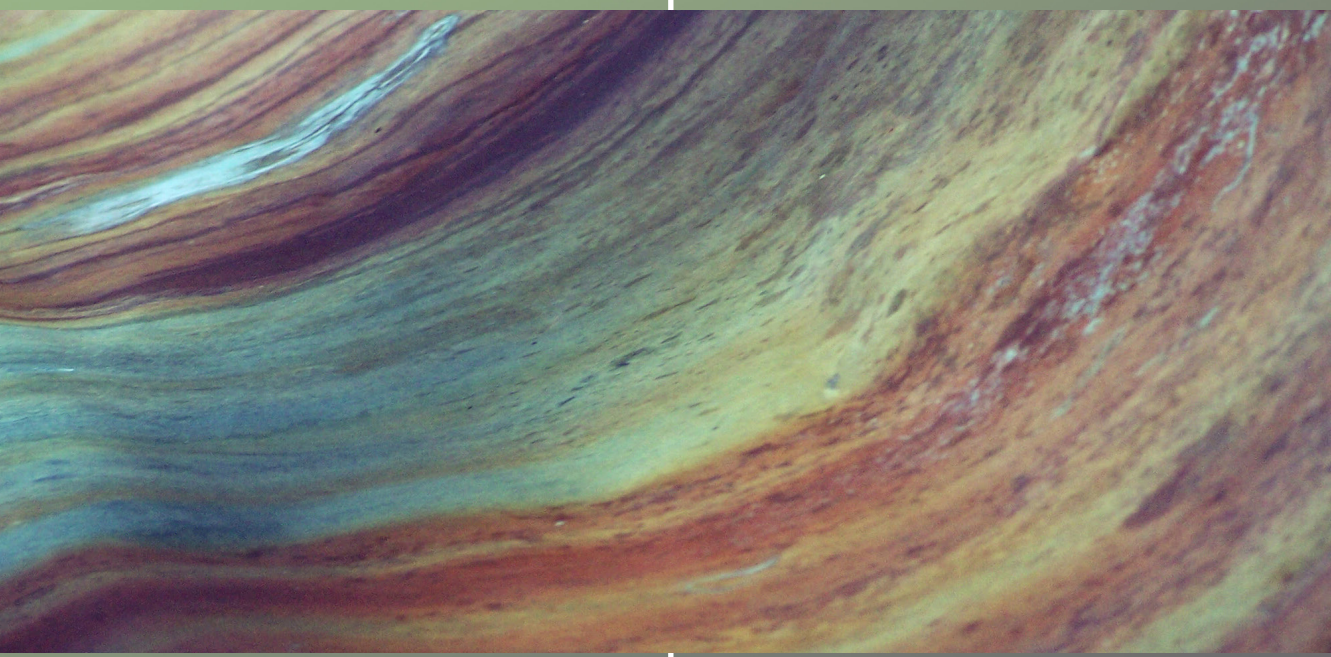
Jumping Borders, Tackling Crises

Boom, Frank van den; Bosch, Lotte van den; Hendrichs, Kaspar; Klerk, Gabriël de; Juriatti, Chiara; Luck, Matthew; ... ; Spaans, Didi

Leiden Elective Academic Periodical

JUMPING BORDERS | TACKLING CRISES



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First Issue

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Editorial team:

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Chiara Juriatti
Matthew Luck
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Introduction

Editorial team

This first issue of the Leiden Elective Academic Periodical (LEAP) focuses on the topic of crisis. At its core, crisis signifies a condition, a situation, or a period of pending change. The denotations of "crisis" are, however, multifold. The term can mean a variety of things, such as "choice, decision, the power to distinguish or separate", but also "judgment, critique, or diagnosis."[1] Crisis holds the potential to challenge the demarcations of eras, cultures, and societies, and to disrupt the established order of a society. But such change is never guaranteed, as crisis "can signal a turning point in history or a moment of truth for a society, but also a chronic condition without a clear prospect of resolution."[2] The outcome of crisis, in short, remains unpredictable.

In this issue, we are especially interested in how moments of crisis trigger or even demand critical reflection and interrogation. Rodrigo Cordero summarizes this in the idea that crisis "places us in relation to the limits of the frameworks that sustain our forms of life and, therefore, in relation to a world that is not immune to questioning."[3] Crisis, in that sense, also acts as a sign of "the irremediable fragility that inhabits the foundations of social life,"[4] a fragility that becomes painfully clear in a time of COVID-19, global warming and forced displacements across the globe.

Digital technology and global interconnectivity have increased not only the visibility of crises, but also the proliferation of the term "crisis", which media cultures now tend to overuse.[5] This explosion of the term presents a danger, as the rhetoric of crisis is never neutral

[1] Boletsi, Houwen and Minnaard, *Languages of Resistance*, 2-3.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Cordero, *Crisis and Critique*, 1.
[4] *Id.*, 2.
[5] Masco, "The Crisis in Crisis," 65.

and "favours clear-cut distinctions between perpetrators and victims, between those who are guilty and those who are innocent."[6] Many cultural productions and academic studies call awareness to the ideological implications of how "crisis" is used and which mechanisms of in- and exclusions this use entails. In this first issue of LEAP, we seek to contribute to this discussion, by critically reflecting on various manifestations and representations of crisis. Through a variety of case studies, we situate specific crises within larger political, ideological and cultural constellations.

This first issue is divided into two sections. The articles in the first section, "Community in times of crisis," explore important political questions of community belonging and community preservation. In the first contribution, Arijana Šimunović analyzes the Central American refugee crisis and its representations in media and literature. She traces how the US-based Latin American writer Valeria Luiselli provides a counter-perspective to official representations of the so-called "Central American migration crisis." Matthew Luck continues this focus on how crisis manifests for specific migrant groups. His article homes in on the key role of legislative language in the uncertain status and rights of both the Windrush generation, and EU citizens after Brexit. Luck argues that a reoccurring crisis has developed for transnational citizens in the United Kingdom.

In her study of the digital presence of Dutch mosques in response to COVID-19 restrictions, Sophia Mons subsequently examines the online initiatives of Centrum de Middenweg in Rotterdam and how these create a virtual religious communal life. Analyzing the internet as a social space of communication, she argues that the traditional Islamic institutions of the mosque proves resilient and adaptable to unexpected circumstances. The first section concludes with a review by Lotte van den Bosch of Viktor Pelevin's novel *The Clay Machine-Gun* (1996; translated 2000). Van den Bosch discusses the ways in which this postmodern novel plays with the axes of time and space to reflect on the uncertainty experienced by a community in transition from socialism to postsocialism.

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[6] Boletsi, "Towards a Visual Middle Voice," 23.

The contributions in the second section, "(Im)materialities: engaging with crisis," discuss different ways in which material and immaterial objects relate to crisis. Gabriël de Klerk, firstly, examines the imperial ideology that materializes on the coinage of Emperor Galba during the crisis of the "Year of the Four Emperors" in 68/69 A.D. Investigating the coin-types that were minted during Galba's reign, De Klerk analyzes how the imperial administration employed coinage as a political medium. The following article by Chiara Juriatti investigates the motif of permanent ice in contemporary art installations that refer to the climate crisis in the glacial regions. Through the sensual engagement of the human body, Juriatti argues, the artworks make the implications of climate change tangible.

Didi Spaans, in the next contribution, highlights the role of algorithms in the anti-vaccination movement that emerged in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. She delves into the question of how YouTube algorithms influence the political and social understanding of vaccines. Next, Frank van den Boom explores in what manner Ovid's epic *Metamorphoses* (8 A.D.) is able to contribute to a viable frame of mind in times of the contemporary ecological crisis. The corporeal transformations in Ovid, Van den Boom argues, reflect philosophically on the unpredictability of the future. Kaspar Hendrichs, finally, reviews Agustina Bazterrica's novel *Tender is the Flesh* (2017; translated 2020), zooming in on how the theme of cannibalism simulates the power-relations between the eater and the eaten in consumer society. In this way, Hendrichs discusses, the novel constructs a critique of the savage fundaments of late capitalism.

In different but complementary ways, the contributions to this first issue of LEAP shed light on the various manifestations and cultural representations of crisis. Writing in the spring of 2021, with COVID-19, the precarious situation of refugees, and climate change on our minds, we start from the belief that crisis necessitates critical reflection.

The 2021 editorial team of LEAP consists of: Frank van den Boom, Lotte van den Bosch, Kaspar Hendrichs, Gabriël de Klerk, Chiara Juriatti, Matthew Luck, Sophia Mons, Arijana Šimunović and Didi Spaans.

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Part One

Community in Times of Crisis

Fiction as Counter-Discourse: Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* and the Rewriting of the Central American Migration Crisis

Arijana Šimunović

To leave is to die a little.
To arrive is never to arrive.
MIGRANT PRAYER

Valeria Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive* (2019)

In a time of crisis, social distinctions arise not only on the basis of where we live, but also on the basis of how we move. The ongoing COVID-19 crisis — where one must remain at home and limit one's movements in order to protect communities from the virus — demonstrates this fact. Mobility has become a resource that is disproportionately distributed: some people have access to it and some people do not. Tim Cresswell, writing on this theme, argues that the way we experience mobility is informed by the narratives and meanings that surround it.[1] Immigration, for instance, has become a polarized issue in contemporary political discourse, as those in power advance negative stereotypes about migrants in order to uphold specific political agendas.[2] Maria C. Ledesma, likewise, posits the "[E]bolification of immigration reform," a development which serves to perpetuate anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes.[3] These political narratives come with specific uses of language, freighted with assumptions about the effects of migrant arrival in the receiving state. One such use of language is the term "illegal," which in conservative political discourse is a noun rather

[1] Cresswell, *On the move*, 21-24.
[2] *Id.*
[3] Ledesma, "Public Discourse versus Public Policy," 58.

than an adjective, as in the usual sense — naming the immigrant as a criminal, as if an inherently morally delinquent person.[4] Commenting on such words as "illegal," philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler have argued that violence is embedded in language.[5] This violence has the power to determine the public perception and fate of immigrants to the West from former colonies, and other diasporic subjects.

Against this background, Cresswell contends that social sciences, the law, and national governments generally attend to human mobility according to statistic and quantitative factors, asking questions such as: *how are people moving, where are they moving to, how many people are moving and how fast are they moving?* The arts and humanities, on the other hand, reject the technocratic "social science" approach to thinking about human mobility, being primarily engaged with the question of what movement means both to the people who are moving and to the people that are around them.[6] Informed by these questions, I will consider in this article how literature responds to popular rhetoric related to migration. My key point of reference will be Valeria Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* (2019), which I understand as a *counter-discourse* to the established narratives surrounding migration movements.

In this article, I will analyze how *Lost Children Archive* deconstructs mainstream narratives around immigration by offering a counter-narrative. I will also examine how the novel critically reflects on the environments in which immigration processes take place. *Lost Children Archive* incorporates many travel-related intertextual and intermedial elements, which I will also consider. One intermedial element in *Lost Children Archive* is the text's inclusion of work by the Mexican writer and photographer Juan Rulfo, who depicts the aridness and desolation of the Northern Mexican landscape. Rulfo's work is of major interest to my analysis because it shows the difficulty of the migrant journey. In his work, the aridness of the landscape can be read as an allegory of United States immigration policy and as critique of its inhumanity. The dangerous road that migrants must take in order to reach the United

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] See, for example, Derrida, "Shibboleth"; Butler, *Precarious Life*.

[6] Cresswell, *On The Move*.

States, tragically, is merely a prelude to the dangerous road that begins upon crossing the U.S.-Mexico border.

The article will consider the relationship between fact and fiction, between intertextual and intermedial elements in Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive*, and how these elements offer a counter-narrative to the popular perceptions surrounding what in the United States has been called the "Central American migrant crisis." The first section of this article will address the relationship between mobility and mobility narratives in the post-industrial era. Following Cresswell, I will focus on migration from a perspective of human geography. The second section of this article will elaborate on Luiselli's intertextual and intermediated strategies that critically reflect on the space in which migration processes occur. Finally, the article will argue that literary works have a greater potential to promote empathy than mere facts and figures, reasserting the human dignity of the individuals who cross national borders.

Mobility and Narratives

By studying migration from a human geography perspective, we can recognize the complex power relations at play in debates surrounding immigration policy. As Sandra Ponzanesi emphasizes, colonial practices "did not stop with the end of empires but have been brought home, and made visible the racial nature of old national identities highlighting the multicultural rapture of the new."[7] The legacies of colonial policy can be traced, for instance, in the ongoing Central American migration crisis. In his study of mobility as a right of citizenship, Cresswell compares United States migrant exclusion practices in the late nineteenth century to modern day practices, concluding that the method the United States government employs to make intelligible and respond to these individuals remains the same.[8] His historical context is the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which forbade Chinese immigrants from entry to the United States after the government decided that arrival of Chinese laborers in the country "endanger[ed] the good order of certain localities within the territory."[9]

[7] Ponzanesi, "Diasporic Subjects and Migration," 209.
[8] Cresswell, *On the move*, 193.
[9] *Id.* 159.

To be a citizen is, among other things, to be a bearer of rights. One of those rights in the context of the United States is the right to mobility. Moreover, mobility is included in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1949) as a universal right, which guarantees both movement within borders of each state and the rights to leave and return to a country. Yet the United States' detention of thousands of immigrants, including children, from the beginning of the migration crisis in 2014 until today demonstrates that mobility — supposedly a freedom that lies at the heart of some of the foundational ideologies of the modern world and the United States — serves to falsely perpetuate the idea of universality when actual state practice suggests otherwise.[10]

In popular culture, the iconography of the "American" as a practitioner of mobility has been played out repeatedly in novels, on film, and in music. The idea that everyone in the United States is a traveler is firmly established in the minds of many, being part of the myth of the nation as a country born out of immigration.[11] In *Lost Children Archive*, Luiselli critically reflects on this myth and its associated iconography by juxtaposing a narrative of the migration crisis with a narrative of a family road trip. She identifies traces inscribed in the landscape that evoke past atrocities such as the Indian Removal Act, envisioning their links to the ongoing migration crisis and its effects on the thousands of people crossing the border. In Luiselli's text, observations of the landscape play a crucial role in deconstructing the identity of modern American society. Her descriptions of landscape contain vivid imagery alluding to the struggles migrants face in their journeys north. Luiselli explains that her book is a road novel, but in reverse:

> It is like retracing the path that has become iconic of the American road trip. To go through it is to undo the myth of liberation, of discovery, of reinvention. This myth is also based on a very false idea of history and that is that this country was invented in freedom with a creative spirit. That was at the expense of so many

[10] *Id.* 162-166.
[11] *Id.* 193.

> people. This novel dialogues with that myth and thinks about that group of people who are always marginalized, relegated, imprisoned, so that the white American dream is possible.[12]

While a reader of a novel addressing migration issues might expect a melodramatic firsthand narrative account of migrant-related sorrows, no such narrative is present in *Lost Children Archive*. Luiselli leaves the radio broadcasts that her characters listen to in their car, the human interactions they encounter during their trip, and the landscapes they pass through to speak for themselves. From America's liminal spaces — empty cities, vast deserts, police controls, Walmarts, and the Elvis Presley motel — Luiselli allows us to witness the creation of "otherness."

Landscape and myth

To distance oneself from a particular narrative and tell a story from a different point of view is to create an alternate archive.[13] Blurring the line between fact and fiction in *Lost Children Archive*, Luiselli brings her life and work experiences as an immigrant and translator into a fictional scenario of a family road trip. The novel contains numerous intertextual, intermedial, and metafictional elements. Of particular relevance to my analysis is a meta-text called *Elegies for Lost Children*, which appears in the *Lost Children Archive* in fragments. Luiselli creates a fictitious author — a woman named Ella Camposanto — whose book-within-the-book introduces the reader to the journeys of unaccompanied minors migrating by foot and *La Bestia* from Central America to the USA.[14] *The Elegies for Lost Children* functions as a metanarrative for *Lost Children Archive*. *Lost Children Archive* begins with a conventional American family

[12] Maristain, "Valeria Luiselli: Me interesa poquísimo la autoficción."

[13] I am aware of the theory surrounding the notion of archive, but this is beyond the scope of this article. For the theory on archive see *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1996) by Jacques Derrida, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (2001), by Carolyn Steedman.

[14] Sp. La Bestia (eng. beast), also known as "The Train of Death," is a colloquial expression in spanish for the train that helps the migrants to traverse the length of Mexico.

road trip, but ends up addressing the migration crisis when the narrator's children get lost in the desert and meet the lost children from the meta-text *The Elegies for Lost Children*. Their meeting space might be called the *borderlands*, which Chicana writer Gloria Anzaldúa conceptualizes as the landscape of the American Southwest where "two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch."[15] Anzaldúa argues that the *borderlands* is not a comfortable territory to live in, as hatred, anger, and exploitation are the prominent features of this landscape[16]. Furthermore, the *borderlands* is a place where "land and bodies blend in both metaphysical and real senses, in which perception and living cannot be distinguished so easily."[17] When Anzaldúa refers to *borderlands* as a place of contradiction, she means that it is a place where life and death meet. This concept derives from an awareness that land resonates with the diasporic bodies that inhabit it.

Lost Children Archive complicates Anzaldua's definition of the *borderlands*. The novel emphasizes how dominant cultural and economic institutions exploit the perilousness of border crossings as a means to control the movements of individuals. The novel portrays two journeys: a family leisure road trip through the American southwest, and unaccompanied minors traveling north. These two trips share a common setting. The main narrator's interpretations of what she sees on her road trip undermine her prior understanding of the territory that she is exploring, an understanding that had been based on the iconography that she had studied in her previous capacity as a documentarian. She reflects:

> I know, as we drive through the long, lonely roads of this country — a landscape that I am seeing for the first time — that what I see is not quite what I see. What I see is what others have already documented: Ilf and Petrov, Robert Frank, Robert Adams, Walker Evans, Stephen Shore — the first road photographers and their pictures of road signs, stretches of vacant land,

[15] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 19-35.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*

> cars, motels, diners, industrial repetition, all the ruins of early capitalism now engulfed by future ruins of late capitalism. When I see the people of this country, their vitality, their decadence, their loneliness, their desperate togetherness, I see the gaze of Emmet Gowin, Larry Clark, and Nan Goldin.[18]

The narrator finds the Southwestern terrain to be a desolate wasteland haunted by genocide and occupied only by border patrol agents and lonely locals. The last chapter of *Lost Children Archive*, entitled "Box VII," reproduces the polaroid photos that the family takes along the journey. The photographs depict empty land, a few cowboys, a train, and a family on their last trip together.[19] The narrative of *Lost Children Archive* parallels the story that is told wordlessly through these photographs. The photographs, just as does the metanarrative *Elegies for Lost Children*, visualize real migration routes.

In these photographs, the landscape is a metaphorical representation of hell. In fact, the novel makes an interesting intertextual reference to the work of Juan Rulfo, a writer who explicitly gives landscape imagery an infernal symbolization in *Pedro Páramo*. Aspects of the Mexican town of Comola, he writes, make it "el infierno mexicano" ("Mexican hell"). Travelers to this town descend into "el puro calor sin aire" ("suffocating heat without air"). The title of Rulfo's work, moreover, contributes to this atmosphere. The Spanish word *páramo* translates as "wasteland," implying that the novel is set in a wasteland. In *Lost Children Archive*, landscape is presented in the same manner as in *Pedro Páramo*. Like Rulfo, Luiselli often plays with language to provoke a reader's visceral response. The surname of *Lost Children Archive*'s metanarrator, for example, is Camposanto. This word translates from the Spanish as cemetery.

Some believe that Juan Rulfo's photographs are a kind of writing. But Rulfo himself explains that writing and photography are

[18] Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 102.
[19] *Id.,* 353-376.

different worlds. For him, the only way to write is through imagination:

> Para escribir tengo que imaginar. La realidad no me dice nada literariamente, aunque puede decírmelo fotográficamente. Admiro mucho a quienes pueden escribir acerca de lo que oyen y ven inmediatamente. Yo no puedo penetrar la realidad: es misteriosa.[20]

Walter Benjamin argues that "a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye, if only because an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man."[21] Accordingly, it seems that Luiselli, placing photographs on the last pages of *Lost Children Archive*, wants to offer a version of the novel's narrative through images rather than words to express the wishes and needs of the dominant social strata, and to interpret real-life events in its own way. The photographs narrate the family's road trip by capturing the landscape in which the two "trips" appearing in the novel are set. As she drives, the narrator describes the landscape through the lens of his father's observations:

> Now he was talking about this whirlpool of history, and erased lives, and was looking through the windshield at the curvy road ahead as we drove up a narrow mountain pass, where there were no green things growing, no trees, no bushes, nothing alive, only jagged rocks and trunks of trees split in half as if old gods with giant axes had got angry and shopped this part of the world apart. What happened here? ... Papa said: Genocide, exodus, diaspora, ethnic cleansing, that's what happened.[22]

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[20] Goldáraz, "El fotógrafo Juan Rulfo." My own translation to English: "In order to write, I have to imagine. Reality does not tell me anything through literature, although it can tell me things photographically. I admire those who can write about what they hear and see directly. I cannot penetrate reality: It is mysterious."

