequent apprenticeship under the famous painter Seiji Moriyama (Mori-san), and his later political involvement with the imperialist regime.

During each stage of his career, Ono attaches a grand goal as the motivation behind his choices and moves, such as pursuing "*true*" art instead of commercial art by starting his apprenticeship under Mori-san, and "produc[ing] paintings of genuine importance" by venturing into making art with new, radical political themes.[9] In actuality, Ono's decisions are driven not by a genuine belief in the respective ideals themselves, but by his fetish for the "idea" of these ideals, as well as his desire to portray himself as important by claiming them as his motives. A notable example can be seen in how Ono describes Migi-Hidari, the pleasure district he helped establish early in 1933 and one of his proudest achievements, which Ono describes to officials as a celebration of "the new patriotic spirit emerging in Japan." Despite making this nationalist claim to the officials and expressing his satisfaction in seeing the project born out of an ambitious-sounding ideal, Ono's enthusiasm lies mostly in how his participation in the project shows his place as a reputable artist during the time. He recounts in detail how the officials agreed to the district's development plan because of his persuasive letter, and how

[9] *Id.*, 71, 163. Italics in original.

the owner of the district thanked him by reserving for him a private table of his choice.[10] Ono's attitude further reveals his elitist belief system in which some individuals have a clearer view than average and some perspectives are essentially greater than others. Such beliefs are also evident in Ono's faintly contemptuous attitude towards his old colleague 'the Tortoise,' whom he refers to as his follower. In the last section of this article, I will return to Ono's elitism again.

Ono's belief in and appreciation for grand ideals is challenged when what he wants to believe does not align with what he actually experiences after the war, since the war sacrifices his son Kenji, and destroys Ono's favorite Migi-Hidari district, while the failure and rising criticisms of the imperialist project force him to retire. As someone who greatly values his social status and reputation, Ono finds nothing more distressing than this blow to his self-image when he becomes known as a disgraced war criminal. He thus tries to hide away his past self by refusing to discuss or admit his role in bringing about the devastating consequences of war, allowing him to continue believing that he is still seen as an influential and respected artist. For example, after his controversial reputation likely resulted in the failure of his daughter Noriko's marriage negotiation with the Miyake family, Ono is shown first feigning ignorance, and then persuading himself that the Miyakes have withdrawn because of the mismatched family status between the bride and groom. Ono assumes that the fiancé's family must be confused by his approval of Noriko's marriage to someone from a humbler family.[11] Having lost his previous social position and feeling his past self being rejected by the present society, Ono's existence in the society after the war is characterized by strong senses of precarity and loneliness even as he refuses to discuss it.

In order to maintain his self-image as an idealist despite his downfall, as well as to protect his past life from being rendered meaningless in the changed social atmosphere, Ono tries to portray himself as a good-willed tragic hero who has only chosen the wrong path of imperialism with the "best" intentions for his country.

[10] *Id.*, 63–5.
[11] *Id.*, 18–9.

Reframing his past deeds as a brave endeavor seems to self-deceptively secured the artist's life meaning from historical blame and found a way out for his personal reputation. Doing so, however, also ignores the great suffering caused by all these political ideals he falsely proclaimed. The story implies that Ono himself remains aware of this conflict between following ideals and acknowledging lived experience, but is inclined to choose the ideals over what he experiences in reality to fulfill his desired self-image and validate his past. An example of this takes place during Kenji's funeral, when Ono confronts his depressed son-in-law Suichi, who refuses to celebrate Kenji's sacrifice as a patriotic act while "those who sent the likes of Kenji out there to die these brave deaths" continue to live.[12] Here Ono justifies the death of Kenji and numerous others with a grand ideal, instead of registering the actual events and experiencing the hurt and grief like Suichi. It is left ambiguous whether Ono's quick acceptance of Kenji's death derives from his self-deception as a former imperialist promoter or his self-protective mechanism against grief and guilt. Whatever the case, the incident demonstrates how grand ideals often remain insufficient in justifying loss and suffering on a personal or intimate scale, while Ono's belief forces him to maintain an attachment to such ideals to prove his own self-importance.

## A Matter of 'Fact'?: Neglected Experiences and Perceived Truth

Following the previous explanations of Ono's attachment to grand ideals and value of life, this section examines Ono's failure to fully access the emotions and affective experiences of self and others, as shown in his blindness to others' perspectives while he avoids his own experiences of pain and loss. I will analyze two significant events in the story—his visit to his former apprentice Kuroda's place and his confession speech during Noriko's marriage negotiation—where Ono's ignorant and self-deceptive omittance of painful experiences skews his understanding of the situation surrounding him. The constant memory lapses in Ono's narrative show that his emotions and effective experiences complicate his perceived truth.

[12] *Id.*, 58.

Noriko's new marriage negotiation with the Saito family serves as an immediate and emergent demand for Ono's attention toward reality. According to social conventions, Noriko and Ono must present themselves as respectively a suitable bride and a respectable head of a family during an upcoming *miai* (marriage negotiation meeting between the two families) in order to secure the daughter's marriage to young Saito. At the suggestion of his older daughter Setsuko, Ono attempts to dispel any potential doubts about his reputation as a respectable family head by visiting several old acquaintances. Among them is the wronged Kuroda, whom Ono (during wartime the "official adviser to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities") turned in as a traitor accused of advocating unpatriotic ideologies through art.[13]

According to the values Ono tries to associate himself with, confessing and apologizing are actions understood as expressions of vulnerability, where an individual admits their limit or mistake through a ritual of self-shaming. Up until this point, Ono has refused to express any feelings of regret or to partake in any act of confession or self-shaming, constructing himself as a respectful and influential figure who should always be the one to grant pardons instead of receiving them. However, Ono for the first time faces direct humiliation, ironically because of his ignorant dismissal of another's pain, when he tries to smooth over his past betrayal of Kuroda. Omitting the troubling story of this betrayal like it never happened, Ono shows up at Kuroda's mansion with the proud air of a respected master in front of Kuroda's young apprentice Enchi, despite having come to ask for a favor. After Enchi realizes Ono's identity and tactfully asks him to give up waiting to meet Kuroda, Ono assertively claims that Enchi is too young to understand his long relationship with Kuroda, and that the young man should not "jump to conclusions about matters" without knowing "the full details," a remark that infuriates the young apprentice and leads him to usher Ono out of the mansion:

> "It is clearly you who are ignorant of the full details.
> Or else how would you dare come here like this?

[13] *Id.*, 182.

> For instance, sir, I take it you never knew about Mr Kuroda's shoulder? He was in great pain, but the warders conveniently forgot to report the injury and it was not attended to until the end of the war. But of course, they remembered it well enough whenever they decided to give him another beating. Traitor. That's what they called him."[14]

Here, Enchi is not accusing Ono of being shameless for his unjust betrayal of Kuroda. He is mainly criticized in the passage for his proud attitude as he shows up at Kuroda's mansion, expecting himself to be welcomed not just as a friend but as a senior and guiding figure to be respected. Enchi's account of Kuroda's sufferings in the passage shows how disrespectful and hurtful the young man found Ono's feigned ignorance of his own deeds. It also stresses that Ono would never be able to acknowledge, let alone to empathize with, the traumatic experience that Kuroda has undergone. Ono's failed attempt to see Kuroda in person further suggests that Kuroda and Enchi would not easily forgive him for his deeds. But it is also important to note that Enchi is affected more by Ono's failure to acknowledge Kuroda's suffering than the question of any confessions or apologies. The disturbing exchange with Enchi "cast[s] something of a shadow over" Ono's mood and evokes in him the uneasy feeling of a gap between the story he tells himself and what happens in reality.[15]

On a surface level, the visit to Kuroda's and the later accounts of Noriko's *miai* with the Saitos seem to show how, after sensing his downgraded social position, Ono tries to actively tackle the emergent, real-life problems that he and his family face. However, as Wong persuasively points out, Ono is not fully focused on reconciling with Kuroda or even securing Noriko's marriage; instead, he is mostly preoccupied by his own emotions of potential anxiety, guilt, and shame, and by his precarious reputation.[16] Ono's attempts to conceal this inner instability are implied in several

[14] *Id.*, 112-113.
[15] *Id.*, 114.
[16] Wong, "Emotional Upheaval," 204.

incidents such as when he repeatedly denies having dwelled on a distant memory of seeing a frail Kuroda after his betrayal, and when he projects his anxiety on his daughters after his failed negotiation with Kuroda and before the *miai*.[17] He is unable to interpret his daughters' words without understanding them in terms of his fall from grace, while his own efforts to discern others' motives and disguise his emotions at the *miai* ironically drive him to see the Saito family as hostile and accusive towards him.[18] As I will show in the last setion of this article, underlying Ono's careful (if not bordering on neurotic or paranoid) suspicion and desperate suppression of emotions is a desperate denial of having failed and wasted away his life, and a fear of being forgotten.

Instead of trying to recognize his own vulnerability or empathize with the feelings of others more accurately, Ono self-deceptively adopts the confession genre as a matter of formality at the *miai* to explain himself. During the prior preparations and the earliest part of the *miai*, characters frequently use phrases like "preparing [one's] appearance" or "[being] presentable" which illustrate a sense of performance or theatricality of the conventions in traditional marriage negotiations. As Ono observes all the attendees at the event, he first tries to persuade himself into believing that Noriko's unusual nervousness is normal behavior, until he suddenly realizes how in the previous *miai* his daughter had been nonchalantly "mock[ing] the formality of the occasion."[19] Either a realization of his daughter's dire situation at the moment, or the revelation that one can simply give a performance for an occasion or a self-image, prompts Ono to give his significant speech of confession at the Saito's sudden mentioning of Kuroda's name:

> There are some who would say it is people like myself who are responsible for the terrible things that happened to this nation of ours. As far as I am concerned, I freely admit I made many mistakes. I accept . . . that mine was part of an influence that

[17] Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 78, 114.
[18] Wong, "Emotional Upheaval," 202-3; Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 115, 117.
[19] Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 115–7, 119.

> resulted in untold suffering for our own people . . . As you see, Dr Saito, I admit this quite readily. All I can say is that at the time I acted in good faith . . . But as you can see, I am not now afraid to admit I was mistaken.[20]

On one reading, it could be argued that Ono uses confession to finally admit his feelings about his displacement and decrease in reputation, and that the confession allows him to resituate or reconnect himself with the prevailing beliefs of the present society. A closer look at the passage above, however, reveals how Ono still stresses his influences in a way that even suggests a sense of pride more than guilt or remorse. Ono's presentation of beliefs and confession are intended to be actions according to social norms, like the displays for first impressions in a *miai*, while the self-portrait Ono is trying to paint is that of a respected and courageous figure who does not try to "avoid responsibility for his past deeds."[21] What remains even more ironic is how by "admitting" his wrong, Ono expresses neither a personal vulnerability nor a redressing for the sufferings of the likes of the wronged Kuroda and the sacrificed Kenji. Instead, passively suppressing the negative emotions and refusing to unpack them, the disgraced artist desperately manages to re-empower himself through a re-association with grand values, without being aware of his own biased perception of his environment caused by his negligence of affective experiences.

## The Fear of Being Forgotten and Shared Experiences

In this final section, I analyze Ono's recollections of some past conversations, trauma, and confusions, which are often embedded in and stimulated by his sensorial encounters with scenes and objects. I will first analyze how silence in *An Artist* is depicted as a gesture of disapproval, rejection, or exclusion through a refusal to communicate or understand an alternative perspective. Second, I will analyze how a fear of being forgotten, juxtaposed with the idea of being deemed unworthy of the future world, can be detected in

[20] *Id.*, 123–4.
[21] *Id.*, 124.

Ono's attempts to gain control over memory through re-narrating his past. Finally, I will dive into a traumatic scene of Ono's sensorial experience, discussing how tapping into the immediate bodily and psychological experiences may have brought Ono closer to understanding others.

In one peculiar scene in the novel, Ono has a conversation with his elder daughter Setsuko about the confession speech, which he has prided himself on ever since the success of the *miai*, only to be met with Setsuko's confusion as she does not remember advising her father anything before the *miai*, much to Ono's astonishment and irritation. Moreover, rebutting Ono's self-likening to a famous songwriter who committed suicide to take responsibility for his wartime commitments, Setsuko 'reassures' the old artist that he should not have to take responsibilities like that, since "Father's work had hardly to do with these larger matters of which we are speaking. Father was simply a painter. He must stop believing he has done some great wrong."[22] The scene presents a possibility of Ono failing again to remember events as they have been, while implying the condition that Ono fears the most: to have failed in his artistic career, to have been mediocre. In this scene, having one's past experience forgotten means that the memory has been denied importance and worthiness of remembering. At the same time, willing silences or forgetfulness like what Setsuko employs can serve as a refusal to respond. In this sense, Ishiguro portrays silence and forgetfulness as alternative tactics people employ when dealing with disagreements which, as mild or ambiguous as they may seem, often serve as significant factors that can foretell the breakdown and outcome of a negotiation.

Some of the most notable depictions of silence and unreliable memories take place in accounts of Ono's days at Mori-san's villa, where questions, suspicions and doubts all melt together within the silent and incomprehensible spaces between conflicts of aesthetics, styles, and accusations of loyalty. For example, during Ono's days as an artist apprentice, Mori-san and the fellow apprentices often work with different kinds of silence which maintain the social norms and orders of Mori-san's villa—from deliberately remaining silent in

[22] *Id.*, 190–3.

order to present a convention of politeness as natural, to constructing a social emotion of shame through dismissal of the individual voice.[23] A notable incident illustrates how a gifted pupil comes to be accused of being a traitor by fellow pupils after his art style deliberately departs from Mori-san's teachings. People come to avoid that pupil and exclude him from the community by staying silent and averting their eyes whenever he talks. Ono's recollection also contains various blanks and haziness in details, which add another layer of ignorance and denial as he claims to have already forgotten or deems it unnecessary to retrieve the memory.[24] We later get a closer, first-person perspective of an accused traitor in the villa when Ono faces the same silent treatment. Despite trying to convey the motives behind his new aesthetic approach in face of an alarmed and hostile Tortoise ("Tortoise, look at my painting. Let me explain to you what I'm trying to do") and the solemn Mori-san ("I would beg you to look once more at my new paintings and reconsider them. Perhaps . . . Sensei will allow me when we return to explain my intentions in each picture"), Ono is answered twice with silence and avoidance.[25] These responses imply an almost unconditional refusal, denying even the possibility for the two sides to communicate before leading to the relationship's breakup. Juxtaposing an artist's artistic expression through painting styles with an individual's expression of ideas and opinions, the novel illustrates how frictions between people with different perspectives trigger unrepairable clashes simply a refusal to communicate, and how willful silence can be a passive expression of ignorance.

It is, then, important to return to Ono's unrealistic elitist beliefs, which foreclose the possibility for him to acknowledge the importance of others' voices and experiences, or to imagine a future where everyone's experience is equally important. Beneath the artist's desperate attempts to portray himself as an influential figure worthy of being remembered is a fear of being forgotten by time and deemed unimportant. According to Ono's belief system, this outcome can result from expressing an ideal that is deemed 'flawed.'

[23] Wright, "No Homelike Place," 74–5.
[24] Ishiguro, *An Artist*, 142–3.
[25] *Id.*, 163, 179–80.

Ono's two traumatic memories illustrate a fear of having one's view dismissed and forgotten, describing how his paintings were destroyed: first by his father to stop him from becoming a painter, then by Mori-san in accusation of him breaking away from his teachings.[26] A similar mindset is shown in Ono's rumination on how it is hard for a teacher like Mori-san to accept being surpassed by their pupil. The narrative then implies that Ono himself was also driven by the same fear of being deemed wrong and outdated to sacrifice the paintings of his own gifted pupil Kuroda to the imperial officials.[27]

This brings us to the effect of immediate, sensorial experiences in fostering reconciliation. I read Ono's troubling memory of the police investigation at Kuroda's mansion as the most potentially cathartic moment for the character, especially in combination with his memories of Mori-san and his father. Right after the recollection of his last words with Mori-san, a conversation that ended with the master confiscating his 'traitor' paintings and him leaving the villa, Ono's narrative jumps to his memory of arriving at Kuroda's place after turning him in, only to find the police officials burning Kuroda's 'offensive' paintings.[28] The traumatic smell of burning at Kuroda's also reminds Ono of how his father collected and burned his paintings.[29] The repeated image of paintings lost or destroyed implies a concept of oppressed individual voices and irretrievable memories, while Ono's trauma from losing his paintings, along with his guilt of betraying Kuroda, allows him to connect with both Kuroda's sufferings and Mori-san's regretful "arrogance and possessiveness" towards his pupils.[30] Ono may not have fully understood what it means to empathize, but he is shown in this scene as starting to feel the suffering experience of others in a similar way to his own. This is also when Ono is shown to be seriously sensing his limitedness as a human being, as he regretfully comments on how a teacher (like Mori-san or himself) should not

[26] *Id.*, 43–4; 179–80.
[27] *Id.*, 142.
[28] *Id.*, 180–3.
[29] *Id.*, 43–4.
[30] *Id.*, 181.

be controlling or possessing his students' works or beliefs. This heartfelt recognition does more to enable Ono to tap into another person's feelings than his earlier performance of self-abasement. He finally sees past his idea of the ideal and starts connecting to real-life affective experiences. Instead of passively ignoring existing differences and experiences to avoid conflicts from happening, or trying to cast away a dark past through forcing silence or forgetting, Ono stubbornly narrates his past life and the ideals attached to it in attempt to resist the threat of being forgotten, as if asking the readers to bear witness of his perceived reality.[31] His story suggests that each memory can matter when one notices the frictions between narratives and different versions of truth, registers personal experiences, and approaches conflicts with an awareness of individual suffering and limits.

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[31] Teo, *Kazuo Ishiguro and Memory*, 67, 124.