[21] Benjamin, *The Work of Art*, 56.

[22] Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 215.

Examining the Rulfian landscape in conjunction with the photographs appearing in the last chapter of *Lost Children Archive* allows the observer to reflect on the empty landscape and abandoned life forms resulting from the "genocide, exodus, diaspora, ethnic cleansing" in the region.[23] In *The Ground of the Image* (2005), Jean-Luc Nancy suggests that "the country manifests itself as something based on belonging, but a belonging that can only come from one who 'belongs' insofar as, and because he is related to what he calls his 'country.'"[24] Region or landscape, according to Nancy, provides an individual with a sense of belonging through personal attachment. Luiselli critically reflects on this attachment, exploring the forms of belonging and non-belonging that emerge when one's setting is the *borderlands* and *cemetery*. Her portrait of the American wasteland is bleak: "Long straight roads, empty and monotonous"[25]; and "chicken fences stretch out endless. Behind the fences are lonely ranches. Lonely people in those ranches, maybe."[26] The photographs included in *Lost Children Archive* are similarly evocative. Their subject matter is the same as that of the narrative: the local people, children and the landscape. In this way, the photographs provide a visual counterpoint to the text. The narrative of these photographs, which runs parallel to the novel's written narrative, deconstructs a key component of United States national identity: the belief in the freedom of the open road.

Reading Luiselli together with Rulfo's photography, we can find an intersection of American and Mexican history inscribed in the landscape settings both of *Lost Children Archive and* Rulfo's work. Luiselli recognizes that this landscape is the landscape of Apache history, and that it is the landscape of migration history. For her, this landscape demonstrates the false promise of mobility as a universal right in contemporary America. Rulfo's photographs from Mexico are related to the photographs appearing in the *Lost Children Archive* chapter "Box VII" because a history of exclusion and forced exodus is embedded within both Mexican and United States cultures and landscapes. Luiselli's photographs in particular

[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, 59.
[25] Luiselli, *Lost Children* Archive, 158.
[26] *Id.* 113.

show a vision of the southwestern United States landscape, which demonstrates that the neocolonial legacy of U.S.-Mexican relations endures through an interconnection between universalism and the colonial imagination.

The landscapes in both Rulfo's and Luiselli's photography range from attractive mountains to dusty, desert expanses. In Luiselli' photographs, people are often sitting, climbing or walking along dusty desert paths. In the photographs appearing in the last section of the book, the chapter entitled "Box VII," we can observe parallels between the pictures of Luiselli (figures 1,3,5) and of Rulfo (figures 2,4,6).

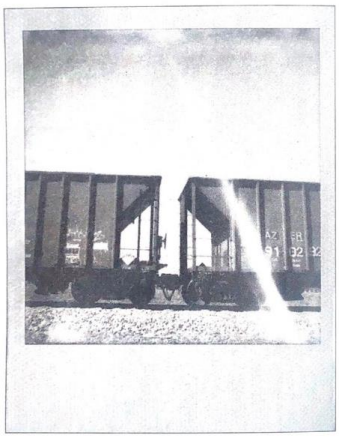

Figure 1: Valeria Luiselli (in the chapter "Box VII")

Figure 2: Juan Rulfo (from the series *En los Ferrocarriles*, property of Clara Aparicio de Rulfo)

Figure 3: Valeria Luiselli (in the chapter "Box VII")

Figure 4: Juan Rulfo (property of Clara Aparicio de Rulfo)

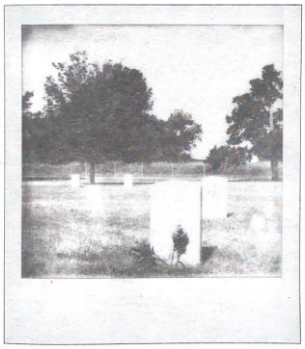

Figure 5: Valeria Luiselli (in the chapter "Box VII")

Figure 6: Juan Rulfo (property of Clara Aparicio de Rulfo)

In considering the relation between Rulfo's novels and his photography, Bong Seo Yoon asks: "What does it mean to photograph? It is finishing a story, knowing how to interpret, knowing the language of an unknown story, imagining the poetic page necessary at that moment."[27] In *Lost Children Archive*, Luiselli is concerned with these same capabilities. She attempts to create a comprehensive picture of the migration crisis by incorporating different intertextual and intermedial elements in the novel to elicit readers' empathy for migrants, thus serving a counter-narrative to the conventional representation of the crisis.

Literary counter-narratives do not follow the strict rules of reasoning and argumentation, but allow for other ways of thinking about the world. They give access to the understanding of complex social problematics in a very different way than the domain of law. Legal scholars have also seen those possibilities of literature. In the work of legal scholar Amnon Reichman and philosopher Martha Nussbaum, for example, literature is often viewed as both inferior and superior, explains Frans-Willem Korsten when he analyzes how the field of law talks about the field of literature as the *Other*. It is viewed as inferior in the sense that it does not follow the strict rules of reasoning and argumentation, but it is seen as superior for "its capacity to make things imaginable, palpable, tangible and senseable

[27] Seo, "Juan Rulfo, escritor y fotógrafo: dos artes en conjunción."

or in its potential to promote empathy or ethical behaviour."[28] The law, in that view, implies "a field that feels cold and instrumental," but literature "one that indulges in the warmth of understanding," so Korsten argues.[29]

Whereas Luiselli's previous work, *The Essay in Forty Questions*, was a work of criticism, strictly concerned with questions relating to institutional frameworks, *Lost Children Archive* uses fiction to introduce the reader to the circumstances that lead migrants to want to cross the border and suffer the perils of migration. In short, it is a novel that documents the plight of migrant children in an unconventional manner contrary to the mainstream representation of immigrants as a threat to citizens of their receiving countries.

Conclusion

In *Lost Children Archive* we find two mediums in conjunction: image and text in a reciprocal relation. The photos, much like the narrative, give a wide-ranging view of a disturbing land. The photography captures the dryness and emptiness of the American southwest. But such emptiness does not necessarily suggest complete abandonment, because this landscape remains an area that is populated by individuals and nomads who sustain themselves on the borderline between docility and a perpetual state of inertia. These individuals become susceptible to believing in narratives and supporting policies about cross-border mobility result that in great hardships for migrants.

Drawing both from Nancy and Cresswell's reflections on belonging and attachment to a place, we can see how migration in the modern Western world is seen as a threat, a disorder in the system. The migrant and the refugee have been inscribed with immoral intent, an inscription reflected in popular discourse and social practices. The suffering of these figures demonstrates that violence and exploitation, rather than freedom and liberty, are at the core of American history and experience.

[28] Korsten, *Art as an Interface*, 17.
[29] *Ibid.*

Luiselli's strength in *Lost Children Archive* is her ability to narrate children's stories from different points of views that are in constant dialogue with other types of literature on mobility. She creates a sense of presence and immediacy in the story, which goes beyond US-Central American socio-cultural context. She incorporates photographs of a family road trip that do not simply depict a family road trip. Trapped in a desert wasteland, these migrants try to escape from their living nightmares. This way, Luiselli deconstructs the popular portrait of diasporic subjects as seekers of the American Dream. Both Luiselli's and Rulfo's portraits of the exteriority of the American space (or, as Anzaldua would put it, the in-between space), eloquently demonstrate that crisis is rooted in power. One of Luiselli's characters describes the American situation in this way:

> This whole country, Papa said, is an enormous cemetery, but only some people get proper graves, because most lives don't matter. Most lives get erased, lost in the whirlpool of trash we call history, he said.[30]

The journey from Honduras to Mexico and all the way up to US-Mexican border is not only bumpy but insufferable. Moreover, it does not end at the border. Upon crossing this border, the obstacles created by United States' immigration law emerge. Mixing fact with fiction, *Lost Children Archive* invites the reader to reflect critically on the so-called immigration crisis and on the hate discourses that surround it. Luiselli depicts the *vacuity* of the American landscape through her telling of two journeys, generating an enriching alternative archive to the mainstream perspective.

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[30] Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 215.

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Status at the Mercy of Language: A Reoccurring Crisis for Transnational Citizens in the United Kingdom

Matthew Luck

Out of the remnants of colonial empire and following generations of intra-European conflict, the post-World War II era has seen the emergence of new technologies and laws facilitating the transnational movement of people to Europe and amongst European countries. Among these countries, the United Kingdom has been no exception, having over the past seventy years made various legal provisions facilitating transnationalism. That said, the UK has also repeatedly revoked these provisions and replaced them with policies that frustrate transnationalism and foster racial and ethnic discrimination. In this article, I will discuss British immigration and nationality policy in the mid-twentieth century in relation to legislative changes that took place at the time of the UK's entry in the European Union. I will also discuss the UK's midcentury immigration and nationality policy in relation to the legislative changes which took place upon the UK's exit from the EU. To do this, I will examine two categories of primary source material. The first will be a selection of nationality and immigration acts from the mid-twentieth century: the British Nationality Act 1948, the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 and the Immigration Act 1971. The second category will be primary source material relating to the UK's entry into the EU and subsequent exit: the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, the 2020 Withdrawal Agreement, and the 2019 EU Settlement Scheme. In the texts of these acts and agreements, key legal terms such as "leave to remain" and "settled status" give form to categories of legal subject. "Leave to remain" is a term that defines rights of the

Windrush generation after the Immigration Act 1971, who were free from immigration controls and had no limit on the duration of their permitted residency in the UK. The existence of this unique legal status distinguishing them from UK citizens led them to face unjust scrutiny from immigration authorities. Reminiscent of "leave to remain," "settled status" describes the legal status of EU citizens living in the UK who, following Brexit, register with the EU Settlement Scheme. These EU citizens are given unique proof of their status to show employers, landlords and government officials, allowing them to access critical services when required.

The connection drawn in political and media spheres between migration and crisis is also examined in academic research. "Beyond Crisis Talk: Interrogating Migration and Crises in Europe" is one example of a scholarly article that takes a broad look at the link between migration and crisis. The article, written by Nick Dines, Nicola Montagna and Elena Vacchelli argues that this link has only strengthened in recent decades: "Human mobility has long been associated with the idea of crisis. Over the last 10 years this connection has become particularly pronounced."[1] Indeed, many contemporary debates that revolve around housing, employment and public services in the United Kingdom include discussion of immigration, and the role of immigrants within the country. Dines, Montagna and Vacchelli further note how social crises have often been tied to or even blamed on migrants: "Stephen Glover declared in the Daily Mail that 'It's not racist to say that migration has fuelled the housing crisis' [and that] uncontrolled immigration to the United Kingdom over the last 10 years and not austerity or a lack of public investment that had increased the 'scarcity of affordable housing.'"[2]

This article fits into the academic discourse that surrounds the topic of migration and its link to crisis. In particular, this article engages with research scholars have devoted to connections between the Windrush Scandal and Brexit in recent years. Ronald Cummings's "Ain't no black in the (Brexit) Union Jack? Race and empire in the era of Brexit and the Windrush scandal" is just one example of academic literature that links Brexit and the Windrush

[1] Dines, Montagna and Vacchelli, "Beyond Crisis Talk," 440.
[2] *Ibid.*

scandal. In doing so, Cummings discusses seminal academic works like Paul Gilroy's *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), which addresses the relation between British identity and race.

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It is necessary to touch upon the details of the unjust scrutiny that Caribbean British subjects have faced. The 2018 Windrush scandal concerned actions taken by the Home Office affecting "British subjects" who had arrived from Caribbean countries before

[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*

immigration control changes in 1973. They faced potential detention, loss of rights, and deportation due to the hostile environment policy introduced in 2012. They also faced these risks because they were not issued legal documentation when they were originally granted an automatic right to remain in the UK. New cases of British subjects denied access to their rights of residency in the UK, the right to public services and the right to re-enter the country after travelling abroad, are still coming to light as of the time of writing of this article.

In this article, I will not consider question of whether the European Union is most accurately defined as a supranational union. Nor will I consider the question of whether the concept of citizenship found in the United Kingdom's 1948 British Nationality Act is entirely equivalent to the concept of citizenship espoused by the European Union. Rather, I will study the history of the right of UK citizens and subjects to move to and settle in the UK. My approach will be from the perspective of transnationalism, a term which I understand to refer broadly "to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states."[5] In many situations of transnationalism, people experience "a continued identification with the nation-state they have come from (often because of the intention to return)."[6] A crucial characteristic of transnational movement that in such cross-border interaction, state sovereignty remains at play: "while the power of the state has been challenged in some circumstances by subnational, supranational and transnational institutions, the organs of the nation-state still play a crucial role."[7] Transnational status is additive, enabling migrants to settle in countries other than their countries of origin while still retaining connections with and legal rights in their countries of origin due (e.g. a British subject who is also a European citizen). Despite this possibility, the nation-state can also create uncertainty for vulnerable transnationals by changing their legal status. This has been the case in the UK in relation to the Windrush generation, amongst others. Despite the role that national citizenship plays in transnational citizenship, Jonathan Fox's definition of "transnational

[5] Kaiser and Starie, *Transnational European Union*, ii.
[6] Willis, "State/Nation/Transnation," 2-3.
[7] *Ibid.*

citizenship" notes that "the concept of transnational citizenship resonates with those who want to extend rights and principles of political and social equality beyond nation-state boundaries."[8] This definition will be integral to my analysis, as I will examine how both the establishment and breakdown of transnational citizenship in the language of legislation determines the "political and social equality" of these citizens.

Giulia Adriana Pennisi addresses the unique functions of legal language and the importance of word choice in the drafting of legislation:

> Legislative expressions are required to be clear, precise, and unambiguous, on the one hand, and all-inclusive, on the other. The challenge in the construction of legislative discourse is the nature and extent of specification of legal scope in the expression of legislative intentions. A clever balance between the two is the essence of the craftsmanship of legislative intent.[9]

The particular language contained in legislation has the power to define, ensure, and also subsequently alter the rights and status of those whom the legislation addresses. The intent that legislative language be "unambiguous" is a fitting subject for a critical discourse analysis. Justin Parkinson identifies how an absence of legislation — an absence of the assurance of status in legal language — led to the mistreatment of the Windrush generation. Parkinson notes that the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) determined in its report on the UK Home Office's treatment of the Windrush generation that "it is unacceptable that equality legislation, designed to prevent an unfair or disproportionate impact on people from ethnic minorities and other groups, was effectively ignored in the creation and delivery of policies that had such profound implications for so many people's lives."[10] Clearly, the detrimental effects of the changes to key immigration and nationality legislation

[8] Fox, "Unpacking "Transnational Citizenship," 171.
[9] Pennisi, "Legislative Drafting," 99.
[10] Parkinson, "Windrush Generation," para.17.

coupled with an increasingly hostile UK government stance on immigration over the last century have altered assurances and perceptions on transnationals. The EHRC report itself acknowledges the unique history of transnational connections to the UK that result from the history of the British Empire, identifying the considerations that should have been made in regards to any alteration to immigration policy: "Britain's complex history of international power [has] implications for the movement of people. The potential consequences of immigration policy for people's lives are profound, especially when it goes wrong."[11] The report homes in on how UK immigration policy should be but historically has not been rooted in a sense of common humanity. This is a key facet of the ongoing UK immigration crisis. Sweeping political decisions have brought about monumental problems for members of the Windrush generation and will have similar effects on European citizens in the UK in years to come.

I will draw on theory and research on citizenship and transnationalism alongside my methodology of critical discourse analysis, which Ruth Wodak defines in *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* as a focus on the fundamental role of language use in structural relationships:

> CDA may be defined as fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. In other words, CDA aims to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use.[12]

With this critical approach in mind, my comparison of postcolonial migration acts with the UK's exit from the European Union will examine language use in policy directed for mass public consumption.

[11] "Public Sector Equality Duty," para.7
[12] Wodak, "What CDA Is About," 3.

My article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I will study the legislation that led to the formation of transnational connections between the UK and its colonies and Commonwealth. My primary source material in the first section will be the British Nationality Act 1948, which created the legal status of "Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies" (CUKC). In the second section, I will study the legislation that led to the formation of connections between the UK and the European Union. I will also study the legal status of "European citizen," a term which the European Union uses to describe a new transnational citizen. The primary source material I study in this section will be the Treaty of Maastricht (1992).

The third section of my article will examine the controversy around rights-restricting legal status "leave to remain," which the Immigration Act of 1971 applied to CUKC transnationals. This Act and the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 are the primary material of the third section. In the fourth section of my article, the legal status change of CUKCs that I discuss in the prior section will provide the basis for a comparison to situation of EU citizens in the UK during and after Brexit.

CUKC, commonwealth, and EU citizens living in the UK lack official documentation of legal residency status. When their residency in the UK is questioned, these people themselves have the burden of proving their legal right to this residency, but no means by which to prove this right. Media and legal initiatives such *the3million* have already noted comparisons between the consequences of Brexit and the Windrush scandal, highlighting the impossibility of registering all EU citizens living in the UK as people with "settled status." *The3million* is an advocacy group that was established after the UK's 2016 referendum on membership in the EU. This group campaigns for EU citizens' rights in the UK in response to Brexit policy developments. The aim of my article is not to provide a solution to this reoccurring crisis, nor to advocate for sweeping changes to the current UK legal structure determining the rights of migrants to the UK from the Caribbean, the commonwealth and the EU. This is partly because the full extent of the consequences of recent legislative changes affecting the status of transnationals have not yet been fully realized. In place of advocacy, I will examine how the transnational crisis repeats itself the last

century of British history. In the process, I will aim to highlight the role of legal policy language in manifesting political intent. It is specific uses of language, I will argue, which effects the severing of transnational connections. In this, I aim to demonstrate the propensity for the transnational crisis to remerge not only in the United Kingdom, but also in the European Union and other transnational contexts.

The creation of the "British subject" through the British Nationality Act (1948)

The passage of the British Nationality Act 1948 (BNA) was a defining moment in the history of British citizenship. The act was passed in the same year that the National Health Service was founded, and both acts signified a crucial period of change in the UK after the Second World War. The BNA regularized the citizenship rights of British subjects, which had previously been legally inconsistent between Commonwealth nations:

> (1) Every person who under this Act is a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies or who under any enactment for the time being in force in any country mentioned in subsection (3) of this section is a citizen of that country shall by virtue of that citizenship have the status of a British subject.[13]

This clearly constitutes an intent to establish in writing an equality of status between British citizens and subjects. In his study of citizenship in postwar Britain, Randall Hansen highlights the importance of this parity to the legislation's drafters:

> There was near-unanimity around the belief that all British subjects – colonial subjects and Old Commonwealth citizens – should formally enjoy full citizenship rights (though they would not be referred to as such) in the UK. ... In the main, criticism of the legislation centred on its potential for introducing distinctions among

[13] *Legislation.gov.uk*, "British Nationality Act 1948."

> British subjects. Lord Altrincham, for example, detected such a differentiation in the distinction between CUKCs and citizens of independent Commonwealth countries ... When Altrincham's arguments were repeated by others, the Lord Chancellor tried to reassure Opposition members that: "This Bill does not differentiate between British subjects.[14]

The Parliament sought to ensure full rights for all British subjects, fearing the consequences of a distinction between nations of the CUKC and Commonwealth citizens. Despite their efforts, the Parliament's fears would be realized. Subsequent legislation created such distinctions between British subjects and caused confusion surrounding the legal status of United Kingdom residents.

Attending to the particular word "citizenship" as it appears in the BNA, a critical discourse analysis approach can reveal the role of this term in determining power relations between and statuses of British citizens. David Olusoga identifies the transnationalism inherent in the BNA and the parity of rights that the broad term "citizenship" signifies:

> The 1948 British Nationality Act reaffirmed rights that had existed for centuries in common law, including the right of all British subjects to move freely and live anywhere they chose within the newly constituted British Commonwealth.[15]

Following the Lord Chancellor's promise to Parliament of parity between subjects, the act put into place a transnational system that defined colonial subjects and Commonwealth citizens as of an equal right to the "British" identity. In their discussion of citizenship theory, Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist point to the system of inclusion and exclusion that defines citizenship:

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[14] Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration,* 49.
[15] "The Unwanted The Secret Windrush Files," 00:08:30 - 00:09:00.

> The distinction between citizens and noncitizens, those who were for one reason or another excluded from full membership as citizens ... served as a significant and consequential differential mark of identity. It spoke to who could and who could not take part in the ongoing process of self-rule. The idea of full membership is crucial here insofar as while in some instances it was possible to distinguish the citizen from the alien.[16]

The implications of such a "differential mark of identity" were Lord Altrincham's concern in considering the potential for the BNA creating changes in the respective statuses of CUKC and Commonwealth "British subjects." Despite the Lord Chancellor's assurances to the contrary, one's transnational status as a "British subject" still had the potential to become a function of one's ethnicity, race or national identity. "Full membership" in this sense presents the possibility of dividing the British citizen from the British subject, the national from the transnational identity. Transnationals, unlike nationals of a given state, can be by turns included and subsequently excluded from the social body.

A prominent Pathé newsreel report covering the Empire Windrush's arrival in the UK, titled "Pathé Reporter Meets (1948)," is evidence of favorable popular attitude to the arrival of the Empire Windrush's passengers.[17] Although the journey of the Windrush passengers was not easy — historians such as Olusoga have revealed that the UK government made secret attempts to prevent these citizens from arriving in the UK, as well as that these citizens faced discrimination on arrival — their arrival in the UK nonetheless constitutes a new transnational connection coming into existence.[18]

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[16] Kivisto & Faist, *Citizenship: Discourse*, 16.

[17] The Empire Windrush was a passenger liner which docked in Kingston Jamaica en route to the United Kingdom to pick up servicemen who were on leave. The ship was far from capacity, and therefore advertised cheap transport to the UK. Jamaicans were to be deemed "British subjects" under the British Nationality Act 1948 going through parliament, and so, people took this opportunity to find work and residence in the UK as per their right within this act.

[18] Olusoga, "The Windrush Story," para.8-9.

The language of the BNA allowed people living in the UK's West Indian colonies to view themselves as transnational British citizens.

The newsreel contains an interview with a man who says he travelled from Jamaica to the UK in order to provide for his mother back in Jamaica: "I am a single man, only my mother that is depending on me ... I'm trying to help myself and also help my mum."[19] The BNA ensures that this man and others from the UK colonies and Commonwealth that their legal status will enable them to go between nations freely and retain connections to family outside of the UK. In the same way that the BNA uses inclusionary terms like "British subject" to describe residents of the UK's colonies and the commonwealth, the Pathé newsreel announcer admiringly calls these people "our ex-servicemen who know England ... coming to the mother country with good intent."[20]

New rights and a new community with the Treaty of Maastricht (1992)

The introduction of the "British subject" status through the BNA can be compared to that of "European citizenship" through the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht, which similarly instituted transnational freedoms for nationals of EU countries. Later treaties, such the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, specified that European citizenship was a supplement to rather than a replacement of national citizenship. Like the United Kingdom following the BNA, the European Union with these treaties established itself as a transnational system. Like the CUKC and Commonwealth "British subject" within the United Kingdom, the EU citizen is a "citizen of the Union" with rights that extend beyond his or her rights as a national of any particular EU member state. The following lines from the Treaty of Maastricht are relevant here:

[19] *British Pathe*, "Pathe Reporter Meets (1948)," 00:01:35 – 00:01:56.
[20] *Id.*, 00:00:50 – 00:01:01.

> Every person holding the nationality of a Member State shall be a citizen of the Union. Every citizen of the Union shall have the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States.[21]

Michael Lister discusses some of the complexities arising from this definition of European citizenship, including a conflict that arises between transnational citizenship and traditional national citizenship. A "key task" involved in constructing the European Union as a transnational system, he finds, is to "enable every national of an EU Member State to recognise European citizenship as a source of new rights and the expression of belonging to a new community."[22] This belonging "'give[s] European citizenship . . . its full meaning.'"[23] The intent to foster a "new community" is key here. The European Union's conferral of equal status on European citizens regardless of national origin is reminiscent of the BNA's assurance of no disparity between CUKC and Commonwealth citizens as British subjects. But in both contexts, despite aspirations to create new transnational "communities," subsequent government decisions such as changes in immigration policy have redefined — and in some cases undermined — the legal rights of transnational individuals. The changes in legal language — the new words — which bring about these changes in immigration policy restructure the power relations between non-transnational and transnational citizens, leading to reoccurring crises of transnationalism.

"Patriality": Transnationalism Revoked through the Commonwealth Immigrants Act (1962) and Immigration Act (1971)[24]

The first instance of such a reoccurring crisis following the BNA emerges through changes UK immigration policy in the 1960s and 1970s. These changes overhauled the rights of transnational British subjects. The Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962 subjected all CUKC and commonwealth citizens to immigration control,

[21] EU Citizenship, "EUR."
[22] Lister, "European citizenship," 166.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Patriality is a right granted to reside in the United Kingdom without facing the constraints of immigration policy.

permitting only those in possession of government-issued employment vouchers entry to the UK. This was a drastic change to the legal status of those British subjects, including those who arrived aboard the Empire Windrush, who had settled in the UK following the BNA. The UK government gave a new and all-encompassing "leave to remain" status to former colonial British subjects living in the UK. This meant that the necessary documentation was not given to these subjects, nor deemed necessary to provide to authorities until this flaw in transnational documentation was revealed in the 2018 Windrush Scandal. Ironically, this denial of documentation meant that people with "leave to remain" status could not "leave" nor legally "remain" in the UK upon the introduction of the hostile environment policy. As a result, they became the wrongful targets of immigration law enforcement authorities.

The language of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962 cements a hierarchy privileging non-transnational subjects over transnational subjects. One of the provisions of this act is "to amend the qualifications required of Commonwealth citizens applying for citizenship under the British Nationality Act, 1948."[25] The provision to amend citizenship "qualifications" — in practice, to make them more stringent — signals a drastic immigration policy shift away from the intentions of the BNA, which gave assured the free movement of CUKC and Commonwealth citizens to and from the United Kingdom. In that the Commonwealth Immigrants Act obligated these citizens to quality for British citizenship on the basis of employment prospects in the UK, the 1962 act reflects changing power relations between non-transnationals and transnationals. Critics such as David Olusoga and Denise Noble read the Commonwealth Immigrants Act as thinly veiled racial discrimination. British subjects from Caribbean countries who were on equal footing as British citizens from United Kingdom according to legislation enacted just over a decade prior were suddenly determined to be legally inferior than those citizens from the United Kingdom. Noble states that "what the 1962 act clearly does is draw a line and says you may have been British subjects — British colonial

[25] "Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962," 178.

subjects — prior to 1962, but now you are not anymore."[26] The term "Commonwealth citizen," which after 1962 encompasses those formerly of British subject status, creates a hierarchy in which prospective Caribbean immigrants to the UK are considered "unskilled workers" and those Caribbean immigrants already settled in the UK under the provisions of the BNA begin to receive scrutiny over their immigration status.

In order for a "Commonwealth citizen" to immigrate to the UK, the act requires that the prospective immigrant possesses a "voucher" issued "by or on behalf of the Minister of Labour or the Ministry of Labour."[27] The voucher system allowed for government to discriminate against Caribbean migrants on the basis of race without seeming blatantly to do so. The discriminatory quality of the Ministry of Labour's immigration application system was couched in legislative language according to which the only criterion for making immigration decisions was suitability for employment.[28] Rather strikingly, Rab Butler — Home Secretary at the time the Commonwealth Immigration Act was being written–acknowledges the discriminatory quality of an employment-based immigration system in a letter to cabinet colleagues:

> We must recognise that, although the scheme purports to relate solely to employment and to be non-discriminatory, its aim is primarily social and its restrictive effect is intended to, and would in fact, operate on coloured people almost exclusively.[29]

The Commonwealth Immigration Act, he writes elsewhere, "would represent a departure from the long-standing freedom of all British subjects to enter and stay in the United Kingdom."[30] The ongoing Windrush scandal has shown the consequences of this discriminatory law and the similarly discriminatory laws that came in its wake. One such subsequent law was the Immigration Act 1971,

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[26] "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files," 00:41:30 – 00:41:46.
[27] "Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962," 179.
[28] *Ibid.*
[29] "Cabinet Memorandum. Commonwealth Migrants Memorandum," 47.
[30] *Id.,* 46.

which followed up on both the 1962 act and another in 1968. The Immigration Act 1971 increased restrictions on immigration to UK, taking aim at the BNA's expansive definition of "Britishness." But the act also permitted immigrants already settled in the UK to remain in the country indefinitely. This came with a catch, however: the act did not define any mechanism to provide legal immigrants with documentation of their legal residency. Moreover, in the BBC documentary "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files," Olusoga identifies the "catastrophic consequences" of the particular language choice in the Immigration Act 1971 and the power imbalance it establishes between the citizen and the state. He discusses in particular the impact of the language choices at section 3, paragraph 8. The Act states that "when any question arises under this Act whether or not a person is patrial, or is entitled to any exemption under this Act, it shall lie on the person asserting it to prove that he is."[31] According to Olusoga, "these words would come back to haunt the children of the Windrush."[32] As a consequence of the Immigration Act 1971, "anyone without the proper documentation was denied accommodation, employment or treatment and was reported to the Home Office. Now deemed to be illegal immigrants, they were at risk of deportation."[33] This act and others created great hardships for the Windrush generation, a minority community in which many do not possess nor have means to acquire proof of legal residency status in the UK sufficient to satisfy the increasingly stringent demands of successive immigration acts. The disappearance of the term "British subject" in the post-1948 UK policy language has eroded the standing of such people, who increasingly find they lack legal place within UK society.

The dispassionate language of the UK's post-1948 immigration legislation — which categorizes citizens on the basis of "qualifications" such as employability — functions as a pretext for discrimination against transnational citizens on the basis of race, ethnicity, and nationality. Words create legal differentiations between different groups formerly granted equal standing on the basis of mutual transnational citizenship rights.

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[31] *Legislation.gov.uk*, "Immigration Act 1971."
[32] "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files," 00:46:53 – 00:47:00.
[33] *Id.*, 00:50:56 – 00:51:11.

In a 1952 memorandum by the UK postmaster general, we can see these legal differentiations begin to crop up in discourse at the highest levels of government. Responding to a query from Prime Minister Winston Churchill about the racial demographics of Post Office employees, the postmaster general replies that "this is not purely a post office question at all. It raises the whole issue of whether coloured subjects of the commonwealth and Empire should be admitted to the country from now on." But beyond merely speculating about immigration policy, the postmaster general asks "whether those who are already here should be discharged not only by the Post Office, but by the rest of the Civil Service, other nationalised industries and, indeed, if we are to be logical, by private industry also."[34] The candidness is striking: a cabinet minister muses about wielding the state legal apparatus explicitly for the purpose of forcing settled British subjects out of work. The postmaster general recognizes the practical difficulty of such an act, but raises its possibility to Churchill anyway. Though the series of increasingly restrictive immigration and nationality acts that would come about beginning in 1962 did not go so far as to disenfranchise Caribbean immigrants in the UK from their right to work, they were informed by the same discriminatory intent that motivates the postmaster general's proposal.

Caribbean migrants in the UK make for vulnerable group that can be targeted on the basis of race. Lacking the legal documentation to prove their status after the term "British subject" ceased to have a legal function in the UK, race would continue to be used as the basis to determine who had to prove their right to live, work, and receive healthcare.

The Status Change of European Citizens: Withdrawal Agreement (2020) and EU Settlement Scheme

Certain European citizens who settled in the United Kingdom between the years between 2004 and 2007 also experienced discrimination on the basis of their transnational status. Deanna Demetriou describes the creation of a transnational-national distinction which served the purpose of discrimination:

[34] "The Unwanted: The Secret Windrush Files," 00:27:33 – 00:27:48.

> It was then on October 24, 2006 that Home Secretary John Reid announced the government would be placing restrictions on Romanian and Bulgarian rights to work in the UK. It can be argued that this decision automatically imposed a sense of difference between the 'A10' and the 'A2' accession countries, seemingly legitimizing much of the contentious discourse directed towards 'A2' nationals.[35]

The 'A2' descriptor appearing in the legal text outlining the government's policy change functions to define Bulgarian and Romanian nationals as separate from "European citizens."[36] This is strikingly similar to the distinction which the 1962 immigration act makes between British and non-British Commonwealth citizens. Legislation which aims to divide groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, or nationality without explicitly naming those groups on these bases can be called obscured discrimination. Like overt discrimination, it creates a difference between the figure of the so-imagined "native citizen" and those others who cannot assume this position.

The UK's exit from the European Union has led to another flaring-up of the reoccurring crisis of transnationalism. The Withdrawal Agreement 2019 altered the status of transnationals in both the UK and European Union nations. Many rights will change with this status change and many additional requirements will fall on EU citizens who have lived in the UK for decades under assured circumstances and UK citizens who likewise have lived in the EU. Indeed, Article 18 of the Withdrawal Agreement provides that the host state can require an individual to apply for new residency documentation:

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[35] Demetriou, "Welfare restrictions," 381.

[36] "A10" countries refer to those which joined the European Union in 2004: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. "A2" countries refer to those which joined in 2007: Bulgaria and Romania.

> The host State may require Union citizens or United Kingdom nationals, their respective family members and other persons, who reside in its territory in accordance with the conditions set out in this Title, to apply for a new residence status which confers the rights under this Title and a document evidencing such status which may be in a digital form.[37]

Because in such circumstances it is the individual who is obliged to apply for this documentation rather than the state that is obliged to provide it, the burden of to prove right of residency falls — as for the Windrush generation — on the individual. The Withdrawal Agreement 2019 places no burden on the state of proving that any particular individual is *not* a legal resident. Withdrawal Agreement 2019 may attempt to play down the changes for which it provides in transnational citizenship status, but these changes are undoubtedly consequential: transnational citizens after Brexit must now adhere to the requirements of nations rather than the transnational system that provided them with the rights to live and work across nations.

The "digital form" of documentation to which Article 18 alludes is especially relevant to problems of transnational citizenship, provoking the question of who "owns" an individual's legal status. The UK government website for Settled Status notes that "you can view your status or prove it to someone else online. You will not usually get a physical document."[38] The very fact that instructions are required to convey to an individual how to view an online version of their status document shows the extent of governmental control over residency status. Remarks on the application website such as ""you cannot use the [application success] letter itself to prove your status" imply an official desire to preclude European citizens in the UK from ever physically possessing their status.[39]

In the same way that digital identity documentation prevents transnationals from ownership of their residency status, transnationals were unable to vote in the UK's EU referendum, and

[37] "Withdrawal Agreement."
[38] *GOV.UK*, "Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme."
[39] "Apply to the EU Settlement Scheme."

as such they lacked "ownership" of their future. Some have argued that this disenfranchisement is a violation of human rights.[40] Transnationals lost control over their lives as immigration policy changes and new documentation requirements were thrust upon them. All the while, a governmental website holds their legal rights in a code accessible "only online." It is ironic that this legal residency verification system is exclusively digital considering that the application process for settled status requires physical proof of identity and proof of continuous residence. This reliance on digital rather than physical proof is destined for failure and abuse.

In addition to all of these conditions for receiving documentation of legal residency in the UK, there is a condition relating to time: "If you're an EU, EEA or Swiss citizen, you and your family can apply to the EU Settlement Scheme to continue living in the UK after 30 June 2021."[41] Is the UK's imposition of this deadline simply a bureaucratic formality, or does it mark the precise moment in time when the transnational's right to live in the UK comes into danger?

Following Brexit, the transnational European citizen living in the UK must abide a change in legal status and an unfavorable requirement to "prove" his or her life in the country. The alternative is the undocumented status and precarity of the Windrush generation. Madeleine Sumption, Director of the Migration Observatory at Oxford University, states in an Institute for Government panel discussion on European citizens' rights after Brexit that "the basic issue is that we have no idea how many people are eligible" for settled status.[42] The UK government's uncertainty as to the number of people eligible to receive settled status — coupled with the legal necessity of applying for this status before a government-determined deadline — creates a hostile situation for vulnerable groups. In a report on The Migration Observatory recognizes that vulnerable groups are liable to miss this deadline or lack the proof required of them:

[40] Low, "In Some Respects."
[41] "EU settlement scheme."
[42] "Settled Status? Citizens' Rights after Brexit." 00:13:51 – 00:13:55.

> securing settled status will be more difficult for certain groups of people, whether because they lack awareness of the process or the need to apply, are vulnerable for different reasons (such as abuse or exploitation), have difficulty navigating the application system, or cannot provide evidence of time spent in the UK.[43]

The Migration Observatory report goes on to elaborate that factors such as "language barriers," "age or disability," and computer illiteracy will make it especially challenging for these groups to navigate an online residency documentation system. These factors should remind us of a major issue making "settled status" reminiscent of the Windrush generation's legal documentation obligations in the UK: namely that authorities failed to inform this group of the sudden need to prove their British legal residency status following the introduction of the Hostile environment policy in 2012. In spite of the UK government's attempts to reach all European citizens in the UK through marketing campaigns, it will once again be those with limited resources and of a lower social class who will not be made aware of how the language contained within new immigration legislation has so drastically altered their status.

Former Minister of State for Immigration Minister Caroline Nokes comments at the Institute for Government panel on the relation between statecraft and language:

> You do not spend a single day as immigration minister without thinking extremely carefully about every single word you are going to say and not only the words you are going to say but the tone you will say them.[44]

Aware of language's political consequentiality, Nokes goes on to argue that the "settled status" documentation system is necessary in order to avoid the issues of a declaratory system, as was implemented with the automatic granting of the 'leave to remain' to citizens who settled under the BNA. This is an attempt to avoid the

[43] *Migration Observatory*, "Unsettled Status?," Para.4.
[44] "Settled Status? Citizens' rights after Brexit," 01:04:32 – 01:04:47.

pitfalls of previous government legislation, which resulted in the catastrophic consequences for the Windrush generation and their children. However, the fact remains that while European citizens are not deemed illegal immigrants, their altered status is named deliberately and a distinction is created in doing so that perpetuates or creates terms which distinguish between citizens in the UK. Nokes may criticize the use of the term "illegal immigrant" because of the connotations surrounding it. Yet, "Settled Status" is a newly created term for 'European citizens' that is not safe from the same negative connotations. Distinctions between groups are given form in terms such as these, and attitudes toward the labeled group will naturally develop once the term has left the pages of legislation and enters into public discourse.

In the weeks and months leading up to the 30 June 2021 deadline for applying for settled status, media reports have increasingly reflected changing attitudes in the UK toward European citizens. In a 2021 *Daily Mail* article, Katie Feehan contrasts the number of European citizens predicted to be living in the UK and the number who have applied for settled status: "In total, 4.6 million people have been granted the right to remain in the UK after Brexit by way of the Government's EU Settlement Scheme. This is higher than the estimated 3.1 million EU citizens in the UK before Brexit, according to the *Times*."[45] The fact that Feehan does not specifically identify the "4.6 million people [who] have been granted the right to remain" as "EU citizens," but does use that designation to refer to the 3.1 million estimated to live in the UK before Brexit by the *Times*' implies a belief that those receiving status under the settlement scheme are not the same EU citizens who have been living and working in the UK for many decades. This is a worrying characterization of European citizens, showing clearly how a change in the language that identifies a group can result in an alteration in the media and public perception of that group. While Feehan's article does eventually note inconsistencies in the government's data on EU citizens living in the UK, the headline of the article misleadingly implies that settled status holders have taken advantage of the Brexit transition process, in turn casting suspicions on all

[45] Feehan, "Number of EU Citizens," para.2-3.

European citizens living in the UK: "Number of EU citizens living in UK is now HIGHER than before Brexit."[46]

Regardless of the Home Office's actions to prevent a post-Brexit recurrence of the crisis which the declaratory system coupled with the Immigration Act 2014 created for the Windrush generation, Madeleine Sumption argues the crisis that will emerge for vulnerable transnationals once again:

> The thing that is likely to create discrimination is the fact that British citizens aren't in the database, and so you have to have a different way of checking. British citizens will only be able to use the physical document. So you're always gonna have with employers and landlords and so forth a dual system where some people get to use the physical document and some people don't. I think that's where the concern about discrimination come in.[47]

The system which collates the status of European Citizens will naturally be discriminatory because British citizens are not in the system. Brexit's removal of the nation from a transnational system undoubtedly will lead to a reoccurrence of the crisis of status endured by the Windrush generation. The BNA and European Union citizenship were systems intended to grant transnational populations equal status, but in the UK both faltered, morphing into systems for differentiating people who were previously seen by the law as equivalent. Organizations such as *the3million* have campaigned to mitigate the potential issues facing vulnerable European citizens living in the UK after Brexit. Their efforts have already seen the filing fee for settled status applications removed. But beyond the filing fee, they have identified further issues with the digital registration system and the Home Office's ownership of the physical documentation of European citizens' status: "we are now seeing increasing examples of where the lack of physical proof is failing people, unable for example to open a bank account because

[46] Feehan.
[47] "Settled Status? Citizens' rights after Brexit," 01:14:15 – 01:14:35.

many providers demand a physical document."[48] Indeed, the distinctions made in the language of the Withdrawal Agreement and Settled Status system between national citizens and transitional citizens will only increasingly lead to discrimination against European residents in the UK in their everyday lives.

Conclusion

British journalists and groups such as *the3million* and the Migration Observatory have identified a reoccurring crisis for vulnerable transnational groups since 1948. They point to the myriad ways in which immigrants to the UK under the BNA and the Treaty of Maastricht have seen their legal statuses change after changes in the law. When such changes invalidate transnational citizenship, transnational individuals face many subsequent legal issues.