PART TWO

# ENVIRONMENT(S)

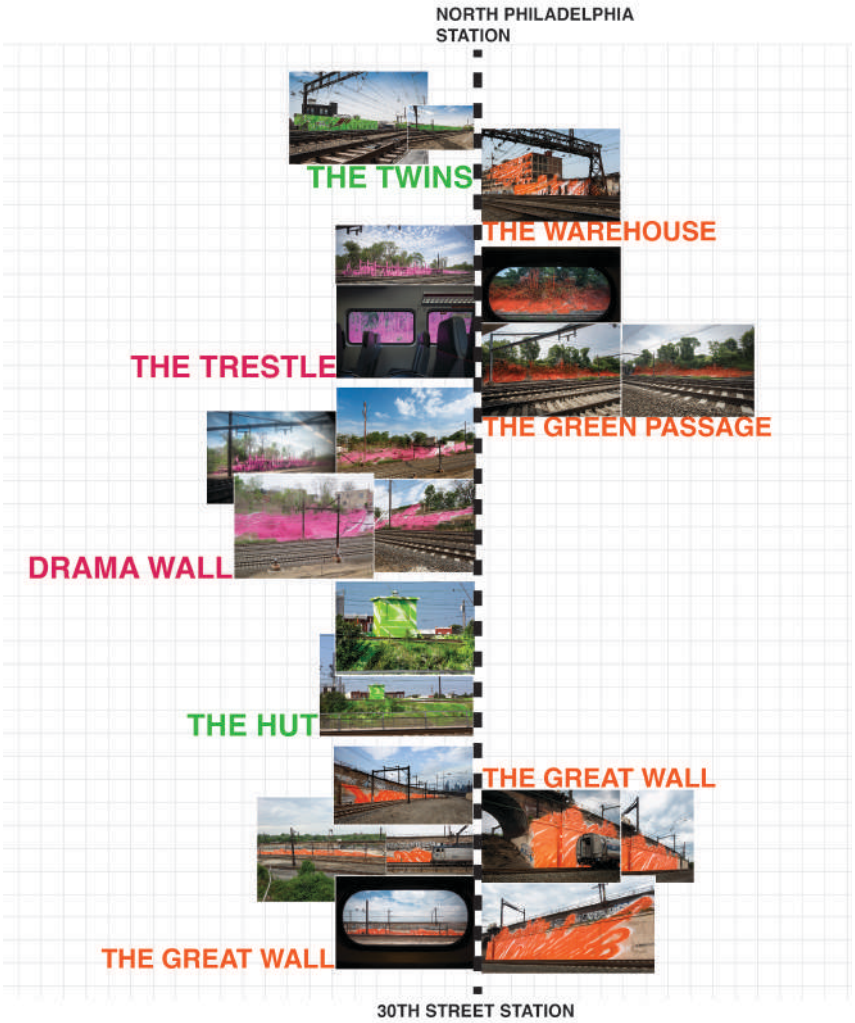


Figure 1: *Psychylustro* Map from 30th Street Station up to North Philadelphia Station, Philadelphia, US. Pictures © Katharina Grosse c/o Pictoright Amsterdam 2024. Original in color.

# Following *Psychylustro*: An (Imaginary) Travelogue through the Matter of the City

Rebecca Billi

Looking for *Psychylustro* (2014), Katherine Grosse's monumental public artwork alongside the railway tracks in Philadelphia, I start my journey at 30th Street Station, searching for the line heading north. The building fits the imaginary of 'the central station,' the type where the climax of a Hollywood film might take place. Even in pictures, the colossal size of this neoclassical edifice and the strong physical presence of its limestone façade are undeniable. When I was a kid, I had a toy village set at my grandparents' place, inherited from some older cousin. At the time, I would always make the train station my house because I believed it to be the biggest and most beautiful building in the collection. Beyond the evidently strong opinions I had on the size and look of my desired residence, the fact that the railway station stood out amongst the other pieces of the set indicates how, through history, stations have become recognizable sites, landmarks of and gateways to the city.

The train I am looking for will take me up the Northeast Corridor, through Philadelphia's northern areas, where German artist Katherine Grosse realized *Psychylustro* as part of the city's *Mural Arts Program.* The artwork is composed of seven artistic interventions—seven individually titled urban paintings—located at different points along the tracks.[1] *Psychylustro* is best experienced as a passenger on the train, the different installments of the artwork appearing one after another along the route (fig. 1). I am on a journey to explore how art infiltrates and discloses overlooked components of the city, and how it can provoke readings and narratives that open up to the eye that wants to see them. A city is

[1] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "Psychylustro."

made up of many different spaces and elements that compose its matter, yet it is common for those constantly interacting with it to become distracted witnesses of the stories inscribed in its fabric. Many of these overlooked spaces and elements belong to the wider category of infrastructure, essential systems that ensure life in the city can proceed smoothly. Infrastructures therefore represent unusual urban elements—often monumental in scale, yet, when working properly in their supporting role, hardly noticeable. I want to suggest that introducing an extra feature in the urban context—a foreign element—like a piece of public art, can revive the attention of urbanites towards their surroundings. This unfamiliar item can invite new readings of the elements composing the matter of the city, even of the most overlooked ones, unveiling insights into the urban context and the socio-dynamics shaping it.

*Psychylustro* showcases how art can perform an essential role in de-familiarizing the aesthetics of infrastructure and pushing us to examine it afresh. The routine associated with rail travel often leads to indifference, but Grosse's artwork is able to introduce the disruption necessary to break the individual out of the estrangement the contemporary city induces. Challenging the senses, art helps expand the notion of urban matter and raises questions about the role that infrastructural systems play in cities and everyday life. The novel artistic elements of *Psychylustro,* standing out as alien to the rail network, offer a way to awaken perception and imagination.

I have found the platform and I board the train carriage, making sure I am sitting next to the window. The train pulls away, commencing its (and my) journey. As it sets off, I am struck by just how long movement has had a place in the history of thinking, stretching back to the claim by Greek philosophers of the Peripatetic school in the fourth and third centuries BCE that movement fostered thought. More recently, writer and historian Rebecca Solnit has explored the act of walking as both a cultural and philosophical practice. Examining the history and politics of walking, Solnit presents the practice as both a way of (re)engaging with the world and a strategy to reclaim public space.[2] Solnit understands walking as an active exploration and an invitation to rediscover the details of

[2] Solnit, *Wanderlust.*

a world we tend to rush through. She invites her readers to engage with walking beyond moving, as a transformative experience. In her theory, walking is strictly bound to creativity—fostering and inspiring it—and facilitates connections, including unforeseen ones.[3]

Being on a train means that I am being transported, making this a more passive experience of movement—the line follows a specific route, and as a passenger, I cannot change the path as I could on foot. It is nonetheless possible to apply parts of Solnit's theory of walking. Even if the element of choice is taken away by the nature of the railway, new connections can also be created when one is being transported. As it is still possible to keep an active engagement with the surroundings, these surroundings can be both rediscovered and seen anew, forming links and inviting thought. Instead of sitting back and letting the city run alongside my window, I can try to individuate connections I had not noticed before. I can actively look out, instead of letting the moving scenery lull me into detaching from my surroundings. The art I am soon to encounter will help to pull me out of a disengaged state, turning the train corridor into a contemporary version of Walter Benjamin's arcade.

In architectural terms, the arcade is a passage, a pedestrian gallery connecting two or more streets, covered by a glass and steel roof and populated by shops, cafes, restaurants, and other commercial establishments. Popularized during the new wave of commercial and technological wealth that in the early 1800s benefitted Europe, and especially France, these galleries are a lot more than simply sites of commerce. They translate in their physical form what German philosopher Georg W.F. Hegel referred to as *zeitgeist*, or 'spirit of the time.'[4] The Parisian arcade was particularly central to the work of the German Jewish writer Walter Benjamin, who explored these commercial passages in his unfinished *Arcades Project*, which he began in 1927 and worked on until his death in 1940. Benjamin's massive work, over a thousand pages in the

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] The *zeitgeist*, or spirit of the time, represents the set of ideas, beliefs, and objectives that dominate and define a specific moment in history, setting it apart from those that came before and will follow. The term is mostly associated to the theories of German philosopher Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831).

German original, was first published in its incomplete form only in 1982. For Benjamin, the arcade is the most important architectural manifestation of the nineteenth century, the perfect site to display not only the "fetishism of the commodity" but also the "anticipation and imaginative expression of the new world."[5]

"The arcade is a city, a world in miniature," says Benjamin—for him this commercial gallery is a representative embodiment of the social, political, and economic dynamics of its time, the late nineteenth-century European bourgeois culture.[6] Benjamin theorized that in the elements composing the arcade, from the architectural details of the roofing to the way encounters among people within the arcade happened, it was possible to read the essence of contemporary Parisian life.

Infrastructure is as much of an integral part of the contemporary city as the commercial arcade was to nineteenth-century Paris; it is tied to the city's functioning and inseparable from it. A city rests upon its infrastructure, whose main role is to provide support as the name itself implies, with the prefix 'infra' coming from the Latin term for 'below.' This suggests that, hidden along the train route I am following, there will be insights into those urban and social networks they literally and metaphorically enable to run: what can the infrastructure reveal of its city?

From the window, I soon begin to see huge blotches of blazing colors—the first installation of the *Psychylustro* series. There are walls on both sides of the carriage, painted bright orange and rechristened by Grosse as *The Great Wall*. This brings up the theme of barriers. What do these walls do? Do they protect, separate, or conceal? They hide part of the city, making the streets and buildings appear detached from the railway, so that the passenger seems to be moving through an intermediary space that does not properly belong to the urban environment.

On a practical level, these walls were erected in part to form a sound barrier. The sight of a running train might be fascinating but its loud rush and the vibrations it produces are hardly ever welcome guests in the privacy of a home. This is a notion of privacy that is

[5] Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 637, 663.
[6] *Id.*, 3.

also, fittingly, a product of that very same bourgeois society Benjamin explores in *The Arcades Project*. When I was living in London in 2017, I had a house facing a section of the District line—the green one—that ran above ground. There was a form of 'underground coolness' in seeing the tube from the windows: the novelty of something usually buried suddenly revealed to me, as if I were seeing something secret and forbidden. The excitement diminished quickly, but even ensconced in our routine habits my flatmates and I were never able to forget that the transport network existed alongside us: the nearness of the tracks caused the building to vibrate as trains passed. It strikes me now that we usually only engage with infrastructure when it has become a personal nuisance. The ability to imagine urban features outside of that narrow personal interest can become a driving force for change, allowing us to not only picture what spaces could be, but to look for alternative narratives in their histories that can challenge our perceptions.

At the center of *The Great Wall* an arched passage opens. Probably once intended to allow another branch of the railway to come through and connect to the main line, what is left now is a residual liminal space. Every element composing an infrastructural system is designed according to that element's intended use. Through this functional aesthetic informed by technological standards, and with the railway's linear progression and defined path, the tracks become a site where the specific city dynamics that compose the urban matter can be unveiled. Like the arcade in nineteenth-century Paris, in the early twentieth century the train was the epitome of the European myth of technological progress, with railroads at the center of the celebration of modernity that followed the Second Industrial Revolution.[7] Even though this glorification never reached the almost religious fever pitch reserved for cars, the importance given to the train is evident in the work of many futurists writers, artists, and architects. They recognized in the train's running

[7] The second Industrial Revolution is usually dated between 1870 and 1914, although a number of its characteristic events can be dated to the 1850s. It is defined by a rapid rate of pathbreaking inventions, its focus on the collaboration between technology and science and the changes in the organization of production. Mokyr, "The Second Industrial Revolution," 1.

silhouette a symbol of industrialized society and the promise of a new century driven by technological innovation. "We state that the magnificence of the world has been enriched by a new beauty: the beauty of speed," writes the father of the futurist movement Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in his "Manifesto Futurista" from 1909.[8] Marinetti then goes on to claim that futurists will sing of "the broad-chested locomotives, pounding on the rails, like huge steel horses bridled in pipes."[9]

With technological progress gaining new contemporary symbols and representatives, the train is not a source of amazement in the same way as it used to be in the early- twentieth century. Moving through and between cities has become just another way to get to work, a mundane form of commuting. Once you take the same train every day, time after time, the surrounding urban context quickly starts to merge and impressions become one continuous image. After a while, you do not see the view outside of the carriage window anymore, but engage passively with your surroundings in the mode from which Solnit would invite us to break away. Yet while infrastructure is generally perceived as either practically or conceptually invisible amongst the elements that make up the matter of the city, reading the railroad as an *arcade* in Benjamin's sense opens up the space for new narratives to unfold.

Wheels screech on the tracks and, outside the window, flashes of urbanization reveal themselves in passing. The city unfolds along the path and peeks out from behind walls, offering snapshots of life to the passenger looking out the window. If this watchful passenger is able, even in a state of apparently passive engagement, to actively observe the sights appearing before their eyes and respond to them seeking further insights, then that passenger in a way becomes a *flâneur* of this imagined railroad-arcade.

The *flâneur* is the urban explorer and the indigenous inhabitant of the Parisian arcade. In nineteenth-century France,

[8] "Noi affermiamo che la magnificenza del mondo si è arricchita di una nuova bellezza: la bellezza della velocità" Marinetti, "Manifesto Futurista." [My translation]

[9] "Le locomotive dall'ampio petto, che scalpitano sulle rotaie, come enormi cavalli d'acciaio imbrigliati di tubi." Marinetti, "Manifesto Futurista." [My translation]

intellectuals were so fascinated by the stories inscribed in the urban fabric that they created a figure that would embody their practice of leisurely strolling through the city streets observing both the architecture and the flow of urban life. The term was first coined by poet Charles Baudelaire in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life."[10] In this work, the *flâneur* navigates the city, detached and attentive at the same time, as an observer of modern urban existence, from which he seeks poetic inspiration. The concept was later picked up by Benjamin in *The Arcades Project*. Benjamin's *flâneur* does not inhabit the streets of Paris, however, but the commercial arcade, which was for Benjamin the symbol of a new modern sensibility informed by the association of commerce, technology, and art. The Benjaminian *flâneur* is both a product of the urban environment and of the new capitalist society. In his strolls, he is able to capture insights into everyday life and its commodification. While still a spectator in the Baudlerian mode, Benjamin's *flâneur* partakes in an engagement with his surroundings that is active, purposely seeking fragments and cues in the urban and social context to inform his reflections on contemporary life. The reader of *The Arcades Project* follows the *flâneur* through his wanderings with little commentary from the author to guide interpretation. The reader instead must seek clues in the text, the same way Benjamin does with the city itself, whose architecture and decorations become signs to be read.[11]

Rather than being limited to *just seeing* when going from one end to the other on this rail journey, I wonder how to *actively look* for fragments and cues analogous to those pursued by Benjamin's *flâneur*. What stories would I be able to identify along the routes, and what kinds of readings of the city could I discover if I paid attention? How can I approach routine differently and what can prevent me from slipping into passivity?

On this route it is art that offers a way out, as the bright colors of the *Psychylustro* installations keep succeeding each other before my eyes, rousing my attention time after time. As my journey continues, I can see more branches of the rail network coming in

[10] Baudelaire, "The Painter," 1–40.
[11] Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics*, ix–xii.

and out of the main track on my left, and some particularly sturdy plants growing in the area around them. This is the kind of invasive low vegetation that you do not have to take care of because it will always prosper, even in inhospitable locations. Wildflowers and low bushes bring some green to the gloomy metal grays and rusty reds of industrial architecture. Soon, however, the green to my left starts to become slightly *too green* to be entirely natural. A little building comes into sight, breaking the horizontal continuity of the view. An artificially bright green little building, this is the second installment of Grosse's work, titled *The Hut*. Intriguingly, the idea of 'the hut' represents the essence of architectural thought, according to French architecture theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier, a passionate advocate of the necessity to return to simplicity in building in the wake of the technological revolutions of the late eighteenth century.[12]

To Laugier the 'primitive hut' is a model for his contemporaries to rediscover and pursue, writing in the mid-seventeenth-hundreds, he claimed that at the basis of all architectural production lies the combination of only three elements: the column, the beam, and the pediment.[13] The concept of the hut was picked up again almost a century later when Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, architect and architectural historian, would step away from Laugier's view of the hut as "found in nature" and present it as representative of the human ability to overcome and subordinate nature through reason.[14] As a feature standing lonely to the side of the rail, Grosse's hut also appears as a stronghold of human creation, almost cartoon-like as it towers over the low vegetation, standing out in its new bright green skin. As the hut is the essence of architectural thought, movement is a core principle of architectural unity and it is fundamental in place-making—going from a start to an end connects two spaces and creates a new one between the points. By bringing individual areas together, movement brings cities together. Without roads and transport links to establish relationships amongst different parts of the city, there is nothing but an assemblage of edifices.

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[12] Laugier, *Essai sur l'Architecture*.
[13] *Ibid*, 8–12.
[14] Bressani, "Notes," 327–50.

The train continues its run against the backdrop of Philadelphia, the city seeming even more detached from the rail as a strip of land comes in to separate the tracks from the city. As I look around, I think again of the theories of Benjamin and the arcade. Benjamin's interest did not only lie in the Parisian arcades during their prime; he was also fascinated by their decline, by what ruins and fragments would come to say about the capitalist society that built them. The railway in Philadelphia is not a ruin, but it also undeniably bears the trace of passing time, a sign of how this infrastructure is perceived in the wider context of the city and the level of care and attention given to it. The railway is defined by routinary use, only existing in the public eye as a function of the stations it connects. Despite this, artists, writers, and painters have given attention to railroads, finding new ideas in routine, writing exciting narratives, and imagining new prospects for everyday urban elements. Picking up on the serial nature of train journeys and their character of belonging to a wider network, Grosse used the seven artistic *acts* of *Psychylustro* to reinvent the experience of traveling a beaten route. Her piece exemplifies the ways artists have found to work with infrastructures beyond simply intervening *on* the material, instead infiltrating those systems to build upon characteristics already present. In the case of *Psychylustro*, this happens particularly through the work's engagement with thematics of movement and scale. Bright orange, green, and pink paints seem to have been thrown out of the moving train in the work's seven urban paintings. The manner in which the color is distributed enhances the perception of speed and movement, already induced by the speed of the train, in relation to the cityscape that stretches by outside the window.