Indeed, the Windrush scandal and the uncertain status of EU citizens in the UK from disadvantaged circumstances post-Brexit illustrate that the changing status of transnationals brought about by changes in legal language is an acute crisis experienced repeatedly by the most vulnerable.

The observation made by the EHRC that I cite in my introduction — namely their criticism of the UK for lack of equality legislation — demonstrates the dynamic I have addressed throughout this article. While the terms "British subject" and "European citizen" were designed to apply to all those within their respective transnational systems and therefore implement equality, the EHRC's report shows how government legislation in 2012 sowed division and denied equality to vulnerable groups such as the Windrush generation. The 2012 "hostile environment" policy sought to reduce immigration figures and in doing so ignored the nuanced status of transnational citizens. The change in government sentiment and the consequential change in legislation meant that these one-time "British subjects" were now broadly seen as "illegal immigrants."[49] When changing policy language places a burden on the individual to prove his or her right of residency, naturally those with limited means of access to such proof will be the most

[48] "#DeniedMyBackup Is Discriminatory," para.8.
[49] Gentlemen, "Home Office Broke Equalities Law."

vulnerable to the policy change. This article is of academic relevance in a field of research that has noted parallels between the Windrush Scandal and Brexit, and as in as in Deanna Demetriou's "Welfare restrictions and 'benefit tourists': Representations and evaluations of EU migrants in the UK," used critical discourse analysis as a tool with which to deconstruct the intent and formulation of terms that are placed on non-native UK citizens."

The changing status of transnationals in the UK is a crisis which originates in political actions and has a tremendous effect on individuals on a personal level, as callous legislative changes bear on the lives of vulnerable individuals, families, and communities. One could argue that transnationalism and a citizenship that crosses national boundaries is in itself a marker of difference, and that migration and settlement in a new country will always define the immigrant as distinct from a native-born citizen. However, the drastic and consequential changes to immigration and nationality law throughout the UK's recent history are evidence that the UK is a country deeply uncertain of which groups of people compose its national identity. The last century has seen this former imperial power open up through transnational connections to the colonies, commonwealth, and EU by way of broad and inclusive immigration legislation. Now that many of these doors have closed, a crisis remains for those transnationals who have found a home in the UK. I have no doubt that the UK will re-engage in transnational systems in the future, but lessons from the current period must be learned. The political actions of nations should not lose sight of the unseen people whose status is at the mercy of language.

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Resilient Religion: The Online Presence of Dutch Mosques in Times of COVID 19

Sophia Mons

For more than one year already, mosques throughout The Netherlands have been largely empty. The coronavirus pandemic has impacted the lives of individuals internationally, robustly defying previously assumed 'normalities' of societal life. As such, religious communities have been forced to reimagine their communal activities to comply with measures intended to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. In these circumstances, the online presence of Dutch Muslims, Islamic charities, and Dutch mosques is visibly growing. Be it through the streaming of the weekly Friday-sermon and prayer, as undertaken by Imam Abdelouahab Bozhar in Rotterdam; the organizing of public lectures by Islamic scholars on Facebook; or the mosques' local fundraising through online payment requests,[1] virtual space is the 'place to be' The pandemic gives mosques and Islamic centers not yet active in the online public sphere now an extra incentive to explore the virtual possibilities for religious communities and institutions.

Although internet use by Muslim individuals has received scholarly attention, few studies have focused on internet use by Islamic institutions themselves. In this article, I seek to address this gap by studying the online presences of mosques in the Netherlands. Building upon a research trend that focuses on the presence of religious communities in virtual spaces, my research is two-fold. First, it intends to examine how the online initiatives of Dutch mosques create a semblance of religious communal life on the *Web*

[1] Bozhar, "Moskeeën moeten nu online sterk zijn."

2.0,[2] a term I use to refer to the Internet as a social space of communication characterized by user-generated content. Second, it examines how such 'virtual mosques' influence and preserve a sense of community through these online initiatives. The aims of this research, then, are to examine the elasticity of the concepts of both "mosque" and "community," to delve into the complex relation between online and offline religion, and to discover how religious communities preserve their communal ties in times of crisis. Approaching the topic through a lens of resilience, a term which Ana María Fraile-Marcos understands as "the capacity of beings — human or nonhuman, individual or collective — to withstand adversity, to endure by being flexible, to adapt to conditions of crisis,"[3] I examine how the *Web 2.0* provides alternative spaces for religious communities.

My primary research method is virtual ethnography, an approach which Robert Kozinets defines as "ethnography conducted on the Internet."[4] This qualitative and interpretive research method makes it possible to study online cultures and communities and obtain empirical evidence of religious communal life online as facilitated by a traditional religious institution. Combining direct observations of the "computer-mediated communications"[5] of Centrum de Middenweg, a mosque and Islamic center in Rotterdam, with several in-depth interviews of individual members of the Centrum de Middenweg congregation, my research provides insight into the possibilities and limitations of the virtual for one religious community in particular. I will demonstrate how the Web 2.0 provides an alternative space where the communal characteristic of the offline mosque can persist and be strengthened, despite the fact that such virtual spaces will not replace their physical counterparts: both the offline mosque and in-person religious communal life. That said, I aim to highlight the elasticity of the concept of "mosque," focusing on the virtual possibilities of which this traditional Islamic institution might make

[2] For research on this topic, see for example: Castells, "The New Public Sphere," 90; Campbell, "Understanding the Relationship," 64-93.
[3] Fraile-Marcos, *Glocal Narratives of Resilience*, 1.
[4] Kozinets, "Netnography," 135.
[5] *Ibid.*

use. This will allow for a deeper understanding of the various forces at play when thinking of the traditional Islamic institutions in the Netherlands, the creation and strengthening of religious communities, and the perseverance of religious communal life online.

Studying Centrum de Middenweg's use of Facebook and Instagram for online communication and virtual programming allows us to consider some of the ways in which members of religious communities make use of online media to engage with one another and preserve a sense of religious communal life. Unlike most mosques in the Netherlands, Centrum de Middenweg mosque is not organized along ethnic lines, as in the more common 'Moroccan' or 'Turkish' mosques in which the language of use is mostly either Arabic or Turkish. Rather, the Centrum de Middenweg community is highly diverse in ethnic background, and the mosque welcomes around 250 to 300 members using the Dutch language. The community is also highly diverse in age and religiosity. For these reasons, the mosque has been referred to as "welcoming" and "hospitable" to anyone.[6] My decision to study this specific mosque is based on its accessible character: not only is the mosque known for its diverse membership, its leaders — Imam Abdelouahab Bozhar and founder Jacob van der Blom — both engage actively in public debates and in the news media. The mosque's proactive public presence online in the Web 2.0 is another reason to examine this particular Islamic institution in a study of the online presences of Dutch mosques and religious communities. During the first "intelligent lockdown"[7] in the Netherlands, which began on March 23, 2020, Centrum de Middenweg was one of the first mosques to temporarily stop holding physical gatherings, and improve its already-existing online streaming services to better migrate religious life onto Facebook and Instagram.[8] The Centrum de Middenweg Facebook page, active since July 31, 2013, has a substantial online audience [which has only grown following the mosque's increased online engagement during the pandemic], and as of March 1, 2021

[6] Bozhar, "Moskeeën moeten nu online sterk zijn."
[7] Rijksoverheid, "Maart 2020: Maatregelen tegen verspreiding coronavirus, intelligente lockdown."
[8] Van der Blom, "Bij Centrum de Middenweg gaat de imam digitaal."

this page had received 8,321 followers, and 7,137 likes.[9] On this page, the mosque live-streams Friday sermons, promotes virtual lectures, and raises money for charitable causes through an online payment processor. Centrum de Middenweg also has an Instagram account, which has been active since May 14, 2014 and as of March 1, 2021 had 2,062 followers.[10] Through these social media profiles, offline religion finds an online counterpart.

With an estimated 5.7 percent of Dutch citizens claiming to be Muslims,[11] and with around 450 mosques currently active in the Netherlands, it should be noted that Centrum de Middenweg is not representative of all Dutch Muslims. Nevertheless, this mosque is worth studying because its online public presence is highly visible and its heterogeneous, welcoming, and accessible identity — reflecting the ethnic, cultural, and geographic diversity of Rotterdam's multicultural context — might be considered analogous to the diverse character of the *ummah,* the Islamic community worldwide. The mosque's online information materials illustrate this point, presenting the Centrum de Middenweg in community in the following way: "Centrum de Middenweg is unique in its 'place for everyone' approach. Have you just repented or have you always been a practicing Muslim? Be welcome!"[12] Focusing on this particularly heterogeneous and visible mosque's response to a situation of crisis allows us to delve deeper into the possibilities and challenges of online religious life and the resilience of religious communities in times of crisis.

Recent and ongoing circumstances of crisis have proven an important incentive to study of religious communities online. Since March 12, 2020, the Dutch government has taken measures to contain the spread of coronavirus which not only affect everyone's daily life, but also many peoples' communal religious lives. In the Netherlands, as internationally, the coronavirus response required that residents stay at home as much as possible and socially distance. In addition, meetings with more than two people became

[9] Centrum de Middenweg (@demiddenweg), "Community," Facebook.
[10] Centrum de Middenweg (@demiddenweg), Instagram.
[11] CBS, "Diversiteit Religieuze Stromingen."
[12] Centrum de Middenweg, "Community."

prohibited, and quarantine protocols were developed.[13] Besides impacting the private lives of individual citizens, these measures also created obstacles to the weekly gatherings, prayers, and communal life of religious communities. In March 2020, hundreds of mosques voluntarily closed their doors and restricted their physical gatherings despite the approaching holy month of Ramadan, which ran from April 23 to May 23, 2020.

Although houses of worship have been exempted from many of the official coronavirus containment measures throughout the pandemic — they are legally permitted to open their doors and welcome their congregations provided that 1.5 meters of distance can be maintained — several of the nation's largest religious organizations have cooperated on a joint coronavirus response, coming to several voluntary agreements on coronavirus containment measures more stringent than those mandated by the government.[14] These voluntary agreements, contained in the communiqué "*Behoedzaam vieren van geloof*" ("Carefully Celebrating Faith"), discourage in-person religious community gatherings by imposing a maximum gathering size of 30 persons and limiting singing. These agreements also encourage digital gatherings until it is safe to ease the restrictions.[15] Clearly the coronavirus crisis has deeply impacted the religious lives of people throughout the Netherlands and it is no wonder, then, that religious communities have increasingly focused on developing their online presences. The online visibility of Dutch Muslims, Islamic charities, and Dutch mosques is growing rapidly under the present circumstances.

A "Virtual" Mosque

Various scholars have studied the importance of the internet in the lives of religious people. In his work on digital Islam, Peter

[13] See, for example, the list of corona-preventions taken by the Dutch government. Rijksoverheid, "Kort overzicht coronamaatregelen, De Nederlandse Aanpak en Maatregelen, Coronavirus COVID-19."

[14] This interreligious dialogue comprises different domes of religious communities, such as *Centraal Joods Overleg, Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid, Hindoeraad,* the *Boeddhistische Unie* and *Interkerkelijk Contact in Overheidszaken.*

[15] Rijksoverheid, "Behoedzaam vieren van geloof."

Mandaville notes that "the encounter between Islam and the transnational technologies of communication will be as multifaceted as the religion itself."[16] It is worth noting that a considerable amount of scholarly work has been dedicated to the role of cyberspace in contemporary Islam. This research considers the internet as a space of representation,[17] as a space for discussing and contesting interpretations of Islam,[18] and as a space information on Islam and Islamic resources.[19] Interestingly, much of this scholarly work focuses on individuals' uses of online spaces and the implications of such use for individual Muslims, neglecting to consider the possibility that a traditional Islamic institution such as the mosque might itself make use of the internet and be virtualized. Underlying this gap in research is the fact that mosques have generally been considered "object-centred building[s],"[20] emphasizing aesthetics over functionality. Although mosques have been a popular topic of study in recent years, with research ranging from architectural interest in the materiality of the building[21] to anthropological interest in the mosque as a site of contemporary religion,[22] too often these studies have neglected to consider the function of a mosque as a gathering place and cultivator of Muslim community. Considering an online gathering as a form of religious devotion challenges the widely accepted assumption that a mosque has a fixed, solid, and material shape, and that it is merely a type of building one recognizes through its two iconic architectural attributes: the dome and the minaret.

If we consider the historical development of the mosque as a physical space, such an assumption is untenable. "The mosque" has never been explicitly characterized by a definite and specific architecture. When considering the etymology of the word "mosque" in Arabic, *masjid* (مسجد) deriving from the word *sajada* (سجد), it can be translated as "to bow down" or "to prostrate before."

[16] Mandaville, "Digital Islam," 23.
[17] See, for example, Anderson, "Transnational civil society."
[18] See, for example, Bunt, *Hashtag Islam*.
[19] See, for example, Lawrence, "Allah on-Line."
[20] Baharudin and Ismail, "Communal Mosques," 107.
[21] See, for example, Farrag, "Architecture of mosques," 613-620.
[22] See, for example, Arab, "The Biggest Mosque in Europe!"

Although praying is one of the "Five Pillars of Islam," the act of prayer need not be performed in a specific space. Rather, it can be performed anywhere, so long as the worshipper is oriented toward Mecca. According to a *Hadith* — the record of words, deeds, and approval of Prophet Muhammad — the Prophet himself said that "all of the earth" can be considered a mosque for the duration of prayer.[23] A synonym for mosque in Arabic, additionally, is *jāmi'a* (جامع) indicating a second and different characteristic of "mosque." As the word translates as "to gather" or "to assemble," its usage indicates a more communal and collective feature of the religious space. Like the act of prayer, gathering can occur in any space. Etymologically speaking, then, a mosque need not be a built structure. Nevertheless, the architectural space we refer to as a "mosque" is an important part of Islamic culture throughout history.

Presumably the house of Prophet Muhammad in Medina was the first mosque to emerge, merely consisting of a simple rectangular building with a courtyard and shaded by palm trees on one side of the building. Throughout time, however, the basic outlines of mosques transformed in line with the changing needs of the Muslim community, different geographical contexts, and the different building materials available in these contexts.[24] The diverse architectural forms of the mosque reflect different locally determined interpretations of the initial mosque. These forms range from domes or minarets in the Mediterranean and North Africa to prayer halls in former shops and school buildings in Western European countries. The rapid incorporation of the mosque as a prominent place in Islam is most likely due to the multifaceted function of the mosque "as a space for the community, as a provider of diverse social services and education, and as a means of representation."[25] In other words, mosques and their particular architectural features took shape in order to fulfil the needs of their communities, their physical forms dependent upon the resources available in their local contexts. Such a functional and community-oriented perspective towards religious space is of particular interest

[23] "The Book on Salat (Prayer)," Hadith 317, Jamî at-Tirmidhi, Sunnah.Com, accessed on April 14, 2021, https://sunnah.com/tirmidhi:317.
[24] Aksamija, "Dare to Wear," 27-28.
[25] *Ibid.*

in a non-Muslim majority country such as the Netherlands, where mosques "symbolize Muslim existence,"[26] and are "heterotopias ... in opposition to the secular surroundings"[27] functioning as community centers for Muslim citizens. In such a context, the most important function of the mosque, is to fulfil the needs and desires of its community and subsequently generate a communal living environment. Such "community architecture," then, describes the architectural space for the conduct of communal activities, a space that becomes "the catalyst to the development of the surrounding area within the aspects of physical needs."[28] The meaning of a mosque, in this sense, is not necessarily tied to its materiality, its building or the physical spaces of its activities. Rather, it is the functions of the mosque — particularly prayer and the communal activities, where Muslim communities gather, develop, and strengthen their faith — that might turn any space into a "mosque."

At a time when people are discouraged to meet one another in person and must socially distance when doing so, the usage of online spaces by Muslim communities in order to continue participating in religious life illustrates the elasticity of the concept of the mosque. Mosques are multi-faceted, and one of their main functions is as a center of communal activity. Beyond COVID-19 as a health crisis, one could say that the limited ability of individuals to meet one another in person and come together in one localized space is a crisis in itself: a crisis of communal life. Giving the lie to the assumption that the essence of a mosque is its minaret and dome, the usage of the Web 2.0 by mosques in order to gather, develop, and strengthen community — the main functions of the mosque in a non-Muslim majority context such as the Netherlands — shows that mosques utilize diverse tools and practices to provide their communities with a sense of communal life. The mosque proves to be crucial in giving structure to a Muslim community, offering individuals not simply a site to practice faith, but also a sense of belonging. It is useful to consider, then, is the question how digital technologies contribute to an alternative understanding of what comprises a religious community.

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[26] Baharudin and Ismail, "Communal Mosques," 107.
[27] Verkaaik, *Religious Architecture,* 16.
[28] Baharudin and Ismail, "Communal Mosques," 107.

Community Online

Given that "the internet and the entire technological cosmos created around it provide a community that transcends geographical and institutional borders in real time,"[29] online communities often seem — to put it in the language of Benedict Anderson — "imagined."[30] Just as Anderson calls the nation an "imagined community" on the basis of the fact that the vast majority of a nation's members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion," a similar charge might easily be made against an online religious community.[31] But the online religious community of Centrum de Middenweg challenges such an assessment. Not only is this community derived from on a house of worship with a physical presence, it also mostly consists of individuals that know each another personally. Lorne Dawson, a sociologist who has studied communities that exist both in person and online, argues that a feasible community is more than the sum of its members, and that trust and intimacy must be considered when discussing intra-communal relations. In his perspective, "virtual life contributes to communal life ... because it augments the pre-existing communal relations more than creating new strictly virtual ones. The internet does not compete with the rest of life, it extends it."[32] Dawson's work shows the heuristic value of the notion of community in studying religious communities, allowing for a broadening of our understanding of the term *community* itself. This term is ambiguous and multifaceted. Employing the term *community* to describe a group of people is to specify the nature of the group's togetherness, rather than to merely describe its ways of congregating. The use of the term 'religious community' generally implies a record of the religious culture that is valued, but in order to understand the meaning of a religious community it is important to consider its meaning of membership, the ways in which members experience and create intra-communal ties and the means by which communal life is negotiated. According to Heidi Campbell, a community

[29] Varisco, "Muslims and the media," 174.
[30] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] Dawson, "Do virtual religious 'communities' exist?," 35.

occurs as individuals assemble "to form networks of interdependent relationships based on common vision, care, and communication."[33] In the case of a religious community, this interdependent relationship is based upon common faith and practices. A community is inherently a social entity comprised of individual members. It is important to distinguish between different forms of Islamic religious communities: the collective Islamic community worldwide, known as the *ummah* (أمة, literally translated as 'community'), the community of Muslims living in the Netherlands, and the community of one particular mosque such as Centrum de Middenweg. Whereas the first two communities bring together community members on the basis of a shared devotion to the Islamic faith, the third form of community is localized, centering itself around one particular mosque. The mosque serves as a multipurpose community space that facilitates harmonious communal experience. Although a mosque might not necessarily be tied down to its physical location, as discussed above, it could be argued that a religious community in such cases does center around its physical space, the mosque, which is to be understood as both a social center as well as a space for performing religious activities such as prayer. Such a localized understanding of the notion of "community" considers the social ties between community members that come about in a particular setting or space, based on a particular commonality. The current context of COVID-19 illustrates how individuals and communities continually adapt to external changes. Their adaptations, based on "established localized relationships" and "local embeddedness,"[34] respond to the absence of their usual community spaces. In this, local embeddedness can be understood as the investment of a community in a specific house of worship and in the individuals attending this place.

In interviews with some members of the community of Centrum de Middenweg, it became clear that local embeddedness is indeed regarded as an important characteristic of community. Although the Islamic identity remains the core of the Centrum de Middenweg religious community — as people have created this

[33] Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*, xvi.
[34] Bryson, Adres, and Davies, "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services," 363.

community on the basis of shared Islamic values and beliefs — it is also the local and societal context that characterizes this community. Besides its religious purposes, one member of the Centrum de Middenweg says, the mosque serves as a "living room,"[35] a non-religious community space where one can meet one another, eat, study, and attend classes on topics like tax preparation and legal issues. Another characteristic of the community, according to this member of Centrum de Middenweg, is its involvement with and contribution to Dutch society and the local neighborhood. By organizing yearly "neighbors days," introductory Ramadan classes and *'eid* (عيد) festivities for the neighborhood, Centrum de Middenweg localizes its community: "if the neighbourhood needs anything, we [Centrum de Middenweg] are here."[36] The Centrum de Middenweg community is thus rooted in Islam itself but has local connections to the neighborhood and to Dutch society. Investigating a localized example such as Centrum de Middenweg illustrates how the COVID-19 crisis has altered that locality and its community.

Centrum de Middenweg Online

When you enter the Facebook page of Centrum de Middenweg, it is clear that despite the virtual environment, the mosque has attempted to make its followers and visitors feel "at home." Welcoming online visitors to the mosque through the page's banner, a photograph of the interior of the Centrum de Middenweg building, the mosque has attempted to recreate its physical space online. Importantly, the space that is depicted in the Facebook banner is the central area of the mosque, its usual prayer space. In this space, one can find the *mihrāb* (محراب),[37] the prayer niche that shows the *qibla* (قبلة), the direction toward Mecca, which Muslims face in prayer.[38] One also finds the *minbar* (منبر), the raised pulpit

[35] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque, in interview with the author, March 19, 2021.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Fehérvári, "Mihrāb."
[38] Wensinck and King, "Kibla."

from which announcements to the community can be made and from which the imam preaches sermons.[39]

Figure 1

This picture conveys the welcoming and community-oriented character of the mosque's online initiatives. By choosing to depict the interior, rather than the exterior of the building, the mosque actively welcomes its members and guests "inside" the community, inside the space where the main activity taking place in the mosque, prayer, is practiced in a communal setting. This welcoming depiction of the mosque's interior showcases to the online visitor that the mosque's online initiatives resemble the mosque's normal offline programs. The mosque's other efforts to recreate the typical elements of communal life on its Facebook page include offering a livestream of Friday prayer, online religious lessons provided Mohamed Abdulahi, a popular influencer and soon-to-be-imam known as the "the cosiest Salafist of The Netherlands,"[40] and discussions of issues such as Ramadan preparations, health, and relationships. The mosque also uses its Facebook page to raise money to support the Uyghur Muslim community center, as well as to fund the rebuilding of the mosque itself. Directly and indirectly fostering communal engagement with the local community, the

[39] Pederson, Golmohammadi, Burton-Page and Freeman-Grenville, "Minbar."
[40] Abdulahi (@mohamedsmening), Instagram, biography.

mosque's online initiatives appeal to the community as a whole, but contribute especially to the enhancement of "local social infrastructure."[41] Examples of this social infrastructure include religious rituals, weekly Friday prayers, and the mosque's social and educational activities.

The Facebook and Instagram posts through which Centrum de Middenweg replicates its communal life online can be called "de-territorialized" in that it can be accessed from any physical location. [42] This content can be divided into three different categories, which each reflect a different interplay between online and offline practices. One category of posts concerns events and practices occurring in the physical space of the mosque. These posts promote and solicit feedback on in-person events taking place at the mosque's physical location. Given the gradual relaxation of corona-measures throughout the year, opportunities for the mosque to welcome its members in person for important occasions have been

Figure 2

[41] Bryson et al., "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services," 363.
[42] Lewis, *Modest Fashion*, 48.

increasingly emerging. Posts promoting "territorialized" activities directly link the online sphere back to offline life. An example of this kind of post would be the financial and material fundraising campaign for the Islamic food bank.

Figure 3

A second category of posts dedicates itself entirely to online interaction, as through the virtual social activities which the mosque sponsors. These activities include speeches, talks, lessons, and discussion sessions conducted through Facebook and Instagram livestreams, as well as through ZOOM. The Friday prayer, for example, is professionally recorded and filmed at the mosque and livestreamed on both Facebook and Instagram. While the livestreamed Friday prayer is organized and produced by the mosque itself, a frequent Centrum de Middenweg visiting imam, Azzedine Karrat, independently decided to also broadcast his Friday sermons on Clubhouse, an increasingly popular live audio platform. These activities illustrate well how religious user communities negotiate processes related to new media technologies, according to the assumed advantages of specific technologies and their potential

impacts on the community itself.[43] Whereas the provision of information and reporting on continuing physical events may easily occur through the sharing of posts and pictures online, it is clear that certain aspects of communal life, such as prayer and religious dialogue, require different formats. Real-time livestreaming recreates the *feeling* of belonging more effectively than does the mere sharing of posts containing text and photographs. One member of Centrum de Middenweg demonstrates this point by pointing out that the online opportunities provided to the diasporic members of the community are particularly interesting to recent converts to Islam: "For them, we initiated the livestreaming of speakers, prayers, and communal dialogue. We realized that, to celebrate Ramadan without any friends, family or community that co-celebrates this holy month, the feeling of belonging to our community was the more important."[44] Reacting adaptively to the interests and needs of the community, the virtual mosque makes use of media technologies and communication styles to engage its members.

A third category of posts illustrates the direct relation between the online and offline engagements of the mosque. These posts

Figure 4

[43] Campbell, *When Religion Meets New Media,* 193.

[44] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque in interview with the author, March 19, 2021.

concern searches for volunteers and online fundraising to benefit the mosque and the local community. These last kind of posts illustrate how the mosque, in these times of social distancing, can be considered a "liminal, in-between" space that is sometimes opened for specific initiatives while remaining closed for larger communal gatherings and "public worship."[45] This kind of content illustrates a clear linkage between virtual and offline practices. Although some of Centrum de Middenweg's online content is intended to interest a general online audience, most of this content targets an audience that is already familiar with the community, the mosque itself, and the mosque's weekly practices. As I have shown, Centrum de Middenweg uses various strategies to allow for the main functions of its physical mosque to be possible online.

The ways in which the Centrum de Middenweg community engages with the activities and events that the mosque organizes and promotes online, however, differs per activity and medium. The mosque's virtual services allow members to be "present together in experience, and, potentially, in time, but not in place,"[46] making it possible for religious communal life to continue beyond scheduled dates and times. In theory de-temporalized services are more inclusive than the traditional in-person approach, which is necessarily time-bound, but in practice various levels of online community engagement are observed.

Although these disparities in engagement were already visible in pre-COVID times — as certain volunteers, regular visitors, and actively engaged members of the mosque effectively "ran" the place — this stratification of the community became even more noticeable under current circumstances, influencing the nature of the mosque's hybrid activities. Those members that are actively involved in the creation of online content, often volunteers and interns of the mosque, are capable of being physically present at Centrum de Middenweg. A member of the mosque states that "only a limited number of new volunteers and interns can be welcomed these days,"[47] indicating that, indeed, the hybrid system of both offline and

[45] Bryson et al., "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services," 361.
[46] *Id.*, 362.
[47] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque in interview with the author, March 16, 2021.

online activities generates "different levels of participant engagement."[48] On one hand, a hybrid system that offers both inclusive online and rather exclusive offline activities to its members may lead to increasing differentiation and distance between online and offline communities. Those members of the organization who work to recreate communal life online experience a feeling of community belonging on a physical basis more than those who are not as much invested or engaged with the logistical side of facilitating online communal life. On the other hand, the digital mosque opens a space for religious communal life any time and in any place. In the case of Centrum de Middenweg this consequence of digitalization becomes clear, as a member observes, in that some members who previously never participated in the mosque's activities now find opportunities to be present in the online mosque. If nothing else, religious communities online "are more accessible to people who, for whatever reason, cannot, or will not, step inside"[49] a physical mosque.

Online spaces provide engagement opportunities to those members that have fully planned schedules, are recent converts, or are only interested in stepping inside the mosque. These capabilities are especially important for a relatively young mosque and community such as Centrum de Middenweg. Visitors of the mosque online might consist of "'dislocated' visitors who were previously locally embedded but have relocated, or they may be 'strangers from without' who have no direct connection"[50] to the local community:

> You can imitate many things, but not the congregational prayer. Even if you listen to the Friday sermon, the online prayer seems to have become more of a lecture. I think people miss that aspect very much. On the other hand, there may be people who are normally ashamed to go to the mosque but want information or want to be involved. Suppose you are not powerful in prayer and when you go there you really expose yourself to the idea that you do not know

[48] Vitullo and Campbell, "Assessing changes," 79.
[49] Price, "Digital Media as Sacred Space," 46.
[50] Bryson et al., "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services," 365.

> it yet, but online it is very easy to access and obtain information in an accessible way. We see more and more interaction of this kind.[51]

Switching to an online platform has proven to be easy for the majority of members. Indeed, the switch has resulted in the inclusion of those who did previously not participate in communal life. Nevertheless, while Centrum de Middenweg's use of digital technology provides new opportunities, it also impedes the community involvement of those who are illiterate, those who do not have access to the Web, and those who have not been raised this new technology or taught about its possibilities. In the process of transferring mosque online some members seem to have been unintentionally neglected. One member states that:

> Because it is quite a young mosque, the switch to an online platform was very easy. For example, Clubhouse, many elderly people do not have that. But I have seen what really affects people, that is really the elderly, sometimes they do not talk to someone for days. That may well be our pitfall. It has always been a young mosque and the online switch seems easy, but the elderly (especially come for prayer, they will also come) but whether they also come for the activities online, that is difficult to estimate - we only see the numbers / likes / comments.[52]

The mosque has experienced difficulty in reaching out to some of its elderly members, a result of their sometimes inconsistent level of access to digital technology. In some cases, younger members have taken up the task of helping some of these elderly members in finding their ways online, but broadly speaking, the transfer of community from a physical to digital space has not been a seamless transition for the elderly.

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[51] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque in interview with the author, March 21, 2021.

[52] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque, in interview with the author, March 19, 2021.

Religious Resilience

COVID-19 challenges the Centrum de Middenweg and its community to rethink the locality of the mosque, shifting emphasis from physical gatherings to a hybrid system combining both physical and virtual activities and events. A question then arises as to how the community is capable of withstanding this adversity and to what extent it proves to be "resilient" in times of crisis. Resilience refers to "the capacity of beings — human or nonhuman, individual or collective — to withstand adversity, to endure by being flexible, to adapt to conditions of crisis."[53] Fundamental traits implied in this definition are the ability to be flexible, to adapt, and to absorb disturbances in times of transformation or change. One of the members of Centrum de Middenweg affirms the importance of this process of adaptation and flexibility in times of crisis, stating that "necessity is the mother of innovation."[54] Referring to the immediate changes implemented in the mosque from the start of the COVID-19 crisis in March 2020, this member highlights an important aspect of resilience: creativity and innovation.

The ongoing coronavirus crisis has changed the rules, everyday norms, practices, and routines of every individual internationally, including both temporary and permanent changes in the daily lives of people across the world. One specific change in the lives of religious congregants is the increased adoption of "telemediated or virtual services," characterized by their "open access, online intersacred space" that allow members of religious communities to share in worship and communal life despite physical distances.[55] In times of social distancing, Centrum de Middenweg demonstrates that "resilience" is more than mere community-survival. Beyond that, it is "flourishing in the midst of difficulties."[56] The mosque's increased online presence has allowed not only local members of the community to engage with the activities and information shared online, but also non-members and even non-Muslims, who are provided with the opportunity to visit and

[53] Fraile-Marcos, *Glocal Narratives of Resilience,* 1.
[54] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque, in interview with the author, March 19, 2021.
[55] Bryson et al., "Covid-19, Virtual Church Services," 365.
[56] Fraile-Marcos, *Glocal Narratives of Resilience,* 1.

participate in the mosque's community. The open access approach of Web 2.0 creates unlimited possibilities for community-construction, as the internet transcends not only physical but also institutional borders.

In a sense, then, resilience does not necessarily refer to coping mechanisms that eventually allow for a return to the past, but rather it implies continuation, change, and even resistance to a previous state of being.[57] The future of Centrum de Middenweg, according to many of its members, is hybrid:

> Now that we have invested in an online platform, camera, sound, and light, it would be interesting to set up a hybrid system for the community. Those who want to can be present physically, but others can decide to follow certain classes or talks online. All of this depends on the desires and needs of the community.[58]

As I have argued, the "communal mosque" focuses on cultivating community and adapts its practices and habits according to its members. Centrum de Middenweg has proved to be adaptive in a time requiring flexibility and innovation, as one of the first mosques in the Netherlands to invest in technologies useful for reaching out to a distanced community. In this, the community proves to be resilient in the sense that it is able to absorb the difficulties inflicted upon it, whilst preserving its most important features. Developing and delivering new understandings of and methods for communal practice, Centrum de Middenweg demonstrates the ability to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. Activities regarded as 'normal' elements of communal life continued during lockdown, although by different means. The example of Centrum de Middenweg underscores Campbell's argument that community is "determined by personal needs and choices," but most of all "dynamic and changeable"[59] when necessary.

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[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Anonymous member of Centrum de Middenweg mosque in an interview with the author, March 21, 2021.

[59] Campbell, "Religion Embracing," 9.

Conclusion

Living in the digital era, a time that is characterized by new technologies for communication through online spaces, it is impossible to ignore the impact and implications of such technologies on religious life. Dutch mosques that were not yet actively present on the web were challenged to find their way online, adapting Islamic tradition to the Web 2.0. Having examined how mosques in the Netherlands generate an online communal presence, this article has discussed the online spaces and activities of Centrum de Middenweg. Not only does this article make an argument about what constitutes a mosque, it also sheds light on the relation between the online and offline world. The internet provides a hybrid discursive space where the normative ideas and understandings of religious knowledge and community can be challenged and reformulated. That said, it is also important to consider the disadvantages to religious communities of the online realm. As mentioned above, while the internet allows for increased audiences, it also precludes community engagement by those who are illiterate, those who do not have access to the web, and those who have not been raised with or taught about the possibilities of this new technology. It is therefore important to consider the implications of the fact that many Muslims that do have access to the internet, and also to acknowledge the limitations of this research, which is not representative of the global Muslim community.

Nevertheless, as I have discussed, unlike any other communication technology, the internet provides a vast array of possibilities for the construction of communities that transcend physical and institutional borders alike. Times of crisis require adaptation and transformation, ranging from the purchasing of suitable communications technologies to the persistent question how best to reach out to community despite social distance. Centrum de Middenweg illustrates how not only Muslim individuals but also traditional Islamic institutions have increasingly created online presences that suit the desires and needs of their communities. Despite unforeseen external circumstances, the mosque has constantly considered and reconsidered its ways in reaching out to its local community. In some cases, this effort has resulted in the re-welcoming of members who previously did not

participate in religious communal life. Yet in other instances, the shift to an online environment has been an obstacle to a sense of communal life. With the slow relaxation of corona-measures, the mosque's online presence and services is also transforming. Whereas in the earliest period of the lockdown, the mosque's communal life fully occurred online, a more hybrid system is increasingly emerging in which both offline and online activities are possible. This point illustrates the adaptable and fluid character of "community," which shapes itself to both external and internal forces, continuously seeking opportunities whilst taking into account the desires and needs of its members. Proving itself to be resilient, this combination of both online and offline practices will continue in the near future, illustrating the flexible character of both mosque and community. Crisis requires us to rethink the normal. As Centrum de Middenweg demonstrates, this challenge provides the opportunity for innovation and transformation.

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Figure 2: An Instagram post of Centrum de Middenweg, showing two active members of the mosque collecting food, money and groceries for the Islamic foodbank. Centrum de Middenweg (@centrumdemiddenweg), 'Vandaag hebben we houdbare producten en geld ingezameld voor de islamitische voedselbank; @interculturelestichtingsalaam. Alhamdulilaah hebben we veel producten ingezameld en een mooi bedrag van € 764,5! Moge Allah de donateurs rijkelijk belonen! Hartelijk dank. Wil jij ook nog bijdragen? Check dan hun Instagram pagina en stuur een berichtje!,' Instagram post, accessed on March 8, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CNLAOt4DWfT/.

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Figure 4: An Instagram post of Centrum de Middenweg requesting volunteers who are willing to help the mosque with the designing of flyers, with the organisation of events or the livestreaming of activities. Centrum de Middenweg (@centrumdemiddenweg), Instagram post, accessed on March 8, 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CCp0qUSDqw-/.

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BOOK REVIEW

Pelevin's Puzzled Protagonist: *The Clay Machine Gun* (1996)

Lotte van den Bosch

He picked up two onions from the table and began cleaning them. One of them he cleaned until its flesh was white, but from the other he removed only the dry outer skin, exposing the reddish-purple layer underneath. 'Look here, Petka,' he said, placing them on the table in front of him. 'There are two onions in front of you, one white, the other red.'
'Well,' I said.
'Look at the white one.'
'I am looking at it.'
'And now at the red one.'
'Yes, what of it?'
'Now look at both of them.'
'I am looking,' I said.
'So which are you, red or white?'[1]

Viktor Pelevin's *The Clay Machine-Gun* (*Chapaev i Pustota,* 1996) is full of unexpected and startlingly direct questions like the one above. More specifically, it is full of ontological questions: questions about being, existence and reality.[2] These questions — which, like cleaning an onion, expose reality's multiple layers — haunt and puzzle Pelevin's protagonist, Pyotr Voyd. The pronunciation of Voyd's last name already gives a clue as to his state of being: a state of ontological crisis. Pyotr does not know when or where he belongs, what is real, or who exactly he is. He knows only the persistent and painful presence of an emptiness that he carries with himself: a "void."

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[1] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 139.
[2] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*,10 and 27 *et passim.*

The Clay Machine-Gun, translated from the Russian by Andrew Bromfield, is about interactions between the real and the unreal. And it is about a rootless man's search for meaning in light of the incessance of these interactions. This unrewarding search takes place in two different realities that appear alternately by chapter. The first is the period immediately after the Bolshevik-led October Revolution, which took place on 25 October 1917 according to the Julian calendar (7 November according to the Gregorian calendar). In this first reality, Pyotr begins as an experimental poet. At the very start of the novel, he is visited by the Soviet secret police organisation Cheka, which is not pleased with Pyotr's literary works. Pyotr manages to escape the Chekists and flees to Moscow. There, he meets the Red Army commander Vasily Ivanovich Chapaev, who appoints Pyotr as his political commissar. Supporting Chapaev during the Russian civil war, Pyotr finds time to discuss both war strategies and theories of life with this wise war hero. Their discussions lead Pyotr to question his own state of being more and more. Intriguing questions soon start haunting him both during the day and in his dreams. These dreams, with which every Soviet-era chapter in the novel ends, take him to an alternative reality.

In this second reality, the Russia of the early 1990s[3], Pyotr is a patient at a Moscow psychiatric hospital. In this hospital, Pyotr and his fellow patients participate in group sessions where, provoked by a therapy combining shock and drug treatments, they experience delusions and hallucinations. The purpose of these sessions, according to the psychiatrist Timur Timurovich, is for the patients to reach a state of "catharsis" in which each "can become aware of the arbitrary subjectivity of his own morbid notions and can cease to identify with them."[4] In Timurovich's opinion, Pyotr's case is "very straightforward."[5] What is going on with Pyotr, the psychiatrist explains, is that he is constantly confronted with the fact that he is still dealing with his past. He "simply cannot accept the new."[6] One way this condition affects Pyotr's life is in that every time

[3] I remind the reader here that the novel was first published in 1996.
[4] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 38.
[5] *Id.*, 32.
[6] *Ibid.*

he falls asleep in the institute, he returns to the period shortly after the October Revolution. Pyotr keeps going back to the past, or the past keeps coming back to Pyotr.

Pelevin's puzzled postsocialist

The tendency to shift from one reality to the other is, according to Pyotr's psychiatrist, a common phenomenon. Timurovich explains to Pyotr: "'You belong to the very generation that was programmed for life in one socio-cultural paradigm, but has found itself living in a quite different one.'"[7] The paradigm shift results in a psychiatric condition or "subconscious conflict" that "nowadays almost everyone suffers from," the psychiatrist adds.[8] That statement is an invitation to look beyond the pages of Pelevin's novel and into Russian history. Pyotr's psychic condition can be seen as a metaphor for the so-called "postsocialist" condition, as described, amongst others, by Boris Groys.[9] Groys identifies the postsocialist condition as the consequence of a confusing transition from a deteriorating socialist era to an insecure future based on a different ideology.[10] This transition took place when the Soviet Union fell in 1991, but one could also argue that the entire period during which the Soviet Union dissolved counts as such a transition. Nancy Fraser describes the "in-between state" this transition brought about as a "skeptical mood or structure of feeling that marks the post-1989 state of the Left."[11] This skepticism is related to the doubt of many former inhabitants of the Soviet Union about their own positions. As Fraser puts it: "[f]raught with a sense of 'the morning after', this mood expresses authentic doubts bound to genuine opacities

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[7] *Ibid.*

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] As does Fraser in *Justice Interruptus*: *Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition*, I here place the term "postsocialist" in quotation marks. Like Fraser, I want to emphasize the critical postures that are possible in relation to this term. See Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, 3 *et passim*.
Alternatives for this formulation include "post-communist" (see Noordenbos, "Shocking Histories and Missing Memories," 48) and "Post-Soviet" (see Khagi, "From Homo Sovieticus to Homo Zapiens," 560; and Gomel, "Viktor Pelevin and Literary Postmodernism in Soviet Russia," 309-321).

[10] See Groys, *Art Power*, 154-155.

[11] Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, 3.

concerning the historical possibilities for progressive social change."[12] As this quotation suggests, the existential doubt concerns both the past — which, from a Soviet perspective, has disappeared – and a non-Soviet future — which is yet hard to grasp. This doubt-inducing ideological void is what Fraser and Groys call the "postsocialist" condition.