There is a curious disconnection that happens on trains as we are transported between stops. The railroad takes you in between times and in between places, in a no-man's land that does not apparently belong to either public or private space. Trains do not move at the same pace the human body does, turning stations into mediators between the time of the city and the time of the railroad. Space and distance feel different too, coming undone under the

effects of speed.[15] Grosse seems aware of this as *Psychylustro*'s smooth color fully but steadily floods the liminal spaces next to the railway, building upon and heightening the railway's distortion of time and space. Physical, mental, and theoretical connections are created. And while the *flâneur* walks the city, he nonetheless engages in an act of motion that can also be experienced by being transported. *Movement* is more than an action of a body; it is an informed act that can break habits and reveal the layers that compose our urban environments. Whether engaging as a walker or a passenger, different aspects of the city are made visible through movement.

The combination of art and technology as Grosse's colorful strokes encounter the rail reflects Benjamin's presentation of the arcade as a space where art, technology and utilitarianism blend, where reality and fantasy come together. Benjamin sees this as a 'phantasmagoria,' a spectacle of commodity culture, through which the public seeks distraction and, ultimately, arrives at alienation.[16] In the case of art intervening in infrastructural networks the Benjaminian model is subverted. Rather than using art to escape the ennui of modern society, here the artwork becomes the means for a rupture that can seep through detachment and draw attention back to the material reality around us. It happens unexpectedly, "like a stranger coming through a door," as Grosse says of her work, while

[15] Schivelbusch, "Railroad Space," 31–40.

[16] The word 'phantasmagoria' refers to a type of horror theatre invented in the late 1790s in which a moveable lantern would project 'a parade of ghosts' for its spectator. Comparative literature and literacy critique professor and scholar Margaret Cohen claims that Benjamin associated the term 'phantasmagoria' with commodity culture's experience of its material and intellectual products, drawing an analogy to what Marx defines as 'commodity fetishism.' A phantasmagoria fools its audience, by presenting a representation "mediated through imaginative subjective processes," hence a non-objective "expression" of the world. (Cohen, "Walter Benjamin's Phantasmagoria," 94.) To Benjamin, the phantasmagorias represent the wish symbols and cultural values of a capitalist society where worth is based on material possessions and its display. He uses the term to define the arcades and traces a comparison to commodity culture where material objects and goods become illusive distractions. ("They open a phantasmagoria which a person enters in order to be distracted." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 7).

Philadelphia as a city acts as a backdrop, becoming a sort of symbol for the contemporary city more broadly.[17]

Another painted brick wall runs along the track, a bright pink one this time—the *Drama Wall*. The pink paint carries on beyond the end of the bricks, flooding onto the trees and low bushes that populate the patch of land next to the train. There is suddenly a pink forest outside of the window to my left, a dystopic landscape flattened by color, enhancing the impression that this route is not leading me towards the north of the city but towards other worlds and multiverses. But in a sense, this is what is happening; the train line I am on brings together different areas of Philadelphia—singular worlds of their own—turning the rail into a thread that ties the city together.

Circulation routes also represent living historical traces of the cities that grew around them. If you take a city plan and remove the buildings, the city still seems visible: the matted web of roads, tram tracks, and rails allows for the dynamics of the city and its urban configuration to come through. Pondering on topography and cities' appearance always, almost automatically, brings the city of Palermo to my mind as I have always been fascinated by how smoothly its architectural and social history are weaved in the way roads are laid out, making those stories relatively easy to decipher. Between 2017 and 2018 I was involved in a project "investigating, reflecting and proposing future scenarios for Palermo," in Sicily, as part of the educational program of the 12th edition of Manifesta Biennial.[18] In the dense, messy knots of roadways populating the *La Kalsa* area, you can read the years in which the city prospered as an Arab settlement, while the presence of the Normans is visible in the areas around the cathedral and the aptly named *Palazzo dei Normanni*, the royal palace. Palermo's two main roads, Via Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda, cross at the center of the city, splitting it into four sectors at the *Quattro Canti*, enduring traces of the *cardo* and *decumano* axis that characterized cities funded by the Romans. At the same time, the strict geometry of the cut that Via Roma imposes on the city is indicative of the changes implemented in the late

[17] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "'Psychylustro'," 0:45–0:57.
[18] Poltz, "Manifesta 12 Studios."

nineteenth century, in pursuit of that 'imperial' aesthetic for cities cultivated by the newly formed *Regno d'Italia*.[19]

Reliving the long history of Palermo while surrounded by the very different materiality of Philadelphia, I am pulled back by the sight of *The Green Passage,* which is not green at all; bright orange paint covers the landscape and enhances the feeling of displacement that these artworks aim to trigger with their highly artificial colors. This evident disconnection—between expectations and the reality of what is happening outside of the window—leads the observer to question what 'real' is. Looking to the left I see pink wooden pylons, a panorama of leftover materials. Grosse calls this section *The Trestle*. Bright landscapes surround me on both sides, sceneries of unexpected colors.

Color is effective in generating astonishment; it has a strong transformative power and is able to subvert expectations. It can re-awaken and re-enchant. Wassily Kandinsky, a pioneer of abstract painting, devoted great attention to this affective capacity of color when tracing the fundamentals of his art theory in his celebrated book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*.[20] Kandinsky claims that color produces two main effects on the eye. The first is a physical one, "when the eye itself is enchanted by beauty and the multiple delights of color," which he compares to the way a spicy dish can "titillate the tongue."[21] The second he defines as a psychic effect that causes an "emotional vibration."[22] To Kandinsky, seeing involves not only sight but all the other senses as well, making it the outcome of the interaction between physical experience and the associations forged by the mind.[23]

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[19] The *Regno d'Italia*, or Reign of Italy, was the name given to the newly established kingdom of Italy in 1861. Formerly subdivided in independent city-states and monarchies, Italy became a unified country under the leadership of the House of Savoia, following the Second Independence War in 1859 against Austria and the conquest of the *Regno delle Due Sicilie* (the Reign of the Two Sicilies) at the hand of the army of Giuseppe Garibaldi. The unification brought about a series of policies intended to strengthen the identity of the newly formed State; these included the pursuit of a specific city aesthetic common to the whole country.

[20] Kandinsky, *The Spiritual in Art*, 39–93.

[21] *Id.*, 39.

[22] *Id.*, 41.

[23] *Id.*, 42.

There is more to color, however, than simply associations—as Kandinsky goes on to say, "color embodies an enormous though unexplored power which can affect the entire human body as a physical organism," directly influencing the soul.[24] In Kandinsky's view, an artist can make the soul vibrate through color.[25] I suspect Grosse would agree—commenting on *Psychylustro* and her own artistic practice, she has stated that "[she needs] the brilliance of color to get close to people, to stir up a sense of life experience and heighten their sense of presence."[26]

During this voyage of infrastructure and paint, in between reality and imagination, links are formed and habit is affected. I have been called out of instances of passive engagement with the route by surreal pink, green, or orange landscapes sprawling out before my eyes. Something did not feel quite right, and—reawakened—I have found myself wondering whether such coloring was an effect of the glass or if the trees and ground had actually been tinted. Wonder, amazement, and uncertainty are at the core of this project, helping to generate a new interest and attention toward what is an otherwise predictable and routine occurrence for the commuter. *Psychylustro* creates a new experience for everybody on the train and a new way to engage with the surrounding city matter.

If this railroad has become an arcade through my journey, it seems natural to think that each of the artistic moments making up *Psychylustro* informs a 'dialectical image.' In Benjamin's theory, the elements disclosing the forces shaping culture are to be found through the observation of what he calls 'dialectical images,' snapshots of society that display its contradictions and tensions, and that become readable only at specific moments.[27] Through the lens of the *flâneur,* the reader of *The Arcades Project* is led to engage

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[24] *Id.*, 43.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "Psychylustro."

[27] "For the historical index of the images not only says that they belong to a particular time; it says, above all, that they attain to legibility only at a particular time . . . It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation. In other words: image is dialectics at a standstill." Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 462–463.

with the dialectical images in the arcades that reveal a social and cultural understanding of modern society. There is also a component of habit present in both Baudelaire and Benjamin's formulations of the figure of the *flâneur*. Just as the regular commuter is generally familiar with their daily train route and the view out of the carriage window, the *flâneur* is used to the city and its streets. Both observe features they have seen before, making it so that there is a routinary side to their wanderings. The *flâneur* keeps looking to further their impression of society—and art can make the commuter look as well. Through its presence at well-defined points along the railway, *Psychylustro* highlights specific moments of the journey along the train's route by using bold unexpected colors. Seemingly frozen, these moments appear as individual images standing out amidst the succession of views outside of the window. *Psychylustro* locates dialectical images along the route, in so doing it has pointed me, as passenger and observer, towards snapshots of Philadelphia giving way to readings of the city and its infrastructure.

Around the next curve of the track is an apparently abandoned five-story industrial building—*The Warehouse*. Part of its imposing façade is covered in enormous orange paint strokes. Given the dimensions of the building, the scale of the intervention ends up being inhuman. It cannot be the result of a single person's work and therefore implies the engagement of a larger group of people.

With *The Warehouse*, Grosse is able not only to create links between the passengers on the train and the landscape of the route but also to generate connections among the people involved in its realization. In a video interview released in 2014, Grosse and *Mural Arts Program* curator Elisabeth Thomas explain how six local artists from Philadelphia worked together with Grosse and her assistants to create one cohesive work.[28] A second video on *Psychylustro*, this time produced by the *Mural Arts Program*, also contains testimony from North Philadelphia locals who believe the artwork draws attention to the potential that exists in the area. The importance of this work is not only an outcome of the finished artistic product, as an intervention like *Psychylustro* can inspire communities and give

[28] WHYY, "'Psychylustro'," 0:29–1:30.

hope for the future.[29] The collaborative process to realize the artwork stands as an example of what can be achieved by working together. The very scale of railway infrastructure calls for people to team up to imagine new futures and uses for abandoned parts of the network, and to write alternative narratives for those sections still operational. Communal effort is always required to reimagine and repurpose urban spaces.

As the train proceeds towards my final stop, I am given a glimpse into Philadelphia through a gap between the green walls on my left. These walls are *The Twins* and, like gateways to life beyond the rail, they stand as windows into the city. Through one single opening, they prompt viewers to consider the unseen, to look further, and to reimagine their surroundings. Site specificity seeps in. The break almost symbolically elevates the walls, making this moment different, demonstrating how disruption can make a well-known occurrence special. To 'make special' is a core concept at the base of contemporary theories exploring art practices and what defines a product as 'art.' This concept, as presented by the anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake in her work on the genesis of the notion of art, links the attribution of the category of 'artwork' not to those objects or products able to induce and sustain an authentic aesthetic experience, but to those capable of being set apart as 'extra-ordinary.'[30]

The train is reaching North Philadelphia Station, meaning this extra-ordinary imaginary journey of mine is heading towards its conclusion. Following the railroad with *Psychylustro*, I was led to explore and reimagine spaces and matter, navigating the urban landscape as both a physical and metaphorical canvas. It now appears to me that to better see the city as a whole, one must first attempt to look differently. Art can break through routine, catching attention and opening the door for associations to occur—the particular set of associations that came to mind for me, and which I have led you through, emerged in the space of possibility opened up between Grosse's public art and my own inner life. Art gives an impetus to look again and, maybe, see the matter of the city through

[29] Mural Arts Philadelphia, "'Psychylustro'," 2:13–2:47.
[30] Dissanayake, "The Core of Art," 13–38.

other eyes—to make something new from the world around us. "The distracted person, too, can form habits," says Walter Benjamin.[31] I turn this sentence around, hoping Benjamin would not hold it against me: the distracted person is the one who, more than everybody else, tends to passively engage with the city, basing their interactions on habit. Paraphrasing Benjamin then: The distracted person too can *break* habits. Art can help. It can become the fracture through which habit is subverted.

Having left the brushstrokes and artificial landscapes of *Psychylustro* behind, I have now reached the final stop on my route. The train halts at the platform and I get off at North Philadelphia Station.

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## List of images

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# What's the Matter with Arctic Alaska?

Mikko Pekkonen

*We got our very own share of the oil profits—each and every Alaskan.*

*How can you be against oil development when it puts money directly in your pocket?*

*You're so wrapped up in oil it feels wrong to criticize it. You're called a hypocrite. Even worse, you feel like one.*

Molly Rettig, *Finding True North* (2021)

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Some say Alaska is cold and desolate, while others point to the particular vulnerability of its nature as its biggest problem. My childhood home is a stage for these contradictory images, where aesthetic landscapes meet a wealth of crude oil in its northernmost borough: the North Slope. The oil companies that operate on the North Slope are aware that they do so on borrowed time, either because at some point there will be no more space left to drill without drawing the ire of Native communities and conservationists or because eventually all of the oil will be pumped out. Questions of value, place, and material production on the North Slope arise each time an oil company produces an advertisement or photographs its operations. This genre of photography is an important tool in oil companies' communication strategies. Photographs of oil infrastructure—rigs and pipelines—are used in promotional materials and articles favorable to the industry. To stay on the right side of the natural resource debates that have long been a fixture of Alaskan politics, oil companies compose themselves in a particular light using photography.

My close reading of visual media on oil reveals stark similarities between their aesthetics and techniques, and those employed by more traditional artists and photographers who also take Alaska as their subject. Roland Barthes defines the photograph

as "certainly not the reality but at least it is its perfect *analogon*" in that a photograph itself is not reality, but perfectly denotes reality.[1] On its own, without cultural assumptions, a photograph cannot connote concepts; the objects in the photograph refer only to themselves, and so they denote reality rather than connote a message through a system of signs.[2] Barthes goes on to state the techniques and styles employed in capturing a photograph tug on cultural assumptions and referents, thus giving the photograph meaning beyond denoted reality. In other words, every decision the photographer makes in the production and dissemination of a photograph connotes some message. For a viewer to derive meaning from a photograph, the photographer's choice of scale, framing, focus, subject, shape, color, or perspective must symbolize something, becoming signifiers.[3] However, this does not necessarily mean the same techniques and styles used on the same subject matter will always produce the same meanings. The platforms hosting an image, along with the content of any texts associated with that image, have the potential to influence, and even completely change, its meaning and connotations.[4] Both the techniques of photography and the modes of communication surrounding a photograph are used to convey a message.

In this article, I analyze the photographic techniques of the Alaskan oil industry, identifying three strategic messages that these connote. The first is that land planned for oil development is empty and can be used for nothing else. The second is that oil development and nature are compatible; one does not come at the cost of the other. The third is that human well-being is linked to maintaining and expanding oil extraction. The advertisements and article headers that I analyze come from the magazine *Alaska Business*, which writes about developments in Alaska's various industries. These photographs were originally published in 2023, and chosen for their temporal proximity both to the present day and to highly publicized changes to future North Slope oil and gas projects. Other

[1] Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 196. Italics in original.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Id.*, 199.
[4] *Id.*, 194, 205.

photographs that I analyze were provided by ConocoPhillips—an oil company that operates on the North Slope—from their media gallery designed to be used by journalists. Each specific example in this article was chosen either because of its placement in *Alaska Business* or because it is meant to be used in journalism, as these are platforms for communicating to a general audience about the oil industry. These photographs are how the industry wants to be seen.

The industry photographs will be compared to wilderness photography, particularly Subhankar Banerjee's work in the North Slope.[5] They will also be compared to the Late Romanticist paintings of Sydney Laurence, who traveled to Alaska at the turn of the twentieth century seeking unbridled wilderness and solitude. To demonstrate how exactly the oil companies communicate the extraction of matter in Alaska, I analyze the similarities between images produced by artists and corporations. Alaska can be cold and desolate, remote and peaceful, or teeming with life. The photographs in this article point toward a polysemic vision of Alaska that is neither vulnerable wilderness nor useless wasteland.

## Crop

Sierra Club and *National Geographic* photographers, and landscape photographers inspired by their work, try to portray their subjects as 'wilderness,' untouched by humans and worthy of preservation due to its aesthetic beauty. Oil companies, on the other hand, often portray landscapes as 'wastelands' unworthy of anything but change and development. The concept of the empty and unworthy wasteland has a long history in the English-speaking world. Studying areas in Great Britain designated as wastelands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Vittoria Di Palma explains that wasteland has been understood as "any place that is hostile to human survival."[6] This presents wasteland as "culture's antithesis," depriving people of the things needed to survive and instead containing potential danger.[7] Di Palma argues that wasteland is not empty, despite

[5] Examples of this work can be found at Arctic Refuge Art, "Subhankar Banerjee;" Burke Museum, "Photo Gallery."
[6] Di Palma, *Wasteland*, 4.
[7] *Id.*, 3–4.

historical contentions to the contrary, but is construed as functionally empty because it is simply full of the wrong things.[8] Henry Nash Smith's observations of explorers of the American West in the nineteenth century go even further. Smith suggests that these explorers viewed the desert beyond the Rocky Mountains as an actively corruptive force, solidifying the connection between wasteland and danger. The thought was that anybody who tried to remain in the desert either died or became 'uncivilized.' 'Uncivilized' in this context implies nomadic and non-farming lifestyles, which were undesirable to the point where lands occupied by nomadic and non-farming people were seen as 'empty."[9] Since Western exploration of the Arctic in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it had been consistently likened to a wasteland. Noelle Belanger has connected depictions of the Arctic to strikingly similar depictions of the moon following the invention of photography. Both are shown as flat, monochromatic, alien, inhospitable, cold, and only just out of reach.[10] From the seventeenth to the twentieth century, wasteland has been conceptualized as 'empty' in some way.

The concept of emptiness is, therefore, foundational to the concept of wasteland. In their introduction to the edited volume *Empty Spaces*, Courtney J. Campbell, Allegra Giovine, and Jennifer Keating define emptiness as "containing fewer people, fewer signs of life, [and] fewer traces of human activity," while sharing Di Palma's observation that emptiness is relational and, as a matter of perception, a "highly subjective phenomenon."[11] Though the definition of emptiness is subjective, the explorers discussed by Smith certainly saw the desert as empty in this way. Where emptiness is understood as a lack of humans and human constructions, the question of whether a space is empty is contingent on how people perceive such lacks, "as the outcome of *both* imaginative and physical work."[12] Authors such as Smith, Di Palma, and Joe Lockard argue that areas constructed as empty are never

[8] *Id.*, 43–44.
[9] Smith, *Virgin Land*, 176–177.
[10] Belanger, "'It Looks Like the Surface of the Moon'," 216, 226–228.
[11] Campbell, Giovine, and Keating, "Introduction," 1.
[12] *Id.*, 5. Italics in original.

truly empty, but presenting them this way advances a specific purpose. Likewise, Wendy Harding makes clear that emptiness "is a notion created or constructed by human interactions" and "areas were pronounced empty and conceived of as empty in order to serve precise objectives."[13]

Because both wilderness and wasteland are similarly defined by their conceptual lack of humans, and are thus 'empty,' the differences between them must derive from cultural associations. Wilderness is seen as 'pure' and 'untouched' without humans, and is most associated with rugged nature. The same landscape—a derelict quarry, for example—can be framed either as a wasteland unfit for human habitation or an opportunity to let wilderness take over and 'reclaim' what was lost.[14] These differing approaches to human neglect create a hierarchy between wilderness and wasteland, where a wilderness without humans is preferable and therefore more worthy of conservation or neglect than a wasteland.[15] These two concepts, wilderness and wasteland, have both been applied to the North Slope, but for opposing purposes. When the landscape is seen as a wasteland, oil companies are justified to use it to their liking, while seeing it as wilderness gives conservation efforts their *raison d'être*. Photography, and in particular photographic techniques, can reinforce how a landscape is perceived, whether as a wasteland or a wilderness.

## White Point

The first set of photographs I analyze contain the clearest examples of the oil industry's presentation of Alaska as wasteland. I compare the improvement of this wasteland that comes from the existence of an oil rig to similar arguments made about Alaska's role as a potential nuclear testing site. Subsequently, I argue that while Banerjee's use of size, perspective, and color make his photographs bear resemblance to those produced by the oil industry, the subtle differences in his techniques result in completely different connotations for the same landscape. Fig. 1 shows an oil rig during

[13] Harding, *The Myth*, 10–11.
[14] Di Palma, *Wasteland*, 242–243.
[15] Herrmann, "The Birth," 316.

Figure 1: *Alpine: Western North Slope, Alaska.* Original in color.

wintertime. No wildlife or people that could possibly be affected by the rig are shown; the end of the road tapers into the horizon line, and the landscape is flat and white. The rig seems almost out of place because it is located on a blank landscape where perspective is hard to find. It appears isolated and completely disconnected from anything else.

Fig. 2 is similar, though large parts of the photograph are obscured by a stylized map of Alaska, and the rig is visually smaller. Both fig. 1 and fig. 2 depict Alaska as a wasteland in the sense that there is nothing beyond the oil rig. As with other examples of wastelands, the photographs show Alaska as inhospitable and barren, but they are different in their quite literal depiction of emptiness as a monochromatic white sheet. This presupposed knowledge that flatness and monochromaticity equate to emptiness makes the connotation of the image stronger. The viewers' assumptions play a crucial part in the meaning-making of the photographic techniques.[16] Where the danger of other wastelands comes from both a lack of support for humans and the presence of

[16] Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 201, 208.

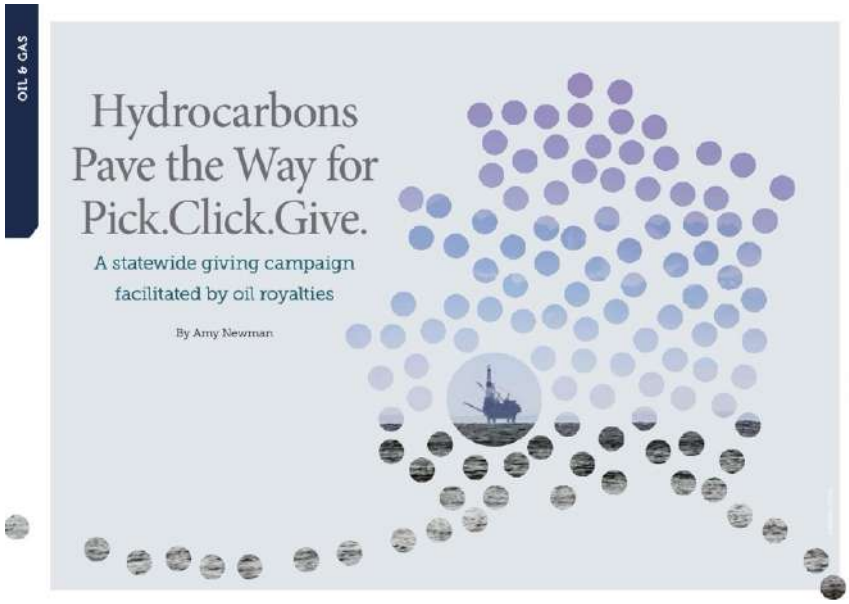


Figure 2: *Hydrocarbons Pave the Way for Pick.Click.Give*. Originally published in *Alaska Business* May, 2023. Original in color.

threats to humans, these images seem to show only a lack. Obscuring large parts of the photograph in fig. 2 serves this purpose further; the only thing of note is the oil rig, and what surrounds it is unimportant. The low saturation and lack of color, as well as the scale of the oil rigs, show isolation, desolation, and a wasteland that humans have turned productive. These small foci, the oil rigs, are making an otherwise useless and empty landscape useful and noteworthy. Their presence is only positive, as there is nothing in the landscape that could possibly be affected by them. In other words, nothing is there but the oil rigs, so no material is damaged by their presence.

The implicit objective of these images is not simply to convince us that the wasteland is being put to good use, but also to depict the Arctic as completely empty to alleviate fears of ecological destruction resulting from oil development. These same arguments, with similar imagery, have also been used by Alaska's political leaders. Former senator Frank Murkowski held up a blank poster board in Washington, D.C., saying, "this is a picture of ANWR [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge] as it exists for about nine months

of the year . . . It's unattractive; don't be misinformed."[17] Another Alaska senator, Ted Stevens, displayed a photograph of the North Slope on national television: "I defy anyone to say that this is a beautiful place that has to be preserved for the future."[18] Parallels can be drawn to the narratives surrounding nuclear testing sites. Lockard has examined these narratives, revealing how nuclear testing within geographic emptiness is justified as causing the least amount of destruction to more important areas. The implicit question Lockard asks is: to what exactly is the least amount of destruction being wrought? Di Palma, Harding, and Lockard all agree that wastelands are constructed through a process of ignoring an area's fullness and construing the space as empty. "These lands have been designated by metropolitan policymakers as suitable sacrificial sites," Lockard argues.[19] Before testing the area must be seen as empty, specifically of humans, and after testing it becomes too irradiated for humans to safely exist in it.[20]

Nuclear testing sites are chosen for their "absent functions rather than present life."[21] And yet, something must still be sacrificed in order to make these places sacrificial sites. Life—including human life—exists in such places, but this is ignored so the areas can be made useful through their destruction.[22] When trying to find a new location to test nuclear weapons in the 1950s, the United States federal government put the moon and the North Slope on the shortlist specifically because of the features that Belanger identifies as working to construe the two as similar, namely a flat and empty landscape and a lack of sizeable human populations. In the end, the North Slope was chosen, with one of the benefits being that it would then be known for something other than emptiness. Before the project could be completed, Native Alaskan resistance to it started a larger movement that eventually led to its cancellation.[23] Similar resistance to new oil developments is the result of efforts to preserve

[17] Quoted in Banerjee, "From Kolkata to Kaktovik," 6–7.
[18] *Ibid.*
[19] Lockard, "Desert(ed) Geographies," 3.
[20] *Id.*, 4.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Kollin, "The Wild, Wild North," 71.

what already exists on the North Slope, and similar messages of emptiness are used to advance these developments, serving to counter such resistance. A key difference between nuclear testing and oil development, however, is that the former is purely destructive, with the amorphous goal of advancing science and security, while the latter has destruction as a side effect to the main goal of extracting matter. This material edge that an oil rig has over a nuclear bomb adds beneficial utility to an otherwise empty wasteland. It is this addition, this positive impact to the landscape, that oil companies employ in their messaging.

In his depictions of the very same North Slope landscapes, Banerjee uses aerial views, similar to that of fig. 1, to accomplish a specific narrative through size, scale, color, and shape. His most well-known photograph *Caribou Migration I*, among others, exemplifies this. From the sky, migrating groups of animals appear tiny compared to the vast, flat landscape around them. White birds contrast with brown tundra, and brown caribou contrast with white ice. Not only is this meant to show how much bigger than them the surrounding ecosystem is, but also to focus on the animals in a process of migration from faraway places. These are not photographs of isolation, like figs. 1 and 2.[24] Banerjee's focus on migrating animals depicts wilderness untouched by humans rather than an empty wasteland that has been put to use. His visually small foci are a means to show large numbers of animals, whereas a visually small oil rig connotes a small aesthetic and environmental impact.[25] Banerjee's use of muted colors to accentuate what does exist on the North Slope, and his choice to reveal its flatness with an aerial view, is meant to depict the landscape as full, meaningful, and big even without humans, in contrast to how I argue these techniques are used in public relations.[26] Even though Banerjee's techniques are similar to those used by oil industry photographers, the resulting message is completely different. Banerjee's depictions are empty of humans, but full of life. This is completely antithetical to the depiction of the very same landscapes by oil industry photography.

[24] Dunaway, "Reframing," 176; *Defending*, 203.
[25] Dunaway, "Reframing," 171.
[26] Dunaway, *Defending*, 202–203.

## Saturation

The next set of industry photographs resemble the traditional view of Alaskan wilderness as minimally impacted by humans as seen in Romanticist art of the State from the nineteenth century, through to the calendars and coffee table books of the twenty-first century. The compatibility of nature, humans, and oil—and the power dynamics therein—connoted by these industry images is compared to the work of Sydney Laurence to argue for his continued influence on Alaskan image-making. Banerjee subverts these narratives of compatibility through his photographs as examples of an opposing way nature, humans, and oil interact on the North Slope. Fig. 3 is an article header in *Alaska Business* depicting a healthy green forest, a healthy river (or so it appears from this perspective), and a minuscule pipe that happens to move through it all. Besides the dirt road that is cut off at the bottom of the photo, no other human impacts can be seen. In many ways the photograph resembles the paintings of Sydney Laurence, where human impact on the land in the foreground is small compared to the strong and eternal presence of mountains in the background.[27] Fig. 4 is a painting of Laurence's, titled *The Streams are Full of Them*, showing a log bear cache used for storing food next to a stream where a person is fishing. A single, looming mountain in the background gives the two subjects in the foreground the perspective needed for the viewer to understand that they are small and insignificant. Isolation and remoteness are signified by the bear cache and the fishing rod being made of natural materials, almost as if taken from the surrounding forest. In the painting there is no sense that other humans or man-made materials are close to this scene. Even the title of the painting suggests that using the land for one's individual gain is warranted, as it will always be able to provide more. The forest is still dense despite human use of its logs and branches, one person cannot possibly fish enough to deplete the stream's stocks, and through everything the mountain remains unmoved. Humans are at the mercy of nature in this idealistic depiction of Alaska, and their

[27] Duffy, "Resource Industry," 143.

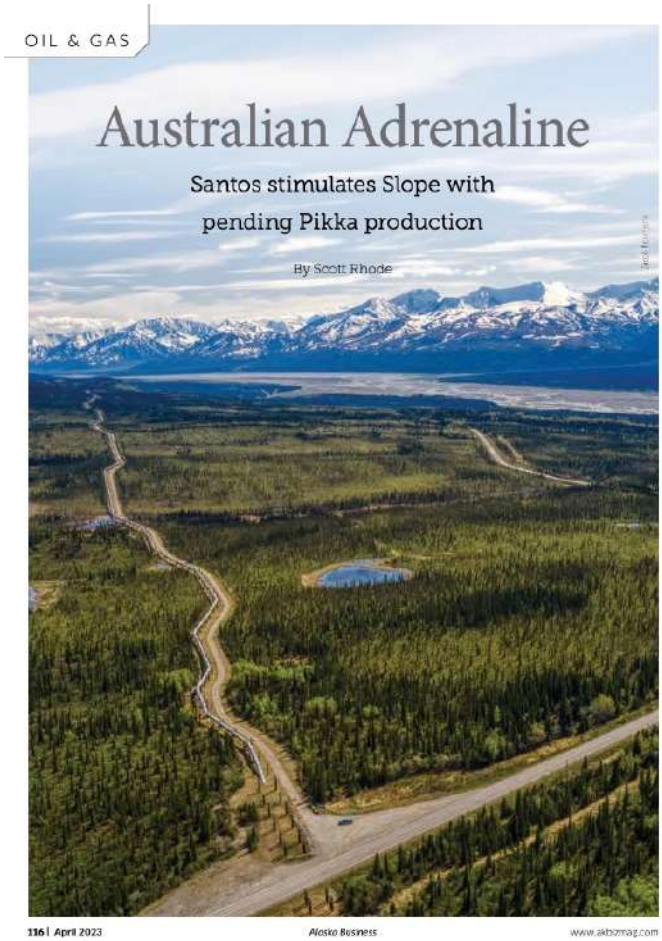


Figure 3: *Australian Adrenaline: Santos Stimulates Slope with Pending Pikka Production.* Originally published in *Alaska Business* April, 2023. Original in color.

presence does little to affect it.

In an advertisement for Udelhoven Oilfield System Services (UOSS) originally published in *Alaska Business* in its 2023 Power List issue, two logos can be seen. The first is a circular seal in the top middle depicting the UOSS logo, and the bottom third of the image is occupied by a transparent logo with 'Udelhoven' written across it in a stylized font. The photograph behind these two logos depicts a nighttime winter scene of mountains and the aurora borealis. The land is mostly obscured by the transparent logo at the bottom, so the

Figure 4: *The Streams are Full of Them.* Sydney Laurence. Ca. 1915-1923. Courtesy of the Dallas Museum of Art. Original in color.

focus of the photograph itself is on the aurora, which is partially covered by the UOSS logo. The transparent logo is also covering a shiny silver-colored pipeline. In this Udelhoven advertisement, the logos superimposed over the photograph are doing a significant amount of signifying work. Without the logos, the focus would be on the pipeline. Instead, because of the transparent logo the pipeline is made less visible, making the aurora the clearest part of the image. Again, the resemblance to Laurence's subject matter is striking. Because the pipeline in the foreground is made less significant by the logo, the focus is on the tips of the mountains not obscured by the transparent logo and on the aurora. The implication of this advertisement's formatting is that human impact on the landscape is minimal; the unceasing and brightly colored aurora and the power of the mountains can withstand any human involvement.

Fig. 3 and the Udelhoven advertisement purport to show how the landscape is impacted by oil development. This impact is depicted as small, and the landscape as resilient to it. In contrast to figs. 1 and 2, where oil rigs are surrounded by nothingness, these pipelines are surrounded by things. If these photographs are to be understood as depicting wilderness instead of wasteland, it is a unique kind of wilderness. The lack of humans is evident, but not the lack of human impact. Instead of showing the landscape with no human impacts at all, as a traditional wilderness photographer might, the photographs instead minimize these impacts. The message is that what little destruction is happening in the wilderness is not enough to ruin it, and that this destruction is necessary to transport oil. Alaska's nature is not fragile enough to be significantly impacted by a pipeline, so this small patch of wilderness is not worth preserving. The photographs are careful to portray enough of a human footprint to show the landscape's resilience to it, but not so much of a footprint that the pipeline would appear to be running through a populated area. In other words, the photographs clearly represent places far away from human habitation, where the presence of a pipeline is less problematic for health or aesthetic reasons. The pipeline photographs establish a hierarchy between humans and nature, where humans are more important. These photographs extend upon Laurence's images; by depicting nature as resilient and eternal, as Laurence does, no amount of intervention will affect it.

Showing Alaska as a wilderness is vital to the pipeline photographs' effectiveness at communicating the insignificance of oil development. The perception that Alaska, especially its North Slope, was untouched by humans made it a more attractive target for development, not less. Fewer people in an area means important matter will be less affected. Whatever did get affected would not be damaged much or could quickly recover from development.[28] Both images show distance from humans, either because of the presence of a dense forest or the presence of colorful aurora borealis denoting distance from areas with light pollution. These symbols of vitality and remoteness are not diminished by a pipeline, especially one whose presence is insignificant. The smallness of the pipelines, the strongly

[28] Kollin, "The Wild, Wild North," 67.

saturated colors, and the presence of looming mountains are techniques also used by painters and landscape photographers, but without the intention to justify oil's extraction from and transportation through these landscapes.

The use of saturated colors in wilderness photography is industry norm, argues Trent University professor Finis Dunaway, citing the vibrancy, perfection, and high drama seen in *National Geographic* magazine photographs.[29] Dunaway has also argued that Banerjee's use of colors is a pointed departure from this industry norm of depicting wilderness as saturated.[30] When Banerjee does not use muted colors, he portrays humans and the effects of anthropogenic climate change through vibrant colors. The aesthetics of a multicolored sunset (*Musk Oxen in the Haze of a Toxic North*) or autumnal forest in the remote Arctic (*Fleeting Autumn*) are juxtaposed with the context that such deep reds and oranges in the sky are usually caused by air pollution, and trees this far north can only be the result of a warming climate.[31] The photographs themselves do not give this context, but their associated captions do. Dunaway argues that while in a standard museum or photographic exhibition the captions next to the displays expand upon or reinforce the messages already connoted by the exhibits themselves, Banerjee's captions subvert those messages.[32] By contradicting the images, the texts imbue them with new meanings that would otherwise be lost.[33] Whereas in traditional landscape photography the use of a wide range of saturated colors usually signals fullness, life, and vitality, Banerjee uses this technique to connote a vulnerable landscape already impacted by humans. In this way the photographs commissioned by oil companies take more inspiration from traditional landscape photography than do Banerjee's. Narratives of nature's strength and permanence are undermined by Banerjee's use of color. His photographs appear to show wilderness, but if even the remote north

[29] Dunaway, *Defending*, 202.
[30] Dunaway, "Reframing," 169.
[31] Banerjee, "From Kolkata to Kaktovik," 8; Dunaway, "Reframing," 169.
[32] Dunaway, "Reframing," 168.
[33] Barthes, "The Photographic Message," 206.

of Alaska bear the marks of human life then wilderness as it was once imagined does not exist, and perhaps never did.