Pelevin and postmodernism

It is not surprising that a postsocialist crisis lies at the core of *The Clay Machine-Gun.* Viktor Pelevin himself experienced the disappearance of the Soviet ideology and the simultaneous emergence of an ideological void. Born in 1962, Pelevin grew up in Soviet Russia and published his first work after the fall of the USSR. Pelevin lived through the transition himself, and in *The Clay Machine-Gun*, he reflects sceptically on it. When the novel was first published in 1996, critics both celebrated and maligned Pelevin as a writer of "New Russia."[13] Pelevin vividly describes these reactions in an interview: "One Booker judge said 'Chapaev' was a virus designed to destroy Russia's cultural memory. After that it sold 25.000 in one week."[14]

Both the enthusiasm and the condemnations could be related to the postmodern character of Pelevin's novel. Just as its author has been "universally recognized as one of the chief practitioners of postmodernism in Russia today,"[15] *The Clay Machine-Gun* has been described as "the most essentially 'postmodern' of contemporary Russian prose."[16] The postmodern nature of the novel can be recognised not only in its aforementioned era-bridging chapter structure, but also in the themes it discusses. Postmodern considerations manifest themselves in the ontological questions that Pyotr and others ponder throughout the work.[17] These questions are in line with what Brian McHale calls the

[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Jones, "Viktor Pelevin is Ironic Writer of New Russia."
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] Gomel, "Futures at the End of Utopia," 293.
[16] Dalton-Brown, "Ludic Nonchalance or Ludicrous Depair?," 216.
[17] By "ontology" I here refer to Thomas Pavel's description of the term: "a theoretical description of a universe." See Pavel, "Tragedy and the sacred," 234.

"ontological dominance of postmodernist fiction."[18] This type of fiction, McHale writes, "deploys strategies which engage and foreground questions like ... 'Which world is this? What is to be done in it? Which of my selves is to do it?'"[19] These questions, Hale explains, "bear either on the ontology of the literary text itself or on the ontology of the world which it projects." In *The Clay Machine-Gun*, Pelevin uses narrative structure, themes and deictic terms to create shifts in ontological focus. A striking example of such a shift is this seemingly meta-reflective passage in which Chapaev tells Pyotr about an effective way to fight:

> 'Ah, Petka! D'you know the way I fight? You can't know anything about that! Chapaev uses only three blows, you understand me?'
> I nodded mechanically, but I was listening carefully.
> 'The first blow is where!'
> He struck the table so hard with his fist that the bottle almost toppled over.
> 'The second is when!'
> Again he smote the boards of the table.
> 'And the third is who!'[20]

"Where?", "when?" and "who?": these three questions are relevant in both of the novel's realities, Russia around the time of the October Revolution and "New Russia" around the time of the fall of the USSR. The structure of the novel foregrounds two ontological possibilities that are, as other scholars have pointed out, equally plausible.[21] Since Pyotr falls asleep at the end of each chapter to awake in the alternative chronotope, each world is either real or a dream.[22] This indistinguishability of dream and reality is visible, for

[18] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction,* 10.
[19] *Ibid.*
[20] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 137-138.
[21] See, for example, Gomel, *Futures at the End of Utopia*, 304.
[22] This is in congruence with what Smethurst remarks on the postmodern chronotope in general, namely that it "is often used against realist representations that rely on linearity and continuous time-space." See Smethurst, *The Postmodern Chronotope*, 221.

example, in the transition from the third to the fourth chapter. The third chapter ends with the following passage:

> I sensed that I should not on any account fall asleep, but there was no longer anything I could do to resist; having abandoned the struggle, I hurtled down headlong between the minor piano chords into the same stairwell of emptiness which had so astounded me that morning.[23]

Does this passage mark the end of a dream or entry into one? The excerpt makes explicit that Pyotr falls asleep. That he does so is confirmed by the first sentences of the fourth chapter: "'Hey there! No sleeping!' Someone shook me carefully by the shoulder."[24] Is this an awakening to reality or to the unreality of things? And what about the "stairwell of emptiness" which Pyotr recognizes for having "astounded" him "that morning?"[25] Two considerations can be derived from this formulation. Firstly, the narrative offers an innovative way of "modeling ... our pluralistic ontological landscape."[26] Secondly, the narrative also plays with the theme of transition. The text makes clear that Pyotr's position in between the two realities is empty. The answer to the questions of "where?" "when?" and "who?" is in the negative.

Embracing emptiness?

It is this same empty position — or perhaps, *condition* — that comes to the surface when Chapaev and Pyotr talk about their own places in the world, which, as it turns out, is the same:

> I wonder, I thought, what he will say if I ask him where this 'nowhere' of his is located. He will have to define the word in terms of itself, and will find his position in the conversation no better than my own.
> 'Can't sleep?' asked Chapaev.
> 'Something is bothering me.'

[23] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 85.
[24] *Id.,* 86.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction,* 39.

> 'What is it, never seen the void before?'
> I realized that by the word 'void' he meant precisely the 'nowhere'
> which I had become aware of only a few minutes earlier.
> 'No,' I answered. 'Never.'[27]

The position between two time-space configurations has a name: it is the void that Pyotr crosses as he circles back and forth between chronotopes. He finds himself in the empty eye of the hurricane, or as *The Clay Machine-Gun* puts it with various other metaphors: a bagel,[28] dynamo[29] and a whirlpool.[30] Throughout the novel, Pyotr repeatedly comes to the conclusion that these circles represent the circle of consciousness. The only place which he can be certain is real is in his own head. The reality he knows is not to be found "out there" anymore. He keeps circling around the "out there" in his dreams — or perhaps these are his daydreams — without finding it back where it used to be.

As Chapaev describes this experience, "[e]verything in the world is just a whirlpool of thoughts, and the world around us only becomes real when you yourself become that whirlpool."[31] To become this whirlpool means grounding oneself in one of the two realities — and this is precisely what Pyotr does not succeed in doing. He does not feel at ease in the period around the October Revolution, having to act as if he were a Bolshevik soldier to survive, and in modern Russia he is excluded from society as a madhouse patient. When he is finally discharged from the mental hospital, Pyotr finds that "[t]he doors of freedom swung open in such a banal,

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[27] Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 149.
[28] See, for example, Pelevin, *The Clay Machine-Gun*, 280.
[29] *Id.*, 151-152, 169, 196.
[30] *Id.*, 294-295. A related term that appears throughout the novel is "whirlwind": "the whirlwind of scales and colours of the contradictory inner life" (*Id.*, 334). Another concept worth mentioning is that of the "dialectical dyad": "One might say, I thought, that on the one hand the world exists in me and on the other I exist in the world, and these are simply the poles of a single semantic magnet, but the tricky thing was that there was no peg on which to hang this magnet, this dialectical dyad. There was nowhere for it to exist!" (*Id.*, 149).
[31] *Id.*, 294-295.

everyday fashion that I actually felt slightly disappointed."[32] His world is instantly transformed, and nothing seems to have changed.

The Clay Machine-Gun evocatively represents the multi-temporal and multi-spatial context within which Pelevin's puzzled protagonist tries to position himself. Both the structure and the themes discussed in this novel visualize and problematize the complex "postsocialist condition." Throughout this work of fiction, Pyotr attentively explores both the Soviet and the post-Soviet period, only to find out that he is situated somewhere in between these chronotopes. The novel emphasises the empty character of this position: whatever he does, he cannot escape the void. Is that why Pyotr ultimately chooses to embrace emptiness? Some scholars have pointed in the opposite direction, arguing that the void might also be read as a positive place.[33] Taking Pyotr's own reflections into account, that statement is rather hard to defend. *The Clay Machine-Gun* does not offer a solution to the problem that is Pyotr: a lived embodiment of the ontological crisis of the postsocialist subject. What it does, however, is confront the reader with a vivid portrait of what this postsocialist crisis might look like. It might even invite us to confront our own emptiness and recognise that of others. As the American monk and writer Thomas Merton once wrote, "art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time."[34]

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[32] *Id.*, 321.

[33] See Stakun, *Terror and Transcendence in the Void*.

[34] Merton, *No Man is an Island*, 35.

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Part Two

(Im)materialities: Engaging with Crisis

Displays of Power: Imperial Ideology on the Coinage of Galba during the Crisis of 68/69 A.D.

Gabriël de Klerk

The death of Nero in 68 A.D. plunged the Roman Empire into a state of total crisis. In the last years of his reign, the unpopular Nero already faced major uprisings in Gaul and Rome.[1] Once he was declared a public enemy by the senate, he committed suicide. Plutarch compares the perilous situation following Nero's death, which marked the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, to the revolt of the Titans in Greek mythology. The empire, he writes, was "torn into many fragments, and again in many places collapsing upon itself" because "the house of the Caesars ... received four emperors, the soldiery ushering one in and another out, as in play."[2] This is hardly an exaggeration: in just one year and 195 days, four emperors donned the purple: Galba, Otho, Vitellius, and Vespasian.

69 A.D. was a year of great upheaval and civil strife. This year was a period of transition from the Julio-Claudian dynasty to the Flavian dynasty with a heavy focus on the unprecedented role of martial imperative in the formation of imperial power. Each emperor had to seek different ways to mobilize support for their cause, not in the least because their claims were almost always attested by other opportunistic senators and generals.

In recent decades, many monographs have studied the events of 68-69 A.D. Among the most influential are *The Year of the Four Emperors* by Kenneth Wellesley and the nearly synonymous *69 A.D.: The Year of the Four Emperors* by Gwyn Morgan.[3] Most

[1] Suet. *Ner.* 49.
[2] Plut. *Vit. Galb.* 1.
[3] Wellesley, *The Year of the Four Emperors.*

research into this period, including that of Wellesley and Morgan, fails to consider numismatic evidence. This research misses an important opportunity, as ancient coins are much more than simple monetary instruments. Above all, they are tools of political communication. Studying the numismatic sources from 68-69 A.D. offers vital insight into how emperors responded to crisis. Only in the last decades of the 20th century have scholars concluded that imagery on Roman coins communicated specific political messages to explicitly delineated audiences.[4] In 1988, Niels Hannestad first considered Roman coins as articles of propaganda. Coins, he argues, are the best sources available for studying Roman political history because although "the information they provide is perhaps distorted, ... they are authoritative in that they represent the officially formulated views of the ruling powers."[5] Likewise, Reinhard Wolters argues in a 1999 study that the Romans continuously changed their coin designs because these images communicated specific messages.[6] In more recent scholarship, Erika Manders argues that any media form can contain visual compositions representing imperial ideology. According to Manders, the ideological dimension of ancient coinage is best exemplified

> by the fact that emperors, the short-lived ones included, issued coin types immediately after their accession, that even usurpers who claimed the imperial throne for a short time minted their own coins and that the minting of coins by other persons than the emperor was considered a challenge to imperial power.[7]

In this article, I aim to fill a lacuna in numismatic research of political ideology. I seek to address how Roman emperors used coinage as a medium for political ideology and how this coinage allowed emperors and their imperial administrative bodies to advance claims to the imperial throne. This will be done through an extensive study of imperial coinage minted during the reign of

[4] Kemmers, *The Functions and Use of Roman Coinage*, 16.
[5] Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* , 11.
[6] Wolters, *Nummi Signati*, 256.
[7] Manders, *Coining Images of Power*, 29.

Servius Sulpicius Galba, who ruled over the Roman Empire from June 68 A.D. to January 69 A.D. The reasoning for studying coinage minted under Galba is threefold: first, such research might provide new insights into how emperors utilized coinage to negotiate times of crisis; second, the reign of Galba signaled the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which had ruled over the Roman Empire for 95 years. Galba, who had no lineage with the Julio-Claudians, had to provide some sort of legitimation for his usurpation. Justifications for Galba's claims to legitimacy might be found in the numismatic evidence; third, the imperial coinage of Galba has not been extensively studied in such a fashion. For this reason, a better understanding of his coin-types might provide new insights into coinage as a medium for political communication.

The imperial coinage of Galba comprises 521 coin-types, which were minted at the imperial mints of Taracco, Vindobona, Narbo, Lugdunum, Rome, and Carthage. The primary source evidence studied in this article appears in the second edition of the *Roman Imperial Coinage, vol. I*-catalogue (henceforth *RIC*). All references in this article to the coinage of Galba and his predecessors will therefore be taken from this catalog. One series mentioned in the *RIC* deserves extra clarification: 143 coin-types do not refer to any emperor and date from between Vindex's revolt and the Nero's death. These coins have strong correlations with some coin-types minted under Galba but were most probably minted in anticipation of the excommunication of Nero, prior to the official ratification of Galba as emperor. This series is referred to in this article as the "Civil Wars"-series.[8]

This article will study the coinage of Galba by first providing an overview of the factors that led to Galba's rule and how this rule eventually collapsed. Such an overview is necessary to place the coin-types of Galba in the context of his reign. After this overview, I will discuss Roman coinage as vehicles for imperial ideology. This discussion will substantiate the claim that the Roman administration used coinage to convey political messages. I will also discuss the government body was responsible for the minting process. Subsequently, I will analyze Galba's coin-types by examining both

[8] Sutherland and Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage*, 197.

sides of his coinage, with an emphasis on the reverse (the back face of the coin). I will argue that Galba wished to convey three distinct images through the inscriptions and images on the reverse side of his coinage: that of the rebellion of Galba that led to the downfall of Nero, that of the subsequent era of internal peace, and that of Galba's competence and magnanimity.

Galba's revolt, reign, and downfall

In 68 A.D., Vindex, the governor of Gaul, launched a revolt against the corrupt government of emperor Nero. Instead of proclaiming himself as ruler, Vindex reached out to Servius Sulpicius Galba, the governor of Hispania, to lead the revolt. Galba accepted his request and was hailed emperor in Nova Carthago around April 68. He sent messages to the inhabitants and governors of neighboring provinces asking them to support his claim, while Nero hastily tried to raise armies to defend Italy. It was during this time that the praetorian guard chose to abandon Nero; shortly after, the senate proclaimed him an enemy of the state. Upon learning this, Nero lost all hope and committed suicide on the 9th of June 68.

Despite Nero's suicide, the rebellion did not run as smoothly as Vindex had hoped. Forces that remained loyal to Nero's rule defeated Vindex near Vesontio. After this defeat, Vindex was either killed or committed suicide. Upon hearing the news of Vindex's death, Galba quickly retreated to the Spanish town of Clunia. He came out of hiding only after learning that, after Nero had died, he himself had been ratified by the senate as the new Roman emperor. Upon receiving this news, Galba triumphantly marched on Rome.

Imposing heavy taxes and financial sanctions, Galba quickly made himself unpopular with the Roman armies, praetorian guard, and aristocracy. According to Cassius Dio, he "collected money insatiably, since he required much, and spent of it very little."[9] Galba tasked himself with replenishing the state treasury, emptied by the free-spending Nero, and this job won him few friends. Cassius Dio tells us that Galba refused to reward the praetorian guard with the bonuses that were promised in exchange for their support, as "I

[9] Cass. Dio, 64.2.

[Galba] am accustomed to levy soldiers, not to buy them."[10] Galba also refused to reward the legions of Upper Germany, retaliating because they had previously fought, on Nero's orders, against the armies of Vindex.[11] Concerning the aristocracy, evidence suggests that Galba only granted offices to those who did not seek it, while simultaneously revoking grants made under Nero.[12] In January 69 A.D., the legions across the Rhine border mutinied, rallying under the banner of Vitellius, governor of Germania Inferior and future emperor. After slighting his confidante Marcus Salvius Otho by appointing someone else as his successor, Otho, feeling betrayed, secured the support of the praetorian guard for a claim to the throne, leading a plot against Galba which resulted in his assassination on January 15th, 69 A.D.[13]

Roman coinage as vehicles of Imperial ideology

Broadly speaking, Roman imperial coinage served two purposes. First, coins were monetary units functioning as means of exchange. Above all else, they served as economic instruments. Their second function, however, was as vehicles for the distribution of images and messages.[14] On the one hand, imprinted images lent coins credibility. These images helped make coins appear to their users as valid instruments of monetary exchange in the Roman empire. On the other hand, the images and inscriptions on the coins contained informational that served purposes other than facilitating economic exchange. I have already briefly noted above how different historians tended to approach coinage in light of these purposes. Here I will elaborate on these approaches.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill proposes four functions of imperial coinage. First, he argues that obverse and reverse images convey imperial authority not only by signifying the emperor as the head of state, but also by implying his authority through a wide variety of images that portray his grandeur, his qualities, and his virtues. Second, he argues that both sides of the coin are value-laden: the

[10] *Id.*,64.3.
[11] Suet. *Galb.* 16.2.
[12] *Id.*, 15.1
[13] Morgan, *69 A.D.,* 31-56.
[14] Manders, *Coining Images of Power,* 29.

emperor and any references made to him serve to strengthen the narrative of the emperor as the focal point of the Roman empire and to emphasize that he is to be worshipped. Third, the coin is persuasive. "It is the coin that speaks, not the emperor," Wallace-Hadrill writes. By this, Wallace-Hadrill means to draw attention to the fact that the coin functions as an independent agent that appeals to an ideology outside of itself. When the coinage honors the emperor, it does so as a seemingly autonomous institution and persuades the user to grant the emperor the same honor. Finally, as I have briefly noted above, the coin derives its meaning from its economic value, but this economic value, in turn, is the result of its non-economic image.[15]

As Wallace-Hadrill emphasizes, coinage was much more than a mere instrument of exchange. Coinage had an undeniable economic function, but it also disseminated imperial messages. These messages were not simply depictions of the emperor and the imperial family. A wide variety of images, including of deities and personified virtues, functioned as symbols of imperial ideology.[16] As Olivier Hekster argues, this distribution of messages might parallel the modern marketing strategies of consumer product brands such as Coca-Cola and Levi's: both the coins and modern brands aim "to create a good name for themselves, for now and posterity, in an empire where most of the inhabitants would never physically see their ruler."[17] This kind of branding might be interpreted positively or negatively, a variability described in a passage of Arrian:

> But I mean the things which belong to him as a man, the marks (stamps) in his mind with which he came into the world, such as we seek also on coins, and if we find them, we approve of the coins, and if we do not find the marks, we reject them. What is the stamp on this Sestertius? The stamp of Trajan. Present it. It is the stamp of Nero. Throw it away.[18]

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[15] Wallace-Hadrill, "Image and Authority in the Coinage of Augustus," 69-70.
[16] Norena, "The Communication of the Emperor's Virtues," 154.
[17] Hekster, "Coins and Messages: Audience Targeting on Coins of Different Denominations?," 24.
[18] Arr. *Epict. diss.* 4.5.9-10.

According to Arrian, a coin's user would attach positive and negative attitudes towards the coin independent of its monetary value. It is the emperor's face – the "branding," to use Hekster's terminology – that determines whether or not the coinage is desirable.

The question arises of who was responsible for determining the images which appeared on coin-types. Was the emperor himself concerned with the imagery and inscriptions on the coinage, or was an imperial administrative body in control of the imperial mints? This question has puzzled many modern scholars for years. While several administrators, such as the *triumviri monetales* (monetal supervisors), the *a rationibus* (secretary of finance), or the *procurator monetae* (mint director), were tasked with at least one part of the minting process, their exact responsibilities are not recorded in the ancient sources.[19] As a result, we do not know the extent of their artistic constraints, or whether these constraints left space for the emperor to influence the design process. The coins are the only sources that leave room for interpretation.

Earlier numismatists such as Buttrey and Levick have argued that the emperor in all probability did not play any part in the design process, and that if he did, his preferences would have played an insignificant role. According to these numismatists, the mint-masters decided what was to be placed on the coinage.[20] Later numismatists have left some more room for imperial interference. Wolters, among others, argues that the emperor intervened in the work of the minters when it did not correspond with his wishes. Under normal circumstances, the plans for coin designs would have been brought to him for review and were either circulated or dismissed according to his decisions.[21] By now, however, it is generally accepted that the question of the emperor's role in the design process cannot be conclusively answered. Regardless of what this role may have been, in all cases it was the imperial court, which centered around the emperor, that issued orders for coin designs, sometimes also actively intervening in the minting process. As Hekster put it, "it seems inevitable that these decisions originated at the top and that coins,

[19] Claes, "A Note on the Coin Type Selection by the *a rationibus,*" 163-164.
[20] Buttrey, "Vespasian as Moneyer," 108-109; Levick, "Propaganda and the Imperial Coinage," 107.
[21] Wolters, "Die Geschwindigkeit der Zeit," 189.

thus, propagated the ideological claims of the ruling regime."[22] Howgego shares Hekster's view, arguing that regardless of who made the final decision, the coins ultimately showcased how the emperor wished to be seen — or at least, how his close associates thought he wished to be seen.[23] Significantly, while in theory the emperor did not actively make design choices for every coin-type, in practice he was held accountable for all of them. It was not only *his* coinage with *his* portraiture that circulated in the empire; the coin-types reflected *his* ideologies and *his* attitudes.[24] "Galba's" coinage, then, does not necessarily refer to pieces that he personally admitted for circulation, but rather to coins that were circulated in his name which therefore reflect his official imperial authority.[25]

The Coinage of Galba

I have demonstrated above that Roman coins are not mere monetary units, but moreover can be understood as vehicles of imperial ideology. Furthermore, I have demonstrated that even if the emperor himself may not have been actively involved in the design decisions, the coin-types still convey his imperial messages. The designs were not randomly chosen but rather reflected particular ideologies that an emperor, or at least his administration, would have wanted to disseminate. Let us now consider the question of what ideology the coinage of Galba reflects. First, I will discuss the obverse's of Galba's coin-types. After this, I will study the relevant reverse coin-types, observing on them three distinct themes that Galba wished to convey.