## Bokeh

In this section, I examine a series of ConocoPhillips advertisements originally published in *Alaska Business* between June and October, 2023, in terms of the oil company's impact on human well-being. I then compare them to the representation of human well-being in Banerjee's photography. In these different visions of the North Slope, what the landscape is filled with, and ultimately what happens when it is emptied, I will argue, communicates the relationship between humans and the landscape differently in each photographic genre. This series of one-page advertisements each show the same aerial view of an oil rig. What is notable about this photograph is that it depicts the oil rig in the summertime, surrounded by flat green grass or moss. In the series a separate photograph is spliced through the oil rig photograph at an angle, each depicting a different individual. They are smiling, wearing safety glasses and ConocoPhillips-branded hard hats. Above their heads are written a first name and job titles. Below the oil rig are the words "more than oil," with a block of text beneath that discussing the company's effects on Alaska's workforce. Unlike the wintertime photograph seen in fig. 1, these photographs are all in full color (i.e., rather than having low saturation or the complete absence of color). The presence of human faces sends a completely different message than any of the other oil industry images. The inclusion of humans with names makes the advertisement more personal. Yes, the oil rig is in this green field, but its existence is justified because these employees and thousands like them would otherwise be out of their jobs. These advertisements are human-centric in a distinct way from the other oil industry images. The inclusion of humanity, rather than its specific exclusion, gives oil infrastructure meaning beyond resource extraction and environmental destruction; if the wasteland is actually full of things worth preserving, these things are nonetheless not worth preserving at the expense of human well-being. What the advertisement explicitly says is that the company does more than drill for oil, but what it implicitly says is that humanity depends on the company's continued operations.

There is a pattern presented by the oil industry in figs. 1, 2, 3, and the Udelhoven and ConocoPhillips advertisements that Lockard also identified in his study on nuclear testing. Figs. 1 and 2 show a place as empty and therefore worthy of destructive improvement—if destroying nothingness is even possible. If it is not possible, there is nothing in the place worthy of preservation anyway. And even if there is something worthy of preservation, the benefits of extracting oil outweigh the cost, as shown in the series of ConocoPhillips advertisements. But at the very least, fig. 3 and the Udelhoven advertisement show the places that are worthy of preservation, the ones that undoubtedly are full, as protected by distance from oil infrastructure—or nuclear testing, as Lockard argues—and so operations ought to continue.[34] Symbols of wasteland's emptiness, isolation, remoteness, resilience, insignificance, and worthlessness are all used to portray limited or nonexistent destruction of whatever may exist in the landscape. But the oil industry's impact is not limited to an aesthetic interruption of an apparently untouched wilderness, as their photographs might suggest; the industry is known to cause frequent spills, habitat fragmentation, and pollution, resulting in ecosystem damage, biodiversity loss, and poorer health in Iñupiat communities.[35] These concerns resulted in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline being the first major American infrastructure project required to provide an Environmental Impact Statement detailing how the landscape and ecosystem would be affected by it.[36] Each time new oil developments are proposed, they must overcome not only the challenges of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) but also their reputation of destruction despite NEPA's requirements. Destruction is a known outcome of oil development, but because its main objective is extracting matter this destruction must be justified; messages about wasteland and emptiness, the strength of wilderness, and the economy and human well-being work together to depict the Arctic in a specific, profitable, way.

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[34] Lockard, "Desert(ed) Geographies," 5.
[35] Wang, "The Arctic," 51–52; Dunaway, *Defending* 246; Glenn, Itta, and Napageak Jr., "Local Perspectives," 612.
[36] Herrmann, "The Birth," 316.

Banerjee's photographs again stand in contrast to this ethos, while his landscape photography has become more political than others. He does not shy away from depicting human use of the landscape, and instead undermines both the wasteland narratives of oil companies and the wilderness narratives of conservationists. He photographs Iñupiat and Gwich'in hunters butchering whale, caribou, and moose meat.[37] In other photographs, Banerjee depicts these same species migrating to the North Slope. The well-being of humans is shown as contingent on the fullness that these animals provide to the landscape. Should the wildlife disappear, so too will the people, and then the land will truly be empty. Bright red moose filets contrast against the dull hull of a motorboat and the inky water below, and the deep crimson of a caribou being butchered contrasts with white snow and the black coats of the hunters in Banerjee's series titled *Gwich'in and The Caribou*. Where in the images of oil infrastructure the landscape is empty but for oil, in Banerjee's photographs the landscape is starved but for the wildlife and the people who depend on it. In both cases the disappearance of the photographs' focus would leave only emptiness. Banerjee shows through his photographs and tells through his words that oil development is a threat to the things and people that already exist on the North Slope.[38]

## Rendering

It is the extraction of matter that makes oil companies' portrayal of wasteland different from others. Northern Alaska is not depicted as a fragile and untouched wilderness, nor is it depicted as a place incompatible with human survival containing nothing of value. What is to be gained from human development of this wasteland is not just the nebulous concepts of power and expansionism that Henry Nash Smith identified within nineteenth-century America, but tangible oil that is pumped with the oil rigs and transported by the pipeline.[39] All of the photographs analyzed here are taken far away from population centers and cities in some of the most remote places on

[37] Dunaway, *Defending*, 199 and "Reframing," 173.
[38] Banerjee, "From Kolkata to Kaktovik," 15.
[39] Smith, *Virgin Land*, 7–8.

Earth. This human element of wasteland, or rather the lack of any human element, is central to the message that these photographs convey. Oil developments in Alaska that are too close to villages or that threaten subsistence food harvests are consistently blocked by Native Alaskan organizations.[40] If photography can erase these obstacles from the landscape, which is then conceptually emptied, that landscape can be filled again with an oil rig generating profit.

The relationship between wilderness and wasteland is not a binary one, where each concept is located at an extreme; wilderness and wasteland are similar in more ways than they are different. This article has shown how the subjective nature of these concepts can be used strategically. When photographing the same landscapes in similar ways, different connotations can only be made through carefully manipulating photographic techniques and paratextual elements. In the past, Alaska has been depicted in absolutes: either as wilderness *or* wasteland. Alaska has also been depicted in terms of its various natural resources, where human exploitation of them and questions of sustainability affect how people view the land. Photography's role as a perfect denotation of reality not only gives the medium a powerful persuasive edge but also provides the opportunity to depict separate, even conflicting, subjective realities. Alaska is polysemic, and the many depictions of it collectively corroborate this.

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# What Is the Matter with Water? An Interview with Rosanne van der Voet

Rik J. Janssen, co-authored with Nicolas Turner

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The roots of the humanities lie in the Renaissance curriculum of the *studia humanitatis*, literally the 'study of humanity.' The human, therefore, is centered in many humanities disciplinary practices and methodologies, including across fields as diverse as literature, law, and history. In our current moment of environmental crisis, however, this assumption about the centrality of the human to the humanities faces challenges, including from the writer and lecturer Rosanne van der Voet. Having recently completed her PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom, Rosanne is now a Lecturer in Urban Studies and Environmental Humanities at Leiden University. Rosanne's work focuses on making nonhuman experiences of the oceanic environmental crisis visible by employing creative-critical writing techniques grounded in ecocriticism and the blue humanities.

Rosanne, who grew up in The Hague, has been fascinated by the coast and sea since childhood. In her PhD project, "Tentacular Textuality and Anthropocenic Seas: A Medusa Poetics" (defended in 2023), she explored new writing techniques to anchor marine animals' perspectives on and experiences of the oceanic crisis. She uses the 'otherness' of jellyfish and the jellyfish life cycle as a literary structuring device to make the experiences of marine animals tangible. Rosanne also holds an MA in Literature, Landscape, and Environment from Bath Spa University (2017) and a BA in European Studies: Literature and Culture from the University of Amsterdam (2016). By incorporating personal experiences and narratives into her work, Rosanne aims to make the global challenges we face more personally relatable and, therefore, more

tangible and emotionally resonant. Using experimental writing techniques that fuse critical and creative elements allows Rosanne to offer a new perspective on the environmental crisis, one that moves away from a human-centric approach and deploys the tools of literature to connect scientific insights with the imagination.

Rosanne's goal of making the complexity of the environmental crisis tangible offers new ways to explore the central theme of this year's LEAP: matter and materiality. Her work's interdisciplinary and creative approach also embodies LEAP's broader goal to be a space for exploring the humanities in all its forms. The interview below, conducted in the spring of 2024, represents my own creative approach to the traditional interview format, with my interpretations of Rosanne's thoughts conveyed in the third person and put into three loose groupings: concepts, the Netherlands, and the future. While Rosanne reviewed these interpretations, all errors are, of course, my own.

## Concepts

Matter and materiality—the theme of this year's LEAP—are essential aspects of Rosanne's research, which builds on insights from new materialism and material ecocriticism. These fields emerge from the conviction that for too long, the role of materiality was lacking in Western philosophical thought as the Enlightenment centered a notion of 'reason' that cemented the idea of human exceptionalism and neglected the role of bodily experience in the development of theoretical formations.

With her own bodily and material experience as a starting point, Rosanne aims to materialize (i.e., make material) the complexity of the environmental crisis through narrative. In the context of global environmental emergency, we can no longer afford to pretend that humanity is cut off from material processes; we are now being made aware of the increasingly disrupted material processes of which we have always been part. By exposing these material links between human activity and environmental impact, Rosanne's work makes the crisis more tangible. In particular, raising awareness of the material connections between humanity and nature will have a key role in driving a response to this moment of environmental emergency. For Rosanne, it is therefore an ethical

imperative to return to matter and break down the false binaries that underpin the environmental crisis.

Exploring how a creative and experimental writing process can represent nonhuman experiences is central to Rosanne's research. European modernity emphasizes human superiority, omitting nonhuman perspectives and perpetuating a strict dichotomy between nature and culture. To break down this dichotomy, Rosanne works to respect the 'otherness' of animals by acknowledging the complexity and unknowability of nonhuman experience while, at the same time, centering the nonhuman perspective. In doing so, she explores the potential and the limits of human language, acknowledging the gap between representation and bodily nonhuman experience. In this context, Rosanne's writing process itself functions for her as a first step away from anthropocentrism and towards a dialogue with other beings.

The notion of 'tangibility' helps underpin Rosanne's centering of nonhuman experience. For Rosanne, "the concept of tangibility refers to literary representation, entailing an embodied, emotional, local, and concrete sense of a global problem." This is where the complexity of environmental crises comes into play. There is not one single form this crisis takes but a range of overlapping crises driven by human behavior. One of Rosanne's most significant challenges is exploring these various expressions of crisis and connecting them to the broad, global crisis of which they form part. Currently humanity can seem overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of the crisis, lingering in inaction or ineffective, insufficient measures. This failure to act shows that the environmental crisis is also a crisis of the imagination, suggesting that facts and statistics alone are insufficient to change behavior. In addition, we need a new story about our human selves and our relationship to our wider nonhuman context, connecting the global and the local as well as the factual and the emotional.

## The Netherlands

Traditionally, the low-lying position of the Netherlands has set the Dutch in constant competition with the sea and water. In this context, water was often depicted as an enemy to society, illustrated by metaphors such as the Waterwolf—the image of a hungry wolf

devouring the land. Water management measures associated with this frame of thought are aimed at keeping the water out; for example, building dikes and seawalls, and reclaiming land. This approach has also created a specific narrative about Dutch national identity in relation to water. There is a sense that the Dutch will be able to resolve any issues around rising sea levels and climate change with technological fixes. This approach risks lingering in a sense of power and arrogance about Dutch expertise while leaving unchallenged an underlying narrative of humanity's domination of nature, which the environmental crisis has shown to be increasingly problematic.

In recent decades, however, there has been a shift in the Dutch water management approach towards more nature-based solutions. Rather than keeping water out, the government is increasingly framing new policies as 'working with nature' and 'building with water.' This demonstrates a political awareness that the old approach is no longer productive and nature-based solutions, such as coastal wetlands and extended natural riverbanks, can contribute to both human safety and biodiversity. Rosanne examines how these new projects begin to tell a different story that erodes the traditional nature-culture binary reflected in earlier measures aimed at separating human and nonhuman realms. The fact that humans are working with nature suggests we are part of nature, necessitating an effort to understand how ecosystems work in order to employ this knowledge for water management purposes. Given that this approach brings the added benefit of increased biodiversity, it may also open the way for a less anthropocentric politics, potentially even a post-anthropocentric politics in which nonhuman interests are conceived as an integral concern.

Through her involvement with ARK Rewilding Nederland, Rosanne is working to bring her research into broader dialogue with this political turn, reaching outside the academy to society at large. ARK promotes nature conservation and restoration and is active in many rewilding projects in the Netherlands, for example through a project that reintroduces tides into the Rhine and Meuse estuaries. This is a valuable nature-based solution that improves flood resilience and river biodiversity, given many plants and animals depend on the interplay between fresh and saltwater. In this context,

Rosanne's current project with ARK focuses on the city of Rotterdam and its future in times of rising sea levels. Although Rotterdam is situated in the Rhine-Meuse delta, it is not commonly associated with nature. This perception is slowly changing with the return of the tides and natural riverbanks on, for example, the island of Brienenoord. Together with ARK, Rosanne organizes writing workshops for local residents in Rotterdam on the themes of nature, water, and the future of the city. Locals are asked to share their personal stories about Rotterdam and are invited to imagine a future story of the city in which various new plants and animals have made Rotterdam their home. By exploring a connection between the human and nonhuman inhabitants of the city in these stories, the human community begins a dialogue with nonhuman voices. For any new water management policies to be effective, it is crucial that they be supported and co-created with local communities. Rosanne's workshops aim to provide a space for the conversations that underpin this co-creation.

## The Future

Moving forward, Rosanne intends to further examine the intersection of environmental crisis and the city, with a particular focus on developing synergies between the blue humanities and urban studies. In the midst of an accelerating environmental crisis, urbanization is also on the rise globally. For any solutions to be effective, it is therefore imperative to tackle the environmental crisis at the urban level. Rosanne argues that we need more research to understand how cities can become climate-neutral, greener, and more biodiverse. According to Rosanne, to achieve this outcome humanity also needs a new story about cities as complex assemblages of human and nonhuman communities. This is what the humanities and a creative-critical approach can contribute.

To take on this role, however, Rosanne argues that humanities research needs to become less anthropocentric. In particular, she hopes that there will be more consideration of more-than-human perspectives and a move away from the idea of human superiority that prevails in both academia and wider society.

Rosanne ended our conversation with some advice for emerging scholars thinking of taking a more creative approach to

their research. She suggested that the best path is to focus on your interests, whatever they may be. Creative writing has various forms and does not have to be academic per se. Therefore, experimentation is vital. Rosanne suggested that one way to experiment is through automatic writing exercises: designate a specific theme and write on it for a couple of minutes without stopping to pause or edit. While the outcome will probably be a bit chaotic, Rosanne advises that this process can shed light on connections and parallels you may have overlooked at first, which can then become a great starting point for beginning a new piece of writing. Given that much of her work is situated in the coastal context, Rosanne also incorporates fieldwork into her creative practice. For Rosanne, this includes walking along the beach while taking notes and photographing things that inspire her.

For Rosanne, the best way to benefit from these creative writing exercises is to share them with others, such as a select group of friends with whom you share a blog about your fieldwork. Start small, ask your readers for feedback, and experiment with that feedback as you revise your writing. While feedback is useful, Rosanne reminds those starting out not to be too discouraged by skepticism around one's creative methods or own abilities. Before Rosanne started her PhD in creative writing, she did not have any other degrees in the field. While broadening one's disciplinary horizons takes time, it is certainly possible; don't let others make you believe that it is not.

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PART THREE

# POLITICS

# Religiosity, Identity, and Non-material Politics in Brazil: The Role of Evangelical Christianity in the 2018 Presidential Campaign of Jair Bolsonaro

Nicolás Vargas Varillas

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According to the newspaper *A Folha de São Paulo*, approximately 26% of Brazilians considered themselves to be of evangelical faith in 2019. While this remains a lower proportion of the population than the approximately 51% who consider themselves Catholic—making Brazil home to the world's largest number of Catholics—evangelicals are a significant and growing group. As a result of its increasing demographic weight, this sizable minority has also become an important political force in Brazil. Following the 2018 elections, 107 deputies in the Chamber of Deputies and 81 senators in the Federal Senate were of evangelical faith, representing around a fifth of the total representatives in each chamber. This, added to the 67% electoral share that Jair Bolsonaro obtained within the evangelical community in 2018, reflects the increasing political importance of evangelicals in Brazil. In his 2018 electoral campaign, Bolsonaro, although of Catholic faith, agreed to participate in evangelical events on various occasions, and was even baptized in the evangelical faith. This represents Bolsonaro's broader personal and political tendency towards bringing the interests and positions of evangelical groups into the mainstream political arena. Bolsonaro characterized his 2018 campaign under the motto "Brazil above all, God above all," which sealed an evident relationship of mutual support that existed between him and the politically involved and conservative-leaning evangelical churches in Brazil, which have a stronger political mobilizing capacity than their Catholic counterparts. Ultimately, this

support catapulted Bolsonaro to victory in Brazil's 2018 general election, where his opponent was Fernando Haddad, a former mayor of São Paulo and a member of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT), which had ruled Brazil throughout most of the twenty-first century.

In this article I examine the drivers behind this political alliance between Bolsonaro and Brazilian evangelicals, in particular the ideological overlaps that facilitated their shared agenda. I read this alliance through the lens of the 'material' and 'non-material' to explain the political situation in Brazil during the 2018 election. These terms are an original way to examine Brazilian politics, but the broad dichotomy they set up is developed from the work of Víctor Araújo, who has argued that the voting behavior of evangelical denominations in the Brazilian electoral landscape tends to be motivated by issues involving 'morality' and 'values,' or what he describes as 'identitarian guidelines.'[1] This article, consequently, is in dialogue with academic scholarship on identity politics, understood as the basing of political projects on identitarian aspects of a particular group of people (such as ethnicity, religious affiliation, etc.). Drawing on this scholarship, I define 'material' politics as focused on the economic and social benefits a candidate promises, such as improvements to infrastructure or public services, while I understand 'non-material' politics as focused on notions of morality and values. To make this argument, I focus on the overlaps between Bolsonaro and the evangelicals on issues related to the armed forces, other key groups (such as the agricultural export sector), and political rivals (such as the PT and the wider political left). I do this through an analysis of a diversity of sources related to the 2018 Brazilian presidential election, such as the government plans presented both by Bolsonaro and his rival, Fernando Haddad, as well as journalistic accounts and relevant academic literature. This approach builds on and expands the work of Taylor Boas and Amy Erica, who proposed that the PT's lean towards 'sexuality politics' during the 2010s pushed a majority of evangelical Christians into a deep-seated opposition to the PT and, by the 2018 election, into

[1] Araújo, "Pentecostalismo," 518–9.

providing decisive support for Bolsonaro.[2] In this article, I extend Boas and Erica's insight by examining the common grounds on which these evangelical groups found it logical to support the Bolsonaro candidacy, creating a programmatic alliance that proved decisive for Bolsonaro's victory in the 2018 Brazilian elections. This article will begin with a brief historical overview of the rise of evangelicalism in Brazil, followed by an analysis of three important sites of overlap between Bolsonaro and the evangelicals, and conclude with some brief remarks that summarize my key findings and relate them back to the central theoretical claim about material and non-material politics.

## Identity Politics and its Non-Material Dimension

Identity politics has been defined by the historian Mark Mazower as a shift towards "political activism increasingly revolv[ing] . . . around issues of 'identity'" rather than social class, particularly "'national,' 'cultural,' [or] 'gender'" identities. This shift results in what Anthony Giddens defines as 'life politics,' the sense that communities are increasingly dealing with "biological, emotional and existential concerns" that appear to be repressed in more traditional ways of doing politics.[3] Explaining this further, the cultural theorist Todd McGowan opposes identity politics to the dominant politics of the twentieth century, in which individuals committed themselves to an abstract idea, such as socialism. Instead, McGowan argues, identity politics relates to an individual's self-perception and essential understanding of their ontology. By this, he means that identity politics sustains itself on the perceived risk of the disappearance of the traditional characteristics on which an individual builds their identity, such as religious or cultural traditions and norms. In contrast, McGowan argues, losing commitment to a political ideology such as socialism doesn't raise the same existential fears about the disappearance of an individual's foundational norms.[4] As a result, identity politics focuses less on improving the material conditions of various groups and more on issues that achieve

[2] Boas, *Evangelicals*, 142–4.
[3] Giddens, quoted in Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 169.
[4] McGowan, *Universality*, 149–52.

cultural salience in relation to the existential self-understandings of those groups.[5]

These characteristics of identity politics also relate to the concept of ideology, especially when analyzing identity in the context of national ideologies. As Knud Larsen argues, the key role of ideology in the context of a nation or, more broadly, in any collective context, is to provide individuals with a sense of belonging and security. Rules and beliefs are stressed across society, sometimes by force, to create a cohesive and integrated order within society and sustain the political practices occurring at the highest level of national administration. In addition, this sense of collective identity can be used to generate a clear line separating those who belong and those who do not.[6] Finally, ideology plays a role in providing individuals and collectives with a space for identification within the unstable arena of political life, creating a common base for the creation of a sense of belonging and therefore offering a 'non-precarious identity.' This 'non-precarious identity' serves as a key pillar for the development of what I am defining as the non-material in the realm of politics.[7] Ideology, therefore, plays an important role in determining the cleavages that identity politics may take, depending on the specificities of the context in which this type of political behavior is identified, and serves as a key driver for shaping identities and creating common ground amongst different communities.

Drawing on this understanding of the rise of identity politics, rooted in the self-perception and identity of groups, I propose to speak more broadly about the nature of non-material politics. In this form of politics, issues are born first from perceived threats to an individual's identity and cultural practices; hence, political positions express a desire for group protection. The critical component of non-material politics is that voting behavior is driven by policies that relate to identitarian concerns, for example around social issues such as abortion or LGBTQ+ rights. These can be regarded as 'values' or 'morality' issues, rather than policies focused on offering

[5] O'Neill, *Essentials*, 114.
[6] Larsen et al., "Ideology and Identity," 166.
[7] Warren, "Ideology and the Self," 617–8.

potential voters material improvements to their lives (e.g., the implementation of social welfare or poverty alleviation programs).[8] Non-material politics can create an 'us vs. them' situation in the political arena. In the 1933 Brazilian Constitutional Assembly election, for instance, evangelical Christians sided strongly with evangelical candidates, who feared the possibility of the new constitution making the country a secular state.[9] This fear led to the evangelical saying "brother votes brother" (*irmão vota em irmão*), reflecting the tendency of evangelical Christians to side with those with whom they shared a religious bond, rather than building alliances over specific political proposals.[10] As this tendency suggests, in the Brazilian context identitarian politics is often religiously inflected, and the rise of evangelicalism has therefore had a significant impact on the development of non-material politics. It is therefore essential to understand the genealogy of political evangelicalism to explain the non-material factors affecting the outcome of the 2018 election.

## The Rise of Evangelical Politics in Brazil

The political importance of evangelicals in Brazil can be traced to the constituent assembly of 1986. Prior to the 1986 election, Brazil's non-Catholic Christian denominations had a stable but minimal representation in the country's different constituent elections. This representation was mainly organized around the perceived threat of increased national political influence by the Catholic Church, which was suspected of pressuring different political groups, such as political parties, to promote a preferential regime for the Catholic faith, or even to make Catholicism an official religion.[11] In the 1986 election, however, the Pentecostal denomination managed to place 14 representatives in parliament, helping to double the evangelical representation in this body and giving birth to the term 'evangelical caucus.'[12]

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[8] Araújo, "Pentecostalismo," 517–8.
[9] Boas, *Evangelicals*, 116.
[10] Rodrigues-Silveira and Urizzi, "Evangélicos," 563. [My translation]
[11] Boas, *Evangelicals*, 113.
[12] *Ibid.*

Although this evangelical caucus has sometimes had members sympathetic to the political left, its members have usually leaned towards more conservative political positions, linking the caucus with parties on the political right.[13] This is partly due to the good relations between evangelical leaders and the Brazilian dictatorship of 1964 to 1985, which was itself a product of the clientelist nature of the regime. To maintain support, the regime looked to evangelical leaders who could win public support for the regime from certain sectors of the population. Starting in 1968, for example, the regime subsidized local evangelical churches in the state of Pará in exchange for support from the leadership of said churches.[14] In other states, the government handed out radio broadcasting licenses to evangelical churches and placed members of these churches in key local administration positions.

With the arrival of democracy in 1986, various neo-Pentecostal denomination groups developed a strategy to attract followers and increase the financial strength of the evangelical churches. This strategy, known as 'Prosperity Theology,' continues to be based on the ritualization of donations (i.e., the tithe) in exchange for receiving economic benefits from God. This—added to the community roots of these churches—creates a mechanism of non-material exchange, spiritually sanctioning the individual and collective economic well-being of these churches' members.[15] Entering the twenty-first century, accumulation of capital through tithe donations allowed various evangelical groups to increase their ability to influence local politics. One venue for this influence is the Evangelical Parliamentary Front, a pressure or lobbying group founded in 2003. As a result of the fragility of the open list electoral system in Brazil, various candidates sought support from pressure groups—including the Evangelical Parliamentary Front—for their campaigns, allowing evangelical groups not only to influence these candidates but also to propose their own candidates.[16] As a result, it

[13] Brasil Fonseca, "Religion and Democracy," 164–5.
[14] Boas, *Evangelicals*, 106–7.
[15] Dengah, "Being Part of the Nação," 50; Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 156.
[15] Pagliarini, "Tongues of Fire," 6–8.
[16] Rodrigues-Silveira and Urizzi, "Evangélicos," 564; Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 156.

is easy for evangelical pressure groups to bring their agendas, based primarily on maintaining tax benefits and promoting a socially conservative agenda, into the political debate.[17] Additionally, they demonstrated an ability to direct the electoral preferences of their members towards specific candidates, leading the evangelical churches to emerge by 2018 as strong political actors in that year's elections, with both high levels of social loyalty and a sustainable financial situation.[18]

## The Bolsonaro-Evangelical Alliance

When he stood for election in 2018, Bolsonaro was no newcomer to the mainstream Brazilian political scene. Bolsonaro began his political career as a member of the Rio de Janeiro city council, where he served between 1989 and 1991, and was subsequently a member of the lower house of the Brazilian parliament until the 2018 elections. Throughout these years, Bolsonaro made a name for himself in the political landscape as someone aligned with right-wing politics, and even ultra-conservativism. Bolsonaro was consistently opposed to the LGBTQ+ community in Brazil, and proposed legislation in favor of arming rural landowners to defend themselves from potential invasions by the Sem Terra movement.[19] Additionally, Bolsonaro presented a nostalgic view of the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil in the second half of the twentieth century.[20] In the twenty-first century, these positions allowed Bolsonaro to portray himself as a clear critic of the ruling PT, which, led by Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, carried out a series of left-of-center policies, such as redistributing property and granting social protections to indigenous groups and sexual minorities, who are often perceived as vulnerable in Brazilian society. In 2016, however, Lula da Silva's successor as president and PT leader, Dilma Rousseff, was impeached following corruption accusations. Rousseff was opposed by the more conservative sectors of Brazilian politics,

[17] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 163.
[18] Lacerda, "Assessing the Strength," 8–10.
[19] Martín, "Os Gays Não São Semideuses;" See also: "Bolsonaro Chega a Cuiabá Defendendo."
[20] Melito, "Jair Bolsonaro Defende."

who disliked the increasingly progressive politics of her administration, including on issues such as the protection of indigenous communities and environmental leaders in the Amazon. The conservatives were also displeased with her administration for floating the idea that abortion be included as a right in the Brazilian constitution. In this context, Bolsonaro emerged as a prominent opponent who campaigned in the 2018 elections as the face of the opposition to the left-wing and, it was suggested, corrupt PT. The traditionally conservative evangelical Christian groups in Brazil saw Bolsonaro as a potentially attractive candidate, due not only to his own socially conservative stance, but also because of his record of fierce opposition to the PT, which saw its legitimacy eroded because of its ongoing corruption scandals. In this article, I argue that the alliance between evangelicals and Bolsonaro went beyond mere convenience, however, and was grounded in ideological overlaps, which I will examine in three key areas: their socially conservative agendas; a shared sympathy for the armed forces; and a similarly shared sympathy with another important group in the Brazilian context: the agricultural sector.

## The Conservative Social Agenda

One reason for evangelicals' tacit and explicit support for Bolsonaro's presidential candidacy and subsequent administration is the ideological and programmatic similarities that these actors share. These similarities are evident in the socially conservative positions that exist in the discourses of Bolsonaro and evangelicalism. Although it is true that evangelical groups have had rapprochements with the governments of the PT for much of the twenty-first century, these relations have worsened over the years. It is important to mention that José Alencar, vice president during Lula da Silva's first governments, converted to the evangelical faith towards the end of his life, which could be considered a symbolic approach of the evangelicals towards Lula. The relationship between evangelicals and the PT, however, has eroded since 2009, driven in part by the PT's political shift toward a social agenda driven by identitarian claims around gender and sexual identity. The PT's 2018 presidential plan, for instance, includes sexual education and LGBTQ+ issues in the national education curriculum.

Furthermore, the plan gave a central role to issues around male-female equality, claiming, for instance that "all public policies, from design to execution, must have an analysis of gender impact, as well as the direct participation of the Ministry of Women's affairs."[21] The Bolsonaro candidacy, in contrast, gave an important role to defeating 'cultural Marxism' and its variants, which were proposed as a threat to the stability of the family and the values of the nation.[22] As a result, social conservatives found themselves closer to the positions proposed by Bolsonaro's plan than they did to the more progressive positions of the PT.[23]

The socially conservative positions preached by evangelical groups have been largely consistent over time, even as evangelicals have historically supported different parties. The leaders of evangelical groups, unlike their Catholic counterparts, have prioritized addressing issues related to the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, abortion, and gender, among others. In a survey carried out by Smith, the 'wrath of God' was amongst the punishments most feared by members of evangelical churches in Brazil, a punishment that they understood as being likely to 'fall' on members of the LGBTQ+ community and supporters of any of the identitarian rights listed above.[24] Support for LGBTQ+ rights, abortion rights, and gender equality, amongst other positions, considered contrary to the doctrine of their churches, have played a fundamental role in the construction of evangelical discourse in Brazil, leading members of evangelical churches to incorporate these opposing discourses and positions actively in their lives.[25] These discourses tends to have more influence because of the existence of a 'threat of exclusion,' under which evangelicals feel pressured to actively participate in their churches and defend their churches' doctrines, under the threat of being excluded from them.[26] This threat makes it easier for preachers to disseminate political messages, creating a collective negative moral judgment toward a more liberal social agenda and

[21] Partido dos Trabalhadores, "Plan de Governo," 20. [My translation]
[22] Partido Social Liberal, "Prosperidade," 5–8.
[23] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 150.
[24] Smith, *Religion*, 64.
[25] *Id.*, 68.
[26] *Ibid.*

sometimes even "promising hell," as evangelical preacher Silas Malafaia once did, to liberals.[27]

Bolsonaro's popularity rose among these evangelical groups because of his own conservative stance on the same social issues. Despite not being evangelical, Bolsonaro developed campaign rhetoric like that of the evangelicals. The clearest example of this was Bolsonaro's campaign slogan, which was even present in all official documents, including his government plan: "Brazil above all and God above all." This phrase has been accompanied by statements where Bolsonaro even declared himself opposed to the secular state in Brazil, proposing to replace it with a 'Christian' one.[28] Moreover, the Bolsonaro campaign's government plan included an introductory section that presented "values and compromises." Amongst these, an assertion that respect for the family is 'sacred' and an argument that the state has no right to interfere in individuals' familial lives suggest Bolsonaro's social conservatism. Furthermore, Bolsonaro's campaign plan accused former PT governments of indoctrination and introducing 'precocious sexualization' to school-age children. The inclusion of these matters in the government plan, and the urgent tone with which the plan presents them (written with red highlighting or capital letters), denotes the hardline position of the Bolsonaro campaign, marking clearly its position on social issues in Brazil and allowing it to stand out from the PT.[29]

Shared positions on social issues allowed an understanding and then an alliance to be formed between Bolsonaro and certain evangelical leaders. A notable example is the case of pastor Malafaia. In 2018, Malafaia led the Rio de Janeiro branch of the neo-Pentecostal church Assambleia de Deus, which then had more than 12 million followers throughout Brazil. Malafaia, along with Michelle Bolsonaro, wife of the future president, was among the biggest critics of the National Human Rights Plan (PNDH3) presented in 2009. Malafaia's opposition stemmed from the fact that this plan contained a legal route to the decriminalization of abortion in Brazil. Malafaia referred to the PNDH3 as a "shame to

[27] "Silas Malafaia Afirma em Vídeo que Aborto é Pior do que Estupro."
[28] AJ+ Español, "¿Por qué Muchos Evangélicos."
[29] Partido Social Liberal, "Prosperidade," 4, 41.

humanity" and, in preparation for the 2010 elections, he personally financed propaganda in Rio de Janeiro calling to "defend the family and the human being."[30] Malafaia's church has a leading doctrinal document known as the *Declaration of Faith*, where the expected beliefs and behaviors of its members are clearly stated. In this document, for instance, homosexuality is firmly categorized as a sinful path and the family is defined as a sacred institution created by God. The previous links between Malafaia and the Bolsonaro family, exemplified by their shared rejection of the PNDH3, helped Malafaia to acquire proximity with the then-candidate Bolsonaro in 2018 and hence to appear as an initial potential supporter.

This alliance was sealed in the run-up to the 2018 presidential elections, when Fernando Haddad replaced Lula da Silva as the PT candidate, representing a major upheaval and a clear point of cleavage in the 2018 presidential race. During his term as mayor of São Paulo, Haddad blocked the construction of a university owned by a local evangelical church and opposed the construction of another evangelical church in the city.[31] Evangelical groups subsequently carried out a successful media campaign against Haddad, whom they described as an 'abortionist' and accused of distributing a 'gay kit' while mayor of São Paulo.[32] These groups also targeted Haddad's vice-presidential candidate, Manuela d'Avila, who was accused of wanting to abolish Christian festivities in Brazil.

Evangelical groups' history of clashes with the PT and ability to wage a media war on PT candidacies bolstered support for Bolsonaro's candidacy.[33] Bolsonaro benefited from this media war against his opponent and from evangelical voters' resulting fears of showing explicit support for the PT candidacy, given that such support would mean breaking the discursive line proposed by some of the most powerful evangelical leaders in the country.[34]

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[30] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 164–5.
[31] *Id.*, 166.
[32] Pagliarini, "Tongues of Fire," 11; Machado and Franco, "Eleições 2018."
[33] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 168.
[34] Pagliarini, "Tongues of Fire," 12.