The obverse of Galba's coinage

In almost all instances, the obverses show either the head or the bust of the emperor. In just a handful of cases, they depict Galba riding a horse.[26] The reason for the representation of Galba on horseback is that the mints did not have an official portrait of the emperor

[22] Hekster, "The Roman Army and Propaganda," 349.
[23] Howgego, *Ancient History from Coins*, 70.
[24] Ellithorpe, "Circulating Imperial Ideology," 66.
[25] Manders, *Coining Images of Power,* 32.
[26] *RIC* I. Galba, 1-3 (Taracco), 85-94 (Vindobona).

readily available.[27] While it might be tempting to assume that the horseback depiction of Galba is an explicit reference to his military career, it should not be read in this way. Rather, it is best understood as a temporary substitute for the head of the emperor that otherwise decorated Roman coinage.

The inscriptions on the obverse list the different honorary and political offices that Galba held. In doing so, the coinage legitimizes Galba's position as head of the state and aligns him with his predecessors. They refer to his declaration as *imperator* (IMP), his acceptance of the *tribunicia potestas* (TR P), his role as *pontifex maximus* (PONT MAX), and his honorary titles *Caesar* (CAESAR) and *Augustus* (AVGVSTVS). These titles are by no means merely honorary in nature; they also have political significance. The *tribunicia potestas* were a series of privileges that in Republican times were only reserved for the *tribuni plebis*, while the *pontifex maximus* was the religious head of state. The title *imperator* referred to the emperor's *imperium*. Augustus was the first emperor to hold held these titles, and it became a custom for his successors to be given similar honors.

The titles *Caesar* and *Augustus* explicitly align Galba with his Julio-Claudian predecessors (see figure 1). All emperors before Galba received and accepted these titles based on their familial ties to Julius Caesar or the emperor Augustus. Suetonius tells us that upon hearing of Nero's death, Galba assumed the title Caesar.[28] It is probably around the same time that Galba also adopted the title Augustus. Hekster argues that the appropriation of the hereditary titles can be understood as an attempt by Galba to align himself with the *domus augusta*, thereby solidifying his legitimate claim to the imperial throne.[29] Of course, the employment of *Caesar* and *Augustus* might also signal a broader transformation of hereditary titles into non-hereditary imperial designations. This view, however, is untenable in light of the fact that emperor Vitellius only employed the title "imperator." If "Caesar" and "Augustus" were simply imperial designations, Vitellius would certainly have used them. While Galba's use of the titles *Caesar* and *Augustus* does not

[27] Sutherland and Carson, *The Roman Imperial Coinage,* 218.
[28] Suet. *Galb.* 11.1.
[29] Hekster, *Emperors and Ancestors*, 53.

preclude the view that for him these designations referred generally to his supreme position at the head of the Roman Empire, it does show that Galba aligned himself specifically with the Julio-Claudian dynasty. Let us now turn to the reverse of the coinage of Galba and consider the first of the themes that appear here: Galba's rebellion against the reign of Nero.

The first reverse theme: Galba's rebellion

Images on the reverse of the coinage allude in several ways to the rebellion that Galba and Vindex led against Nero. One way they do this is by depicting personifications of Hispania and Gallia and referencing the city of Clunia. These depictions refer to the region where Galba accumulated the base of power that facilitated his rise to emperor, serving as reminders of how and by whom the tyrannical Nero was overthrown. These images also depict Mars Victor, who symbolizes the successful conclusion of the civil war and the restoration of order within the Roman empire.

Hispania is invoked both through personification, appearing as a female bust or figure, and through the legend HISPANIA.[30] Likewise, the province of Gallia, the original location of Vindex's revolt, is personified and appears as a female bust or figure accompanied by the inscriptions GALLIA or IMP.[31] The two female figures appear on particular coins either by themselves or together jointly clasping hands. When they appear together, they are supplemented by the legend GALLIA HISPANIA (see figure 2).[32] Four other coin-types depict three female busts with the inscription TRES GALLIAE (see figure 3).[33] This immediately recalls the opening phrase of *De Bello Gallico* of Julius Caesar: "Gallia est omnis divisa in partes tres."[34] But rather than referring to the war of Caesar in Gaul, these coin-types allude to the union of the region's three parts under Galba's rule.

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[30] *RIC*I, Galba 1-3, 50 (Taracco), 86 (VIndobona), 144, 155, 190-193, 225-226 (Rome), 515, 516-518 (Carthago).
[31] *RIC*I, Galba 85 (Vindobona), 145, 156, 227-228 (Rome).
[32] *RIC*I, Galba 15-18 (Taracco), 109 (Narbo), 154 (Rome).
[33] *RIC*I, Galba 89-92 (Vindobona).
[34] Caes. *BGall.* 1.1.1: "All Gaul is divided into three parts."

The coinage pays homage to important geographical locations in the revolution that overthrew Nero's reign and led to Galba becoming emperor. Furthermore, while the coinage makes no direct mention of Vindex, because Vindex was of Gallic descent one could suggest that the invocation of Gallia on the coinage alludes to him. The effigy of Gallia and Hispania clasping hands is a particularly strong image. It represents the harmony of the two provinces, projecting an appearance of cooperation between Galba and Vindex, and their legions. This was not the first instance that such harmony had been represented on coinage, as already in the Civil Wars-series Gallia and Hispania were depicted together on the reverse of one coin-type. Tellingly, the inscription on these coin-types reads CONCORDIA HISPANIARVM ET GALIARVM (Harmony of Hispania and Gallia).[35] Similarly, the reverse inscription on five coin-types reads HISPANIA CLVNIA SVL S C (see figure 4).[36] This inscription refers to Clunia Sulpicia, the city in northern Hispania to which Galba retreated when he learned of the defeat and death of Vindex. It was while contemplating suicide there that Galba heard of Nero's death and his own proclamation as new emperor by the senate. Why would the coin-type so explicitly refer to Galba's place of refuge and recall the death of his ally? It could be argued that Galba did not associate Clunia with those unhappy events. Considering that Clunia was the location where he learned of his elevation to the principate, Galba may have wished to honor the city as the birthplace of his reign. This theory is strengthened by the fact that after becoming emperor, Galba elevated Clunia to the rank of *colonia*.[37] Furthermore, Galba held an additional connection with Clunia: it was here, or so Suetonius tells us, that Galba received favorable auspices from a priest of Jupiter and was encouraged by a young girl to take on the role of emperor.[38] The invocation of Clunia on his coinage, therefore, not only refers to Galba's revolt but might also serve to reinforce the myths around his persona as emperor.

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[35] *RIC* I, Civil Wars, 15 (uncertain mint).
[36] *RIC* I, Galba 469-473 (Rome).
[37] Haley, "Clunia, Galba and the Events of 68-69 A.D.," 159-160.
[38] Suet. *Galba* 9.2.

Figure 1: Obverse of Galba with imperial titelature. *RIC* I. Galba 55 (De Nederlandsche Bank).

Figure 2: Reverse of Gallia and Hispania. *RIC* I. Galba 18 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18227154).

Figure 3: Reverse of Tres Galliae. *RIC* I. Galba 92 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215155).

Figure 4: Reverse showing Clunia. *RIC* I. Galba 473 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215158).

Figure 5: Reverse depicting Libertas with inscription LIBERTAS PVBLICA. *RIC* I. Galba 328 (De Nederlandsche Bank).

Figure 6: Reverse depicting Pax. *RIC* I. Galba 277 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18227781).

Figure 7: Reverse depicting arch surmounted by two equestrian statues, three captives with officer; inscription reads QVADRAGENS REMISSAE. *RIC* I. Galba 80 (Münzkabinett Berlin, inv. No. 18215166).

Figure 8: Reverse depicting Livia; inscription reads DIVA AVGVSTA. *RIC* I. Galba 55 (De Nederlandsche Bank).

Figure 9: Reverse showing adlocutio of Galba. *RIC* I. Galba 463 (De Nederlandsche Bank).

Finally, the reverse of two coin-types depicts Mars, the god of war, accompanied by the inscription MARS VICTOR S C.[39] While both figures and busts of Mars had previously appeared on the coinage of Augustus and of the Civil-Wars series, it is novel to see such depictions together with the epithet "the victorious." This pairing suggests that all parties who were involved in the tumult and civil strife of 68 A.D. felt the war had been concluded and that, with Galba as emperor, order in the empire was restored.

The second reverse theme: a new era of internal peace

The second theme that Galba's reverse coinage addresses is peace. The coinage represents Galba's reign as the peaceful conclusion to a period of turbulent upheaval. This is done through depictions of a wide array of deities and virtues: Libertas, Salus, Securitas, Roma, Victoria, and Pax. All convey the message that Galba's rule must be understood as the antithesis of what had been a state of crisis: the conclusion of a period of civil strife and the beginning of a new era of peace and prosperity.

Libertas is always accompanied by the legend LIBERTAS RESTIVTA or LIBERTAS PVBLICA (see figure 5). Coinage with the former inscription carries images of a female figure,[40] a standing Libertas,[41] and Galba.[42] The symbolism of this coin-series is ambiguous: on the one hand, the inscription and the depiction of Libertas clearly refer to the primary ideological justification for Galba's revolt: to free Rome from the yoke of Nero's tyrannical reign. This aim can be traced back to the Civil Wars-series, where the inscription LIBERTAS RESTITVTA is found.[43] On the other hand, the reverses that depict Galba show the emperor lifting up a kneeling Libertas. The submissive posture of Libertas — only able to stand upright with the assent and aid of the emperor — has been read to mark a transition from principate to outright autocracy.[44]

Coinage with the inscription LIBERTAS PVBLICA is

[39] *RIC* I, Galba 481-482 (Rome).
[40] *RIC* I, Galba 8-9 (Taracco).
[41] *RIC* I, Galba 37-39 (Taracco).
[42] *RIC* I, Galba 479-480 (Rome).
[43] *RIC* I, Civil Wars 24-27, 132-133 (uncertain mint).
[44] Kraay, *The* Aes *Coinage of Galba*, 42.

likewise attended by images of a female figure[45] or Libertas.[46] The inscription and the image of Libertas on this coinage indicate a similar communicative intention as that of the RESTITVTA-series: to proclaim a new freedom. But unlike in the RESTITVTA-series, freedom here means "freedom of the people."[47] The coinage is reminiscent of another series of coin-types: those that depict a female figure, with the inscription SALVS GEN HVMANI: "safety for the human race."[48] While the SALVS-types "ask" for the welfare of the people, the LIBERTAS- category proclaims it.

These are not the only of Galba's coin-types to express a desire for the welfare of the Roman people. Securitas, the deity for security and stability, is attested on three coin-types.[49] That the inscription SECVRITAS ROMANI appears on these coin-types indicates that the deity is invoked to convey a desire that the Roman people enjoy security and stability. While Securitas is attested on the coinage of Caligula and Nero, it is only during the Civil Wars-series that the inscription is related to the welfare of the Roman people. Here, the inscription reads SECVRITAS P R.[50] Other coinage in this series commemorates the revival of Rome through a series of closely related references. This is mainly done through depictions of the deity Roma, who is personified as a helmeted woman, at times in a military outfit, at times draped. Some of the coins depicting Roma have inscriptions reading either ROMA RENASCENS or ROMA VICTRIX. The former inscription emphasizes the same sentiment as invoked by the LIBERTAS RESTITVTA-coins: that of a renewed, reborn, Roman people.[51] The latter inscription corresponds to that of MARS VICTOR, although it places special emphasis on the strength of Rome.[52] Neither inscription has been

[45] *RIC* I, Galba 138-139 (Lugdunum).
[46] *RIC* I, Galba 22-23, 56, 68-76 (Taracco), 136-137 (Lugdunum), 158-159, 237, 275-276, 309-310, 318, 328, 346-349, 363-367, 372-373, 387-391, 423-427, 459-461 (Rome).
[47] Boruch, "Galba's Propaganda Motifs," 74.
[48] *RIC* I, Galba 146-147, 171-172, 205-214, 231-232 (Rome), 96-97 (Narbo).
[49] *RIC* I, Galba 504-506 (Rome).
[50] *RIC* I, Civil Wars 37-38 (uncertain mint).
[51] *RIC* I, Galba 24-29, 40-43, 57-58 (Taracco), 87-88 (Vindobona), 95 (Narbo), 160-162, 194-204, 229-230 (Rome).
[52] *RIC* I, Galba 44-45, 53, 59-60 (Taracco), 130 (Lugdunum).

attested in the numismatic output of the Julio-Claudians, although some coin-types from the Civil Wars-series do bear the same inscriptions.[53] On the reverse of the ROMA VICTRIX coin appears a kneeling Roma holing up a child to a gesturing Galba, a scene which is reminiscent of the LIBERTAS RESTITIVA coin's depiction of Galba and a kneeling Libertas. The inscription appearing alongside this scene reads ROMA RESTI S C.[54] The scene can be read allegorically: Galba, in the role of *pater familias* deciding on the fate of the newborn, is the sovereign who decides on the future of a newborn Rome.

There are two further types that must be considered. The first is that of the deity Victoria, who is invoked on a considerable number of coin-types.[55] The inscriptions on these coin-types read either S C, VICTORIA GALBAE AVG, VICTORIA IMPERI ROMANI S C, VICTORIA P R S C, or VICTORIAE IMP GALBAE AVG. While it might be tempting to read these as simple proclamations of victory, the fact that Victoria has been used by all the Julio-Claudian emperors that preceded Galba means that the appearance of Victoria on Galba's coinage is best understood as a continuation of a numismatic policy already put in motion by Galba's predecessors. The second type that must be considered is that of PAX (see figure 6).[56] On this coin, the deity of peace is accompanied by the inscription AVGVST(I). We find similar inscriptions on the coinage of Claudius, who employed the plural PACI AUGUSTAE.[57] Alisdair Gibson argues that this inscription honors the peaceful character of Claudius' reign, which followed that of Caligula, and announces a return to the glorious era of the *pax Augusta*.[58] The fact that references to peace on Galba's coinage are reminiscent of references to peace on Claudius' coinage suggests

[53] For ROMA RENASCENS: *RIC*² I, Civil Wars 8-9, 10 (uncertain mint); for ROMA VICTRIX: *RIC*² I, Civil Wars 59 (uncertain mint).
[54] *RIC* I, Galba 485 (Rome).
[55] *RIC* I, Galba 10-11, 48 (Taracco), 98, 110-113 (Narbo), 131-133 (Lugdunum), 148, 173-175, 215-217, 233-234, 250-258, 313-315, 350-357, 397-403, 456-458, 490, 510-514 (Rome), 519-520 (Carthage).
[56] *RIC* I, Galba 129, 140 (Lugdunum), 277-285, 319-323, 368-371, 413-415, 444-445, 496-498 (Rome).
[57] *RIC* I, Claudius 9-10, 22, 27-28, 38-39, 46-47, 51-52, 57-58, 61-62 (Rome).
[58] Gibson, *The Julio-Claudian* Succession, 117-118.

that Galba may have pursued similar goals as Claudius and wanted to emulate both his and Augustus' reigns. Telling in this respect is that in the Civil Wars-series, when peace was far from established, we find coin-types with the aspirational inscription PACI AVGVSTAE.[59]

The third reverse theme: Galba's competence and power

Let us now turn to the third theme that is reflected in Galba's coinage. This coinage uses a number of rhetorical strategies to assert Galba's military and political prowess. Where the coinage discussed above contained messages relating to the wellbeing and the peaceful state of the Roman Empire, this series contains representations of Galba as supreme leader of the state. As I will show, these representations draw on legend of his "abolishment of the fortieth," images and inscriptions of Augusts' wife Livia, and the depiction of Galba's *adlocutio*.

Several of the coin-types concerned with asserting Galba's military and political prowess carry the inscription QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE. This refers to Galba's "abolishment of the fortieth", an act by which Calba ended a litigation tax that Caligula had imposed several decades prior.[60] This inscription is the only reference on Galba's coinage to a political policy he implemented during his reign. It is telling for the role of coinage that such a financially strict emperor as Galba would have publicly advertised his suspension of a tax. The inscription is even more interesting in light of the imagery that accompanies it. In eight instances, an image of a standing Libertas accompanies the inscription.[61] In eight other instances, the reverse shows an arch on top of which are two equestrian statues. Three captives and an officer proceed towards the arch (see figure 7).[62] How might this scene be interpreted? We know from Suetonius that Galba was awarded the triumphal regalia for his service in Africa and Germania.[63] Those governorships, however, dated from the reign of

[59] *RIC* I, Civil Wars 56-57 (uncertain mint).
[60] Pölönen, "QVADRAGESIMA LITIVM," 80.
[61] *RIC* I, Galba 293, 296, 327, 422, 438-441 (Rome).
[62] *RIC* I, Galba 77-84 (Taracco).
[63] Suet. *Galb.* 8.1.

Caligula and Claudius and were too long ago to be held eligible for a triumph. Another possible interpretation is that it signifies Galba's military triumph after defeating Nero's forces. This answer can be discredited, however, given that no ancient source mentions that Galba had a triumph instituted for his victory in the civil war and given the fact that celebrating a triumph over other Romans was looked down upon.[64] Yet another possible interpretation is that the triumphal arch signifies the victory of Rome and Galba's forces *an sich* and was not meant to refer to any particular conflict or bloodshed. But this idea might also be discredited, given the fact that the coin explicitly depicts captives in chains. In the past, emperors such as Augustus, Claudius, and Nero had adopted a triumphal arch on their coinage, but this coinage did not also depict captives. The fact that Galba's coinage depicts captives when his predecessors' coinage did not suggests that these captives have specific identities. According to Sear, the "three prisoners doubtless represent Nero's rapacious procurators in Spain who, having denounced Galba at the time of his revolt, later paid the price with their lives."[65] It could be that Nero's procurators in Spain were those who, according to Suetonius, were instructed by Nero to have Galba killed.[66] There is no doubt that before Galba left Spain to march on Rome, he put to death loyalists of Nero.[67] Again, the depiction of Roman administrators in chains on coinage conflicts with Roman values.

Outside of this scene and the other two images previously mentioned, two additional distinct scenes can be found on particular coins with the litigation-tax inscription QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE. One coin depicts Galba being crowned by Victory.[68] The significance of Victory has already been discussed above and will not need further clarification. The other coin, however, carries an image relating to a series of coin-types that has not yet been discussed. It features a depiction of Livia, the deified widow of emperor Augustus.[69] As many as 31 other Galba coin-types also

[64] Lange, "Triumph and Civil War in the Late Republic," 71-72.
[65] Sear, *Roman Coins and their Values.*
[66] Suet. *Galb.* 9.2.
[67] Morgan, *69 A.D.,* 38.
[68] *RIC* I, Galba 134 (Lugdunum).
[69] *RIC* I, Galba 433 (Rome).

depict Livia, either seated or standing (see figure 8).[70] All of these coin-types are inscribed with DIVA AVGVSTA ("the deified Augusta") and refer to Livia's official deification during the reign of emperor Claudius. Only one earlier coin-type, from the reign of Claudius, depicts Livia.[71] Why would Galba depict the former empress? The most obvious answer is that Galba, according to Suetonius, had a close relationship with Livia and owed much of his fortune to her. She elevated his position in the inner circles of the Julio-Claudian dynasty and left him a sum of five million *sestertii* in her will.[72] Furthermore, the reference to Augustus' widow also could have been related to the *pax Augusta* trope found in the internal-peace series of coin-types. The portrayal of Livia thus not only emphasizes Galba's fondness for the former empress but also establishes a dialogue between Galba's times and those of Augustus, which Galba wished to recreate.

Finally, another series of coin-types with the litigation-tax inscription QVADRAGENSUMAE REMISSAE depicts Galba standing in military dress alongside several officers. Standing with the officers on a raised platform, he addresses a handful of soldiers. The inscription reads ADLOCVTIO S C (see figure 9).[73] It is clear that the coins depict Galba addressing the praetorian guard. Coins from the reigns of Caligula[74] and Nero[75] similarly portray the emperor addressing the praetorian guard. The inscription confirms that the reverse refers to the custom of adlocution, in which an emperor performatively establishes the legitimacy of his power through a speech to his personal guard. At the same time, these coin-types symbolize the basis of Galba's power: it was only after his military support for Vindex's rebellion and his subsequent victory over Nero's armies, that the senate proclaimed him emperor.

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[70] *RIC* I, Galba 142-143, 150-153, 184-189, 223-224, 331-338, 432 (Rome), 13-14, 36, 52, 55, 65-67 (Taracco).

[71] *RIC* I, Claudius 101 (Rome).

[72] Suet. *Galb.* 5.2.