## Shared Sympathy for the Armed Forces

Another factor that facilitated an alliance between Bolsonaro and evangelical groups is that both have special relationships with the armed forces in Brazil. This relationship is quite clear in the case of Bolsonaro. It is a product not only of the fact that Bolsonaro himself was a soldier but also of the nostalgic discourse used by Bolsonaro and his supporters to characterize the military dictatorship of 1964 to 1985. Bolsonaro's campaign plan, for instance, praised the armed forces as heroes for "stopping leftist forces" from carrying out a *coup d'etat* in Brazil in 1964.[35] This, combined with Bolsonaro's choice of vice-presidential candidate, Hamilton Mourão, also an ex-military man, suggests Bolsonaro's sympathy towards the armed forces. Moreover, Bolsonaro made clear in his government plan that military men and police officers should be seen as 'national heroes,' mentioning especially those who have died due to gang violence, and that they "should get their names engraved in the fatherland pantheon."[36] The Bolsonaro government plan even argued that violence in Brazil had a "sharp increase" in those states where the PT had ruled in the recent past, creating a discursive inclination towards blaming the PT and left-wing politics for surges of violence in Brazil.[37]

Evangelical churches in Brazil also have a close relationship with the military. As mentioned above, evangelical churches did not see their activities greatly affected during the military dictatorship. This was partly because the regime had a clientelist strategy rather than one based on ideology. As a result, evangelical churches in Brazil accessed financing and subsidies from the Brazilian state. Although the lack of central governing body to unify all evangelical faiths diminished the dictatorship's ability to establish a strong relationship with these churches, the fact that some pastors were able to receive support from the dictatorship was sufficient to build a nexus of closeness based on convenience—or, at least, tolerance—between both actors.[38] It is after the dictatorship, however, that a

[35] Partido Social Liberal, "Prosperidade," 33. [My translation]
[36] *Id.*, 29.
[37] *Id.*, 26.
[38] Boas, *Evangelicals*, 102–10.

convergence in the positions of the armed forces and the evangelical churches is most clearly seen—a result of debates over how the Brazilian state should carry out its human rights agenda.

The armed forces opposed the implementation of a truth commission to investigate human rights violations that occurred during the military dictatorship. During his time as a parliamentarian, Bolsonaro himself described this commission as "slanderous" and argued that it would lead to revenge against the armed forces, accusing the PT and its then-presidential candidate, Dilma Rousseff, of having links with terrorist organizations.[39] Bolsonaro's opposition to the Truth Commission was similar to that sustained by the most conservative groups within evangelicalism against the PNDH3, which was the plan presented by the PT government in 2009 to promote a human rights-centric approach to public policy across all levels in Brazil. These groups channelled their discontent with this plan through the 'evangelical caucus,' a group of evangelical members of parliament. In response to the publication of the PNDH3, the evangelical caucus proposed legislation to regulate decisions around gender identity and abortion rights, which were strongly rejected within the more conservative sections of the evangelical community.[40] The report of the aforementioned truth commission also included proposals to resolve doubts regarding human rights violations during the military dictatorship.[41] Although each group had its own motivations, evangelicals and the armed forces both opposed the PT's human rights positions, bringing them closer together, and therefore, closer to Bolsonaro. This, in turn, created the possibility not only for joint political action within the Brazilian parliament, which materialized in 2016 during Rousseff's impeachment, but also for the alignment of evangelical church members with the causes of the military, thus bolstering support for the military from the neoconservative bases of the evangelical churches.[42]

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[39] Machado, "From the Time of Rights," 11–12.
[40] Guerreiro and Nublat, "Bancada Evangélica."
[41] Machado, "From the Time of Rights," 11.
[42] *Id.*, 12.

Another factor that made the alliance between Bolsonaro and the evangelical groups in Brazil possible was the existence of shared good relations with other actors and a shared rivalry with Lula da Silva and the Workers' Party. As already seen, Bolsonaro and the evangelicals were both nostalgic for the military dictatorship in Brazil. These shared affinities, however, were not only for the military. Such affinities also proliferated toward other groups in society. A clear example is the affinity that the evangelical churches and Bolsonaro had towards the livestock sector, an increasingly powerful group in Brazil also known for its role in the destruction of the Amazon rainforest. For their part, evangelical churches have developed a logistical capacity to reach some of the most remote regions of the Amazon with the primary goal of evangelizing marginal and indigenous communities. Evangelical churches have a massive presence in the Amazon, and even provide certain basic services to Amazon communities, especially healthcare, although always under the premise of "spreading the message of Jesus."[43] This presence of evangelical groups in the Amazon coincided with the presence of groups related to livestock and agricultural activities, who often had regional political weight.

An example of the affinities between Bolsonaro and agricultural groups can be seen in the case of Antonio Denarium, a businessman dedicated to soy who was elected governor of the state of Roraíma in 2018 by the Social Liberal Party (PSL), then Bolsonaro's party. Denarium and other regional politicians carried out a discursive war against the protection of the environment under the pretext that environmental protection impedes the development of a region rich in natural resources.[44] By joining the PSL, politicians such as Denarium were not only able to pursue their personal goals of implementing agroindustry-friendly policies, but also to serve as regional allies of the Bolsonaro campaign. The PT's 2018 campaign plan clearly opposed the interests of large landowners and large-scale farming. The plan—making reference to "the right of land and territory" of indigenous communities and poor peasants with no

[43] Pacheco, "Missões Evangelizadoras." [My translation]
[44] Cowie, Costa, and Prado, "Brazil Votes."

access to arable land, and to how the PT would protect the human rights of these groups and "severely" use violence against those who threatened them—put the PT into a position of opposition to the interests of agribusiness entrepreneurs such as Denarium.[45] Partly as a result of debates like these, agroindustry interest groups have adopted an 'anti-globalist' discourse similar to that of evangelical groups. But rather than opposing the rights of the LGBTQ+ community, agroindustry instead calls positions such as indigenism and environmentalism 'illogical' and argues they contribute little to the development of the regions of the Amazon.[46] While the goals of evangelicals and Amazon agroindustry interests are different, these groups use compatible methods. In the 2018 election campaign, this compatibility created a relationship—or at least an understanding—through which the groups became closer to each other and, therefore, to Bolsonaro's candidacy.

As already mentioned, these evangelical groups had, like Bolsonaro, a fierce opposition to the Workers' Party, a tendency called *anti-petismo*. This phenomenon was linked with a broader 'anti-communist' sentiment, which linked the PT with extreme left politics and was born in the anti-government protests of 2013. The rise of *anti-petismo* is generally understood to be the result of the combination of an international economic crisis, brought about mainly by a fall in commodity prices, and a growing perception of corruption in Brazil, which came to be associated with the PT as the governing party in 2013, hence leading to the aforementioned protests in that same year.[47] Hence, *anti-petismo* arose as an umbrella term under which the different opponents to the PT governments of Lula and Rousseff could identify with.

This section has argued that while evangelicals and the agribusiness sector opposed the PT for reasons with different origins, these forms of opposition ultimately led both toward Bolsonaro. In the case of the evangelicals, opposition to the PT was linked to evangelical rejection of socially progressive policies.[48] For

[45] Partido dos Trabalhadores, "Plan de Governo," 59. [My translation]
[46] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 171.
[47] Davis and Straubhaar, "Producing *Antipetismo*," 86.
[48] Araújo, "Pentecostalismo," 518–9.

the agricultural sector, on the other hand, the PT was perceived as a party with a strong environmental and pro-indigenous stance, threatening the profitability of large-scale agriculture in Brazil, specifically in the Amazon.[49] Both evangelical and agricultural groups found themselves in opposition to the PT, which helped them find in Bolsonaro and his candidacy a kind of bridge between the two, given that he was a political embodiment of the *anti-petismo* that first arose in 2013.

## Conclusion

This article has analyzed three factors that fueled an alliance between Bolsonaro and evangelical groups in Brazil ahead of the 2018 presidential elections. First, there was a similarity between the conservative social agenda of Bolsonaro and that of the evangelical churches. This element explains the close relationship between Bolsonaro's opposition to the expansion of rights for the LGBTQ+ community—as well as to other progressive stances such as the legalization of therapeutic abortion—and the similar opposition of the evangelicals. This shared program created the basis for a political alliance. Second, I examined a shared sympathy for the armed forces. Here it was determined that Bolsonaro's nostalgia for the military dictatorship, although not exactly shared by the evangelical groups—who during the dictatorship had a primarily clientelist relationship with the regime—was related to the opposition of both to the implementation of a broader human rights agenda proposed during the government of Rousseff. Although at a discursive level the opposition to this agenda was different, given that the evangelical groups opposed aspects of the agenda related to health and reproductive education, Bolsonaro and evangelicals found sufficient similarities to support their shared opposition and used this common position to support Rousseff's impeachment process in 2016. Finally, favorable relations between evangelical groups and agricultural business groups, also important allies of Bolsonaro, were analyzed. This analysis suggests that although evangelicals and agricultural groups had different agendas, the conditions were right for them to coexist in the most peripheral

[49] Lapper, *Beef, Bible, Bullets*, 188–92.

regions of Brazil, particularly the Amazon, and find shared objectives in their opposition to the so-called 'globalist' agenda of the PT. This, combined with the wider opposition that both had towards the PT, known as *anti-petismo*, allowed evangelicals and agricultural business groups to together support the candidacy of Bolsonaro, who presented himself as friendly to the agendas of both groups and as the best option to defeat the PT.

This analysis suggests that the non-material features of the Bolsonaro campaign, those pertaining to 'values' and 'traditions,' were attractive to evangelical voters in Brazil, who found in his candidacy compelling positions regarding the turn they felt the country should take. Moreover, these shared positions were also common ground for evangelical Christians and other groups that would end up supporting the Bolsonaro campaign. Opposition to the PT was a common ground allowing evangelical Christians to find understandings and create alliances with other groups based on their non-material or ideological opposition to the PT and left-wing politics in general. These alliances with other groups would form part of the broad base of support for Bolsonaro's ultimate victory in the 2018 presidential election.

The proposed concept of non-material politics can therefore offer a new approach on the impact of identity politics in contemporary political debates. As identity politics encompass issues involving the protection of the traditional characteristics that compose the identity of an individual or a community, non-material politics can be seen as a way in which politicians like Bolsonaro reach potential voters through the issue of protecting their identity. Non-material politics promises to protect certain voters' 'values' or 'customs' in a context where these voters perceive the identity-based claims of other groups—such as women or the LGBTQ+ community—as a threat to their own self-identity. This suggests that a non-material turn can be used to backtrack on the material advances of politics in the twentieth century. The non-material represents a new source of political alliances on both the right and the left in the shifting terrain of contemporary politics.

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# Mao Zedong's Dialectical Materialism: A Matter of Translation

Berkant Isaev

In this paper I examine Mao Zedong's translation of the concept of dialectical materialism from its origins in Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin to the Chinese context. Although the history, development, and influence of Maoism have received scholarly attention, considerably less has been written on Mao's dialectical materialism and its relation to Marxism and Chinese thought. To date, this relation has received only partial attention in histories of communist thought, such as in an article by Holubnychy and the more concentrated recent approaches.[1] Overall, there have been several views concerning Mao's dialectical materialism. One view, particularly popular among the Soviet academics of the past, is that Mao's dialectics are essentially those of Marx understood through the works of Lenin, and that Mao does not contribute anything substantial to the discourse on dialectical materialism. Another view maintains that Mao's dialectical materialism should be understood on its own terms as an autonomous concept that differs in significant ways from Lenin's interpretation of Marx and Engels, and in some ways even from the formulation by Marx and Engels themselves.[2] For example, it has been argued that Mao's dialectical materialism is distinct because of its use of correlative thinking, its heavy emphasis on contradiction as present within the very basic constituents of reality, and its limited epistemology (in comparison to that of Lenin).[3]

[1] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics." See also: Knight, *Mao Zedong*; Tian, "Mao Zedong;" Dirlik, Healy, Knight, *Critical Perspectives*.
[2] See, for example, Althusser in Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics;" Knight, *Mao Zedong*; Tian, "Mao Zedong;" Dirlik, Healy, Knight, *Critical Perspectives*.
[3] Tian, "Mao Zedong."

In this paper I follow a similar interpretation of Mao's dialectical materialism. My aim is not to disprove but to contribute to this discourse by examining the relation between Marx, Engels and Lenin's, and Mao's notions of dialectical materialism through the concept of translation. I understand Mao's approach to dialectical materialism and his later formulation of his own concept of it as an act of creative translation. On the one hand, Mao's concept of dialectical materialism refers back to Marx, Engels and Lenin in some key aspects, such as its purpose as a tool for the analysis of history, society, and reality, its conceptualization of contradiction, and its prediction of the culmination of history with the end of class struggle. On the other hand, Mao's concept of dialectical materialism is distinct as it relies on Confucian and Daoist concepts and approaches toward reality. Although Mao does not use these concepts and approaches in their own context, their meanings and implications influence his reading of dialectical materialism. I claim that Mao's reading and formation of his own concept of dialectical materialism should be understood in terms of creative translation.

## Translation

The English word 'translation' comes from the Latin *translatio* which is a particular supine form of the verb *transferre*. *Transferre* means 'to bring across' or 'to carry over.' By 'translation,' for the purposes of this article, I refer to the act of carrying a specific item or a whole system of knowledge from one epistemic context to another and, in the course of that act, changing it so that it fits the new context it is put in, without altering the very core of the original item or system. This could apply to linguistic translation, as commonly understood, in which a signifier needs to be moved into a new language without that movement affecting its overall meaning or message. While this understanding of linguistic translation corresponds to the concept of translation used in this article, it does not exhaust that concept's meaning. Translation can also be understood in terms of communicating and moving ideas, practices, theories, subjectivity, and power from one context to another. The notion of vocabulary is useful here to illustrate the point more precisely. According to Richard Rorty, a vocabulary is a "collection

of concepts" that form complex interrelations within a system of thought.[4] In Marxism, for example, the concept of dialectics is related to other concepts such as labor, materialism, etc., and these relations form the Marxist vocabulary. Dialectical materialism is therefore a concept that is part of the larger Marxist vocabulary. Marxist theory can be understood as a 'text' and its movement and introduction in China through Chinese philosophical vocabularies can be understood as an act of translation. Just as the translation of a text requires the translation of its every component, the translation of a theory requires the translation of the concepts that construct it.

Sometimes the product of a translation becomes so different from its source material that it barely resembles it at all, making this an act of creation of something autonomous, operating according to its own logic and not according to the core idea of the translated item. This outcome, however, need not be understood as something negative; it is one of the many nuances of translation. As Walter Benjamin argues, the task of the translator is not simply to make an exact translation or even communicate all the senses of the text.[5] He writes: "however, a translation that seeks to transmit something can transmit nothing other than a message—that is, something inessential."[6] Benjamin claims that a good translation is that which finds and preserves what is essential to the original text and then transforms it into the other language.[7] For him translation is not equivalence, but rather a transformation. Moreover, he writes, a good translation is possible if the translator strives towards a "pure language" (i.e., such a form of expression that can capture the core of the text in another language). Of course, Benjamin's work is about the translation of 'texts;' because of that, I will not be following his philosophy strictly. I will, however, take a similar approach to the creative translation of concepts and, more precisely, to Mao's translation of dialectical materialism. I argue that Mao is faithful to the core ideas of dialectical materialism but at the same time reads the concept through correlative thinking in Daoism and

[4] Rorty, *Philosophy*, 48.
[5] Benjamin, "The Task," 153.
[6] *Id.*, 151.
[7] *Ibid.*

Confucianism, thereby transforming and articulating dialectical materialism in such a way that it becomes autonomous.

## Dialectical Materialism according to Marx and Engels

Marx's concept of dialectics is inspired by Hegelian dialectics, although he develops his method as a critique of the philosophies of Hegel and the Young Hegelians. Marx sees the Hegelian view of history and subsequent Young Hegelian critique of society as attempts to understand consciousness and the development of ideas through the analysis of the dialectical movement of ideas. According to him and Engels, however, this critique is fruitless as it is only a critique of ideas, of ideology. In the Young Hegelian critique, for Marx and Engels, "men and their relations appear upside-down as in a camera obscura," and the grounding of history remains abstract and thus unable to fully grasp historical progress.[8] Marx and Engels then provide a view of history based

> not of setting out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; but setting out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process demonstrating the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process.[9]

According to Marx and Engels, the material conditions and the material base precede the movements of ideas between people. They argue that material reality (in the form of social-material relations between people) comes first and serves as the basis for the following development and historical progress. It is important to note that although Marx and Engels both apply the basic logic of Hegelian dialectics to changes in the material conditions and society, a distinction should be made between their understandings of dialectics. Marx's notion of dialectics is specifically concerned with historical change while Engels, especially in his later works, includes

[8] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 120.
[9] *Ibid.*

the natural processes of the world. That is not to say that Engels disagreed with Marx about dialectics. On the contrary, while preserving Marx's analysis and use of the concept, he built on and broadened the scope of Marx's dialectical analysis by applying it to the whole of reality.

According to Marx, the 'material base' is the way societies organize by engaging with matter through labor which transforms nature in order to maintain themselves and provide for their basic necessities.[10] The foundation of society is the mode of production: the way the resources are extracted through the technology a society has, but also the relationship of the various members of that society to the means of production (i.e., if one group owns the physical place of production and the materials with which resources are acquired, then that group is the elite and all other groups are its subordinates).[11] The conflicts that arise from this order include the difference in interests between the ruling class and those below it, the friction between the middle and lower classes, the friction between the lower and the elite, and so on. Here, the dialectical nature of those conflicts can be seen: every social organization based on class contains various contradictions and the way in which those contradictions are resolved leads to the change of the whole social system. In more general terms, the base creates and influences the superstructure, and the superstructure influences the base until enough contradictions and solutions to those contradictions accumulate to be a prerequisite for a new base to emerge (e.g., contradictions in the superstructure can lead to the creation of new technologies, which in turn will significantly change the mode of production). This is how historical progress happens. The ultimate resolution of the class conflict and of history then, is the realization of a "classless, moneyless and stateless society."[12] In other words, the realization of a communist society in which class conflict does not exist as ownership is common.

In summary, Marx's notion of dialectics explains historical and social change through an analysis of the dialectical relations

[10] *Id.*, 47.
[11] *Id.*, 128.
[12] Marx and Engels, *Selected Works*, 212.

between classes. Engels uses several important components from Marx's dialectics to broaden the concept. For example: first, the notion of qualitative change (i.e., the change from one way of organizing society to another, which according to Marx happens through changes in the technology of production, the quantity of production, etc.); second, the idea that every social organization is based on class and every class contains its own contradictions; third, the idea that every emergent social organization based on class will have its own negation from its internal contradictions. All of these components of Marx's dialectics were further developed by Engels, who used them to form a framework through which nature and reality as a whole could be investigated. Engels essentially based his three laws of dialectics on Marx's dialectical methodology. The first law states that qualitative changes can happen only in conditions of quantitative changes and the second law states that everything contains its own contradiction.[13] Reality is therefore a fluctuating web of interactions in which each thing contains its own contradiction (or opposite). This is true for basic material particles as well as for the structures they form: each structure contains its own contradiction. In the same manner, human interactions are the result of countless contradictions and conflicts happening on a smaller material level and class conflict is a contradiction in the various human ways of organizing society around property. It should be noted that this conflict or contradiction that defines reality is not static; the interactions between opposites result in physical as well as social motion, which leads to quantitative change that ends in qualitative transformation. According to Engels, the third law of dialectics states that the process does not end simply by a transformation by negation (i.e., the contradiction happening within a thing or a system) but by 'negation of the negation' (i.e., when the first contradiction has resulted in qualitative change, it in turn faces its opposite and is negated).[14]

It should be clear by now that Engels understood dialectics largely in Marx's terms, with the difference that Engels gives dialectics a broadened scope and purpose. Because of that, Soviet

[13] Lenin, *Materialism,* 48.
[14] Jordan, "The Dialectical Materialism," 271.

scholars made a distinction between dialectical and historical materialism, with the former referring to the broader concept developed later by Engels, which includes natural processes in the world, and the latter referring to the concrete approach to history described above. In this paper, I use the term dialectical materialism for the broader concept that includes both Marx's historical materialism and Engels' enlargement of it. This is necessary for approaching Mao's definition of dialectical materialism because although Mao had little access to Engels' work, he was influenced by Lenin, who was heavily influenced by Engels.

## Lenin's Dialectical Materialism

There are two important aspects to Lenin's articulation of dialectical materialism: the idea that objective reality in the form of matter exists independently of human experience and mind, and the inclusion of two of Engels's laws of dialectics.[15] The idea that matter exists independently from human experience and interaction serves as the basis of Lenin's materialism—here, the mind-body dichotomy is superseded and humans are also in the domain of matter, so their being is ultimately material as is that of every being. Thus, when we grasp material things we grasp their essence.[16] All the processes that happen to material essences are also processes that happen to and within us, so there must be universal laws to the basic processes that guide change in the world. Lenin understands Engels' two laws of dialectics as the basic laws through which reality and change should be understood, namely reality as a dynamic web of contradicting elements each of which contains its own contradiction and changes when enough quantitative changes accumulate, leading to a new cycle of negation and quantitative changes. Following Plekhanov, however, Lenin deems Engels' third law unnecessary as he sees it already implied in the first law.[17] Moreover, Lenin uses the second law to account for the contradictions that exist within larger systems and complex bodies. Lenin largely omits Engels' idea that contradictions exist within every single element that constitutes the

[15] *Id.*, 272.
[16] *Id.*, 274.
[17] *Id.*, 275.

world. At the same time, this idea will be a very important part of Mao's dialectical materialism.

## Tension and Clash between Concepts in Translation

As mentioned above, the main argument of this paper is that Mao's concept of dialectical materialism should be best understood in terms of creative translation. It is not to be understood as a one-directional translation of an epistemic item, nor as a mere continuation of an adopted idea. Moreover, it is not to be seen merely as a result of syncretism between Marxist, Leninist and Chinese philosophical ideas. Here, I will show why those approaches to understanding Mao's notion of dialectical materialism fail to grasp the rich nuances of its essence.

The predominant view amongst Soviet academics during the existence of the USSR was that Mao's notion of dialectical materialism is simply an adoption of the core ideas of Marx, Engels, and Lenin, with small changes in the articulation here and there.[18] But although Mao bases his understanding of dialectical materialism on Marx, Lenin, and Engels, his understanding of it is not simply an adoption or word-for-word translation. Throughout Mao's works, more than half of his references are to Confucian, Neo-Confucian, Mohist, and Daoist writings, Chinese folk legends, and contemporary Chinese intellectuals.[19] Mao infrequently refers directly to Marx or Engels, usually doing so indirectly through the works of Lenin. Although Mao frequently cites Lenin in his main works dealing with dialectical materialism ("On Practice," "On Contradiction," "Lecture Notes on Dialectical Materialism"), he still uses a vocabulary borrowed mostly from Confucian and Daoist philosophers.[20] Moreover, as will be shown later, Mao's notion of dialectical materialism differs in some key aspects from those of Lenin, Engels and Marx.

On the other hand, the idea, noted and mentioned by Knight, that Mao's concept of dialectical materialism is syncretic, in the sense that it is a blend of Chinese and Marxist thought, presents the

[18] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 13.
[19] *Id.*, 16.
[20] *Id.*, 18.

translation as a rather undisturbed flow of syncretic blending, without actually addressing the tensions and conflicts that would arise from such a flow of translation thus fails to appreciate the ways in which Mao attempts to resolve those conflicts.[21] The tensions that I am referring to are mainly between the concepts that Mao borrows from Chinese philosophy and those that he takes from Marx and Lenin: when one concept is superimposed over another, the latter resists and the superimposed concept sets the terms and the direction of the discourse but the other concept still maintains its own multilayered meaning and resists total assimilation into that discourse. Such power dynamics exist because Mao's theory ultimately refers back to Marxism (i.e., the implications of dialectical materialism, its purpose, etc., remain Marxist as they rely on Marx's analysis of social relations and history). Thus, the Marxist point of reference stands as the ground for Mao's thought. At the same time, Mao understands the Marxist vocabulary mainly through the lens of Confucian and Daoist concepts, which, even when detached from their original context, still possess their own implications and philosophical and semantic weight. Thus, while it is impossible to fully assimilate Confucian and Daoist concepts to the Marxist vocabulary, Mao opens a space for negotiation where these resistant concepts question and subvert the premises of that superimposed vocabulary. The translation is not broken because the terms set by the superimposed concept are followed. Rather, the negotiation between superimposed and resistant concepts implies the creativity of the translation and the uniqueness of the new system that Mao creates: while it is not strictly autonomous and detached from its Marxist base, as it constantly refers back to that base, this system still manages to unfold in such a way that is no longer constrained by the original theoretical framework. Instead, the system manages to maintain a creative tension between that original framework and the resistant concepts, thus remaining open for further and potentially unpredictable development.

Here the superimposed concept is the dialectical materialism that Mao finds in Marx and Lenin; the resisting concepts are the notions of change and contradiction that Mao borrows mainly from

[21] Knight, *Mao Zedong*, 49.

Confucian and Daoist classics. In the following section I will demonstrate the tension between these concepts by showing how the notions of change and contradiction in the mentioned Chinese philosophies interact with the Marxist dialectical materialism in Mao's writings.

## Correlative Thinking and Dialectical Materialism

Correlative thinking is a term first used by the Western sinologist Joseph Needham to describe a particular mode of thinking and knowing that is emphasized in many prominent Chinese philosophical traditions. Correlative thinking should be understood in contrast to causal thinking, a mode of knowing that privileges the search for causation and causal connections. In contemporary times, Roger Ames and David Hall are probably the scholars who have worked most extensively on the definition and history of correlative thinking in the Chinese context. They point out that causal thinking was the privileged and preferred mode of knowing in the Western philosophical discourse up until the second half of the nineteenth century and was established as such by Plato, while earlier examples include Parmenides, Zeno, etc. Because this way of thinking is concerned with the first principles and the causal relations between the first and the following, the primary and the secondary, being and becoming, it presupposes a primal unchanging mover (such as Aristotle's philosophical god or the transcendent Christian God) that is full, necessary, always present Being.[22] This Being stands in contrast to the becoming that arises from it through some form of causal connection.

In contrast to causal thinking, "correlative thinking involves the association of image or concept clusters related not by physical causation but by meaningful disposition."[23] Correlative thinking does not order being through causation, but through meaningful correlations of concepts, terms, feelings, etc. The correlations are based on similarity and synchronicity (e.g., the correlations between the Five Directions of the world or the different elements of fire, metal, earth, etc.). As Hall and Ames note, "correlatives are not

[22] Needham, cited in Hall and Ames, "Rationality," 89.
[23] *Id.*, 92.

logically or causally related."[24] Rather, they are dispositions in which the harmony of the world is maintained. Such correlative pairings do not denote radical contradictions or relations in which one excludes the other but are rather complimentary and different at the same time. For example, *yin* and *yang* are a meaningful pairing that complete each other not in the service of a totality, but rather as a correlation of difference. From *yin* and *yang*, we can derive the difference between broken and solid (as is the case in the *Yijing*) and the difference between active and passive.[25] There need not be a causal or logical connection between those differences – their meaningful disposition is enough.

Ames and Hall note that in the *Zhuangzi*, meaningful dispositions imply no ultimate unity or wholeness of the world and no fixed essences. In the overall discourse of correlative thinking "there are no least units, no absolute laws privileging this or that type of pattern regularity, no fundamental forces, no ends or aims shaping the processes of ambiance."[26] Harmony is in accordance with the Dao, the ultimate flow of things.

Tian discusses correlative thinking further, stating that it allows for a metaphysical view of the world where change—the change of everything from one state to another, from one thing to another—is a central principle. According to Tian, there are four ideas that characterize correlative thinking: first, the idea that everything correlates with something else; second, the idea that every difference and interaction between things is a matter of their interconnectedness in "complementary opposition"; third, the idea that the "basic pattern of *yin* and *yang* . . . ceaselessly brings everything in the world into constant change or movement"; and fourth, the idea that everything happens to be in constant change.[27] It should be noted that here the dichotomy between material and immaterial world is not expressed and processes of change encompass everything. While there is much more to be said about correlative thinking, for the purpose of this article I will move to

[24] *Ibid.*
[25] *Id.*, 94.
[26] *Id.*, 93.
[27] Tian, "Mao Zedong," 17. Italics in original.

examine the tension in Mao's writings between the notion of change presented here and the notion of change in Marxist dialectical materialism.

It seems that the notion of dialectical materialism (that of Lenin in particular) has some commonalities with the idea of correlative thinking and the notion of change that follows from it. Both dialectical materialism and correlative thinking are all-encompassing systems: they both include the change of matter (or material change) and they both conceive of change as a constant. These basic similarities entail the possibility of dialogue between the two systems, but the differences between dialectical materialism and correlative thinking should not be underestimated. Although the system of correlative thinking technically includes material change, the term 'material' does not seem to make much sense when applied to it, because, as noted earlier, there is no meaningful way to distinguish matter and the material from anything else. In fact, neither Confucianism nor Daoism could be characterized as materialist philosophies. The term metaphysical could be more appropriate here, but this term should not be used lightly as it is debatable whether the Confucian and Daoist view of reality would fit into the traditional Western notion of metaphysics. Another difference between dialectical materialism and correlative thinking is that although the notion of constant change is present in both, it is articulated in different ways. In Lenin's broader view, dialectical change is the constant state of things in material nature. Dialectical change is defined by contradiction and progress through qualitative leaps after quantitative change. Correlative thinking, on the other hand, views change very differently: as a constant flow in an interconnected web of associations and dispositions in accordance with harmony. Reality, here, is not based on contradiction and progressive change, but on the relations between correlative concept clusters. The change does not lead to a progression towards something else. Another difference is that Marx's dialectics examines history as a class conflict that leads to societal change. In Confucianism and Daoism, such a view of history is absent.

Based on those main differences, I will now examine how Mao managed to translate the concept of dialectics through the use of correlative thinking. One important tension that appears in such

translation is that between materialism and the all-encompassing system of correlative thinking. On the one hand, there is an idea of materialism resulting from the dichotomy between idealism and materialism. On the other hand, there is an all-encompassing system that does not make such distinctions. In Mao's writings, materialism is superimposed on correlative thinking, but it fails to assert itself over it. Rather the material world blends with the all-encompassing reality of correlative thinking. The world remains material, but in Mao's writings it still largely bears the characteristics of the world of correlative thinking. In contrast to Lenin, who relies heavily on the idealism-materialism dichotomy to argue in favor of materialism by superseding the dichotomy, Mao's starting point is simply a purely material world.[28] Although, as mentioned earlier, according to Confucianism and Daoism the world cannot be described in materialist terms, these philosophies still see the world as a whole with different elements that are tied into a correlative network. Mao takes this understanding of the world as a unity and puts it into the materialistic framework of Marxism.

The elements within that unity exist in a correlative relation with each other, as in Confucianism and Daoism, and Mao describes those relations in terms of correlation and contradiction. Thus, the world appears as a unity of opposites that correlate with and negate each other and accumulate contradictions until change happens. This is in contrast to Lenin, who understands the larger reality simply in terms of relations of contradiction, but not of correlation. For Mao it is essential that opposites correlate in order for contradictions to arise.[29] Correlation, for him, is not a law like the laws of contradiction, but the very foundation of reality, which is known a priori. Without that foundation, there cannot be contradictions in the first place. Mao writes: "in order to understand the development of a thing, we should study it internally and its relationship with other things."[30] For Mao, 'relationship' refers to the position of the thing in relation to other things. In other words, things are positioned in such a way that they have a correlative

[28] Dirlik, Healy, Knight, *Critical Perspectives*, 90.
[29] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 30.
[30] Mao, "On Contradiction."

relation with each other. This is taken as a basic fact and Mao does not spend much time on it. Instead, he moves on to establish the fundamental laws of dialectics that cause things to move towards each other, and within themselves, in contradiction.

The next point of tension appears with the notions of contradiction and change. As discussed earlier, correlative thinking does not view change as a result of conflict but as a reality that follows from the meaningful disposition of things. So naturally philosophies of correlative thinking do not give an extensive account of contradiction. In this case, Mao's notion of contradiction presents a break from the traditional system of correlative thinking while at the same time relying heavily on the notion of correlative thinking. Mao's introduction and use of the law of the unity of opposites is his most original contribution to the Marxist theory, and he describes it as the main law of dialectics through which every other law can be derived.[31] The law of the unity of opposites states that the contradictory aspects of something (referring to Engels' first law) constantly transform into each other as each is complementary with the other while at the same time its opposite. Mao gives the example of war and peace, arguing that there can only be peace if there has been war before and war can exist only as a disruption of the peace.[32]

Thus, the contradictory aspects of something form a 'unity of opposites,' an identity that is contradictory and complimentary at the same time. This is strikingly similar to the relations between the clusters of concepts in correlative thinking and, as Holubnychy points out, Mao's law "resembles elements of the dialectics . . . of the Zhuangzi, the Laozi, the Great Commentary of the Yijing."[33]

It is essential to consider the importance of contradiction to Mao's overall theory and his views on dialectics and reality. In *On Contradiction* he writes: "without contradiction nothing would exist."[34] Here a difference with Lenin can be observed, as Lenin never put such emphasis on contradiction. Moreover, Lenin's view of contradiction appears to be more limited than Mao's, as he

[31] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 30.
[32] Mao, "On Contradiction."
[33] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 30.
[34] Mao, "On Contradiction."

understood contradiction solely as a relation between things, while Mao understood it as a relation both between and "within things, phenomena, thoughts."[35] As he writes: "contradiction exists universally and, in all processes, whether in the simple or in the complex forms of motion, whether in objective phenomena or ideological phenomena."[36] The mention of thoughts and ideas is interesting for two reasons: first, Mao argues that these are ultimately the extension of matter and not independent substances; and second, in contrast with Lenin, Mao emphasizes the importance of understanding 'ideological phenomena' through the law of the unity of opposites.

Yet another point of tension arises on the question of epistemic teleology in dialectical materialism. For Lenin, "in accordance with its nature, man's thinking is capable of giving and gives us an absolute truth which adds up as a sum total of relative truths."[37] In line with his view that when we grasp the material world, we have a full grasp of its essence, Lenin claims that such accumulated thought from the observation of dialectical processes amounts to an accumulation of relative truths about reality which in turn may provide access to the absolute truth. In correlative thinking, where processes and changes are essentially eternal and multifaceted, such knowledge is impossible to achieve as the infinity of correlating elements simply cannot be grasped. Although Mao agrees with Lenin's idea about the absolute truth as the sum of all relative truths, he still denies that any such epistemological teleology is possible, as the accumulation (in line with correlative thinking) would last an eternity. Thus, Mao's epistemology, while balancing between the resistant concept of correlative thinking and the superimposed notion of absolute truth, ultimately remains more embedded in direct experience and denies the possibility of accessing the absolute truth.

[35] Holubnychy, "Materialistic Dialectics," 30.
[36] Mao, "On Contradiction."
[37] Lenin, *Materialism*, 50.

## Conclusion

With the given examples I hope to have demonstrated two things: first, how the superimposed Marxist framework of dialectical materialism (through Lenin) clashes in Mao's writings with resistant concepts stemming from the correlative thinking of Confucianism and Daoism; second, how Mao attempts to creatively translate dialectical materialism through the lens of decontextualized concepts from correlative thinking that nevertheless carry their own philosophical and semantic weight.

As shown, Mao's dialectical materialism is quite different from Lenin's in some important aspects. It places far greater importance on contradiction as the basic law according to which reality functions, it understands the initial position of things as the correlative from which the first interaction (contradiction) arises, it emphasizes contradiction as present within the most basic constituents of reality, and it does not present itself as a tool for reaching the absolute truth. At the same time, Mao's dialectical materialism refers back to the 'original' in the sense that it follows some of the essential characteristics of dialectical materialism as defined by Engels (who based his work on Marx) and Lenin. Mao's dialectical materialism belongs to a larger Marxist framework for the analysis of history, society, and reality (as do the dialectical materialisms of Engels and Lenin) and most importantly, it follows the premises of class struggle as the main contradiction in society and the Marxist quest for the establishment of classless, moneyless and stateless society. Thus, Mao's translation of dialectical materialism results in the formation of a dynamic concept that, on the one hand, refers back to its source, but on the other hand, refers to correlative thinking as an important aspect of traditional Chinese philosophies. Thus, Mao's dialectical materialism remains Marxist in its basic tenets and goals but a distinct and autonomous concept in its content.

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