[73] *RIC* I, Galba 462-468 (Rome).

[74] *RIC* I. Caligula 32, 40, 49 (Rome).

[75] *RIC* I. Nero 95-97, 130-136 (Rome), 371, 386-388, 429, 489-492, 564-565 (Lugdunum).

Reflection

When studying the ways Galba and his administration used imperial coinage as a device of political communication, it becomes clear that with this coinage Galba wanted to convey three themes in particular: first, his connection with and original base of power in the regions of Hispania and Gallia; second, the coming of a new period of stability and prosperity; and third, Galba's own military and political power. It is interesting to note that these third coin-types do not always coincide with Galba's actual military and political policies: no mention is found of his financial discipline and in only one instance (RIC^2 I, Galba 77-84: reverses depicting the triumphal arch with prisoners) a reference is made to his political persecutions. The plethora of coin-types issued during Galba's brief reign falsely suggest that this period was a prosperous and kind one, laden with financial remissions and political stability. Despite these false suggestions, however, Galba's coinage clearly projects Galba's legitimacy as the head of state. These coins imply unequivocally that Galba — not the senate nor any other military figure who might have opposed him — held the position of highest authority. To project legitimacy, Galba aligned himself with his predecessors by adopting their titulature and, in some cases, their numismatic symbolism. His use of the titles *Caesar* and *Augustus*, references to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, are the clearest examples of this.

It must be stated that this article has not covered every deity or reference that has been employed by Galba's coinage. Multiple references to, for example, Asclepius, Vesta, Ceres, and Pietas are attested, but because these deities or personifications were also such a substantial part of the symbolism of Galba's predecessors, their appearances on Galba's coins did not function to distinguish Galba's reign from those of his predecessors. The practice of referencing such figures on coinage was already widely established before Galba came to power and would endure years after his death. For this reason, they do they do not carry any specific political meaning in the context of Galba's reign.

During his reign, Galba, the first emperor in decades to bring civil war to the Italian peninsula, also dealt with military crises across the Rhine border. None of these events are reflected in his coinage. While the coinage clearly functions to establish Galba as the

supreme leader of the Roman Empire, it does not address directly the military mutinies and other challenges to power that he confronted. This fact shows that in times of crisis, coinage was not used to address specific internal struggles, but much rather to formulate a broad counter-message: one of internal prosperity with a strong leader.

It is telling that Vespasian, the fourth of the emperors that ruled between 68-69 A.D., borrowed quite a lot of numismatic symbolism of Galba. Becoming emperor after defeating Vitellius in several battles, Vespasian possibly found himself in a similar situation as Galba. Both led revolts against an emperor who was officially recognized as such by the Roman senate, and both were burdened with the task of uniting an empire that was stricken with civil war. It is therefore not surprising to find that many of the deities Galba employed to symbolize internal peace and stability also appear on Vespasian's coinage. Examples of such deities are Libertas Restituta[76] and Publica[77], Securitas Romani[78], and Roma Victrix.[79] While the full significance of Vespasian's coin-type choices can only be explained in a study specifically devoted to his numismatic output, the parallels between the coinage of Galba and that of Vespasian suggest a continuity between Galba and the Flavians that was not disrupted by the reigns of Otho and Vitellius.

Conclusion

While the coinage of Galba does not contain references to the ongoing political crises and civil wars that threatened the existence of the Roman Empire following the death of Nero, it certainly chooses to obliquely respond to this crisis in a number of ways: first, it clearly reflects on the origins of the revolt against Nero through numerous references to the provinces of Hispania and Gallia and the town of Clunia. The depiction of Mars Victor, in turn, signifies the ending of the civil war and introduces the second theme Galba addresses through his coins: the new era of internal peace. The frequent depictions in his coinage of Libertas, Salus, Securitas,

[76] *RIC* I, Vespasian 52, 88-89.
[77] *RIC* I, Vespasian 63, 82-87, 137, 141, 173-174, 237, 272, 309.
[78] *RIC* I, Vespasian 38, 281, 326-327.
[79] *RIC* I, Vespasian 196, 397, 506, 619.

Roma, Victoria, and Pax enable Galba's administration to propose an antithesis to the times of civil war and crisis. Finally, through the references to the repeal of the litigation tax of Caligula and to Galba's *adlocutio,* the coinage legitimizes Galba's claim to the imperial throne and his imperial policy.

As stated above, the coinage does not refer to Galba's financial policies other than his repeal of the litigation tax. In this, we see clearly that Galba's coinage only conveyed the messages that Galba and his administration wished to send and only depicted Galba as he wished to be depicted: as a benevolent and just ruler of the Roman Empire ushering in a new era of prosperity and peace after a time of crisis. Mutinies across the Rhine border quickly gave the lie to this narrative. After Galba's assassination, Galba's successors used imperial coinage as a tool to convey different messages informed by their own particular interests and ambitions. When Galba's brief and tumultuous reign came to an end, Galba's portrait was replaced on new coinage by that of Otho, and in just the same way, the messages on the reverse of those coins reflected Otho's ideology rather than that of Galba.

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Sensing the Anthropocene – The Permanent Ice in Contemporary Art

Chiara Juriatti

In the time between the first Arctic ice recordings in the 1970s and today, forty percent of the Arctic's ice area has vanished.[1] Human greenhouse gas emissions explain this alarming trend.[2] The dire consequences of Arctic ice shrinkage are clear considering the important roles ice plays in different aspects of the Earth's ecosystem. Among its many roles, Arctic ice cools the climate by reflecting sunlight, forms a habitat for humans and animals, and stores the vast majority of the Earth's fresh water. The disappearance of this natural biome not only leads to what is commonly referred to as the "climate crisis," but also to social and political crisis.

Philosopher Bruno Latour criticizes the phrase "climate crisis" and argues that the word "crisis" misleadingly indicates that climate change is something humanity can endure and leave behind. Climate change, he writes, may once have been merely a crisis, but due to humanity's lack of response to it, this crisis has become an "alteration of our relation to the world."[3] For Latour, humanity must not merely tackle climate change, but more broadly change the way it perceives and behaves toward nature. Latour states that due to the assumption that there is a normative model of nature that can be consulted in times of crisis, discussion about climate change is dominated by facts. Facts deriving from natural laws, for Latour, convey the impression that we are looking at the problem from the outside as detached observers. Such detachment, he writes, does not

[1] Wadhams, *A Farewell to the Ice*, 1.
[2] *Id.*, 52.
[3] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 8.

move humans toward action.[4] Latour therefore sees a need to raise awareness of environmental processes through something that "touches our hearts," thus making humans sensitive to and moved by the environment.[5]

Informed by Latour's assumption that affect must be added to the climate debate, this article will investigate the potential of artworks to engage people at this level. As a way of pointing to the grave ecological, social and political problems that result from the vanishing of permanent ice, environmental artists have turned to ice as an ephemeral medium capable of shifting in aggregation state. In this article, I will study four ice-based contemporary art responses to climate crisis, installations which function as intermediaries between the consequences of human agency and humans themselves. More than through scientific reports and media coverage, ice-based art allows for an immediate understanding of climate change through multisensory engagement.

The first work that I will analyze is *The Taste of Discovery* (2009) by Mathias Kessler. This immersive installation is experienced in part through sensation of temperature. The work partly consists of a room cooled to -20°C room containing pictures of Arctic icebergs photographed at night. In the second and third work that I will analyze, sound takes center stage. Katie Paterson's sound installations *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* (2007) and *Vatnajökull (the sound of)* (2007/08) primarily address the viewer's acoustic sense, transforming the materiality and sound of four different Icelandic glaciers into intimate sound artworks. Lastly, I will examine Olafur Eliasson's installation *Ice Watch,* which addresses the viewer's sense of touch. Eliasson places twelve blocks of arctic ice harvested in Greenland in three different city centers. Passers-by are allowed to touch the ice blocks, decreasing the distance between themselves and the polar environment. The four works I will discuss are particularly relevant to the question of the future of the permanent ice because they not only include features of ice that appeal to multiple human senses, but also touch

[4] *Id.*, 49.
[5] *Ibid.*

upon social problems that are connected to the disappearance of glacial ice.

To approach the multisensory qualities of these works, my analysis will make use of Arnold Berleant's theory of aesthetic perception and sensibility and Simon O'Sullivan's account of affect theory. Guided by the frameworks offered by Berleant and O'Sullivan, my objective is to show that by appealing to more than just the visual sense, ice installations have a great potential to influence people's understanding of the climate crisis and their relationship with nature. I aim to demonstrate that the sense-centered characteristics of ice installations can increase public understanding of the problem that led to climate change — namely, human agency — and can make its threat to our world more comprehensible. I am primarily interested how contemporary artists use and portray the materiality of permanent ice, as well as how its multi-sensory experience can create an aesthetic field that allows for discussions about climate change and, more generally, about humans' impact on nature.

Ice as a Medium

The rising temperatures and increased melting of permanent ice observed in recent decades is not a result of environmental events predating industrial times, but specifically a result of human pollution of the Earth's climate since the start of the Industrial Revolution.[6] Since the early nineteenth century, human actions like concrete construction have resulted in CO_2 emissions with measurable adverse effects on the Earth on topographical, biological and chemical levels.[7] This leads chemist Paul Crutzen to coin the term "Anthropocene," describing the geological epoch that discloses human activity as the primary force shaping the Earth's geology. The climatic and geological changes caused by human activity can be observed by the archival aspect of permanent ice, which shows a steady increase in carbon dioxide and methane emissions since the late eighteenth century.[8] Contemporary transformations of permanent ice are amongst these implications. Studying the positive

[6] Zalasiewicz et al., "The new world of the Anthropocene," 2229.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Crutzen, "Geology of mankind," 23.

feedback loop of rising temperatures, arctic scientist Peter Wadhams comes to the conclusion that anthropogenic climate change will not cause another ice age.[9] On the contrary, it would prevent a future ice age from happening if the Earth's orbit were to return to the position it occupied in the time before the Holocene glacial retreat.[10] Ice, therefore, plays an important role in assessing the extent of anthropogenic environmental damage because, on the one hand, in its ice layers it stores information about the concentration of chemicals in the atmosphere, and on the other, as a fragile ecosystem it is endangered itself. This dual function means that ice serves as an ideal medium for artistic response to the Anthropocene and its climate changing processes.

The material qualities of ice are intrinsically tied to the climate. Because of its bright white color, ice reflects sunlight and cools down the earth. Furthermore, ice possesses dynamic features, characteristics that demonstrate its agency. Ice moves and ice floats. Most importantly for the Earth's climate, ice, alternately freezing and melting, is constantly in flux. It acts upon and is acted upon by outside influences that provoke it to change phase. This entangled movement is what Latour calls "agency:"

> [W]e encounter, ... an agent which gains its name of "subject" because he or she might be subjected to the vagaries, bad humor, emotions, reactions, and even revenge of another agent, who also gains its quality of "subject" because it is also subjected to his or her action. ... To be a subject is not to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy.[11]

Humans cannot call themselves the only subjects or agents because their agency influences the environment and provokes dynamic

[9] This bold assumption is supported by Andrew J. Weaver and Claude Hillaire-Marcel (2004) who argue that anthropogenic climate change will lead to a shut-down of Atlantic meridional overturning circulation that works as a cooling of the Earth by transporting warm water to the sea ice.
[10] Wadhams, *A Farewell to the Ice*, 44-45.
[11] Latour, "Agency in the Time of the Anthropocene," 5.

reaction. As human agency triggers changes in glacial ice and these changes in turn influence the human subject, it is necessary to acknowledge nature's agency.

Permanent ice should not only be seen as a material, the changing aggregation which visualizes the implications of climate change, but also as a medium that tells about the social and environmental context in which the ice is situated. Recognizing weather and atmosphere as media, Janine Randerson remarks, allows climatic conditions to be understood as central to and determinative of — rather than simply a background for — human life.[12] Understood as a form of media, ice again demonstrates its agency. In that the body always senses temperature, the coolness of ice connects humans to their environments and makes apparent their bodily dependency on the climate. According to Desiree Förster, it is possible to sensuously perceive the factors leading to the processual emergence of climate.[13] Ice lends itself well to such sensuous perception. One's being located in a glacial environment, for example, makes it possible to observe changes in ice and the influences of these changes on one's human body. These observations make comprehensible the circumstances that lead to the particular composition of one's environment — for example, the causal relation between rising temperatures and the vanishing of ice — and in this, the entanglement of humans and nature.

Permanent Ice in Contemporary Art

In contemporary art, the vulnerability of permanent ice in the Anthropocene is often approached through installations that call for multi-sensory perception. These approaches invite us to consider the link between sensory experience and aesthetics. According to Arnold Berleant, who has studied this link, the etymology of aesthetics shows its intrinsic relation to sensuous experience: the term "aesthetics" stems from the Greek words *aisthetikos* meaning "of or for perception by the senses" and *aisthanesthai* meaning "to perceive, to feel."[14] Berleant uses this definition to identify two ways of understanding a work of art: "As an art object it is the product of

[12] Randerson, *Weather as Medium, Toward a Meteorological Art*, xvii.
[13] Förster, *Aesthetic Experience of Metabolic Processes*, 81.
[14] Berleant, *Sensibility and Senses*, 20.

some activity; it is something made. As an aesthetic object, it is the object as it works in perception."[15] Aesthetic experience of a work of art is not defined by the constructed nature of the work, but can be understood as a directed perception of a situation capturing human attention.[16] To describe this attentive perception, Berleant uses the word "sensibility," which describes aesthetic experience as inherently conscious. That is to say, when humans perceive an object or a situation aesthetically, they do this with focused attention and high awareness of the object or situation they are looking at.[17]

According to Berleant, aesthetic perception is free of judgement, but not free of filters. As a result, any individual's aesthetic perception is shaped by cultural, political, and social influences.[18] Berleant remarks that these filters are what turn sensation into experience: While sensory perception is a neutral process in the human body, experience is mediated by pre-existing conceptions and makes meaning out of the perceived situation. Thus, he argues, meaningful experience must not be confused with physical sensation, which precedes it.[19] Berleant furthermore mentions the unique character of aesthetic experience in relation to other forms of experience such as the religious:

> [U]nlike the religious, it [the aesthetic] requires no myth or doctrine to explain and justify itself, nor does it lead us beyond to a different realm. The aesthetic is content to remain exactly what and where it is, and to elaborate skeins of memory, understanding, and especially of active and intense perceptual awareness on its own. In this sense, the aesthetic is self-sufficient and self-gratifying, and therefore, I believe, most authentic.[20]

[15] Berleant, "Aesthetic Sensibility," 6.
[16] Berleant, *Sensibility and Senses*, 22.
[17] Berleant, "Aesthetic Sensibility," 5.
[18] Berleant, *Sensibility and Senses*, 21-22.
[19] *Id.*, 27.
[20] *Id.*, 30.

Berleant makes clear that no beliefs or tools are requisite for aesthetic experience. This experience takes place without — but at the same time is always interpreted through — pre-existing knowledge and attitudes.

From this discussion of aesthetic experience arises the question how aesthetics relate to ethics. Emily Brady, engaging with the topic of aesthetic values, states that, "[t]he careful perceptual attention required and exercised in the experience of art may enable one to more carefully observe important features and detail in a complex moral problem."[21] She argues that through a practiced aesthetic perception that makes the perceiver attentive to the qualities of the object or situation, a better knowledge of the very object or situation can develop. From this knowledge can arise a ground for moral understanding, although there is no guaranteeing the direction in which such a moral understanding evolves, whether toward an object, situation, or environment.[22] If one's moral understanding evolves from cherishing a certain environment, Brady states, one will most likely make sure to care for the well-being of this environment.[23] Like Berleant, Brady accentuates the significance of multi-sensory engagement as a facilitator of aesthetic experience, mentioning the "penetrating" and memorable effect of aesthetic perception on its perceiver.[24]

Ice as Materiality

Because the aesthetic is a way of perceiving the world that goes beyond the apprehension of beauty, it can reconnect its perceivers with the environment that surrounds them, allowing them to relate to this environment not from the outside as neutral bystander, but as integral part of the ecosystem. The aesthetic does not take the form of graphs and numbers but of something perceivable by the senses. Simon O'Sullivan puts forward this understanding of the relationship between the human, the aesthetic, and the environment in his account of affect theory. Affect, according to O'Sullivan, is a

[21] Brady, "Aesthetics in Practice," 280.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Brady, "Aesthetics in Practice," 280.
[24] *Ibid.*

"reaction in/on the body at the level of matter,"[25] and therefore connects it primarily to humans' materiality. An affect is an impersonal reaction, as O'Sullivan describes it, because it is a way the human body responds to the materiality of its surrounding environment. In this, art does not represent a specific object, but rather initiates an effect on the human body that makes invisible entities sensible.[26] Melting ice materializes an ecosystem in transition. The artwork changes from being an object to being what Berleant calls an aesthetic field, a space that possesses its own agency.[27]

Thus, the first step for aesthetic perception of an environment has to be to attribute materiality to both the perceived environment and the perceiver. In the context of permanent ice, the materiality of the environment is as Petra Lange-Berndt phrases it: "materials are neither objects nor things."[28] Following Lange-Berndt, we can draw a distinction between ice as *object* and ice as *material*. Ice as object would be glacial ice as instrumentalized for political and economic purposes, ice that humans use for their own agenda. Ice as material, on the other hand, is pure ice itself: a nonhuman entity with its own agency.

To materialize permanent ice means to de-objectify it and acknowledge its material agency. As an agent, ice is not a mere carrier of information, but an inherent part of a changing environment. Monika Wagner states: "Material needs no longer to be understood as a detachable carrier for a form or an idea, but can be regarded as indissolubly interwoven with it."[29] In ice-based art installations, the visitor encounters ice as the natural material that it is: it is not a symbol, not a vehicle for meaning, and it cannot be *used* for any human ends.

[25] O'Sullivan, "The Aesthetics of Affect, " 126.
[26] *Id.*, 128-129.
[27] Berleant, *Sensibility and Senses*, 76.
[28] Lange-Berndt, "Introduction: How to be complicit with materials," 13.
[29] Wagner, "Material," 27.

Artist Mathias Kessler, for instance, departs from the ice as an object to contrast it with the ice as a material. The installation *The Taste of Discovery* (Fig. 1) originated from Kessler's expedition to the Arctic, where he took nocturnal pictures of icebergs. The installation is divided into two separate rooms. One is a cramped room in which visitors can experience the inside of an expedition cabin with all their senses. An electric generator produces a foul smell, deafening noise, suffocating warmth. This disagreeable space de-romanticizes the idea of an Arctic expedition. The second room of the installation is a freezing black box. The room has a temperature of approximately −20°C, which is maintained by the generator in the first room. In this room appears one of Kessler's iceberg photographs, separated from the viewer by a glass wall. On

Figure 1: Mathias Kessler, *The Taste of Discovery*, 2009, Photo © Mathias Kessler, 2009, installation view Kunsthalle Dornbirn

the floor behind the glass is water.[30] In Kessler's installation, permanent ice manifests itself materially not as photographed icebergs but as the water. By directly contrasting two states of aggregation through the photograph and the water, the vanishing aspect of permanent ice is accentuated. Kessler juxtaposes the Romantic sublime landscape with the reality of the vanishing material.

Kessler comments on Arctic expeditions that coincided with the era of Romanticism, a period when the British navy, in pursuit of new territories, sought a Northwest passage connecting the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.[31] Artworks of the time reflect the idea that it was heroic and patriotic to risk one's life for Arctic exploration. Alongside the landscape painting *The Sea of Ice* (1823-24) by Caspar David Friedrich, the "great painting" *The Icebergs* (1861) (Fig. 2) by Frederic Edwin Church is one of the most famous paintings from its time depicting the northern ice. Created from descriptions of the Arctic, the painting captures the magnitude and danger of the icebergs as well as the aesthetic and spiritual character of the scenery. The viewer is confronted with huge floating icebergs

Figure 2: Frederic Edwin Church, *The Icebergs*, 1861, oil on canvas, 163.83 cm x 285.75 cm, Dallas Museum of Art, gift of Norma and Lamar Hunt, 1979.28, Image Courtesy Dallas Museum of Art

[30] Kunstraum Dornbirn, "Mathias Kessler – The Taste of Discovery."
[31] Officer and Page, *A Fabulous Kingdom*, 63.

which hint at their even-greater underwater magnitude. The overwhelming character of their grandiosity is highlighted by the fading light of the afternoon sun and the mast in the foreground of the painting. An overturned ship points to the fate of many expeditioners that did not make their way back home, symbolizing man's powerlessness against the forces of the ice. This motif points to the risk explorers must take in order to achieve great things for their nations. It reflects the aesthetic concept of the "sublime," a typical motif in Romanticist paintings. Iain Boyd Whyte describes the sublime as an affect or experience: when confronted with a sublime landscape, the perceiver feels overwhelmed and threatened by the magnitude and force of nature.[32] Immanuel Kant states that the sublime leads the individual to feel superiority over the natural landscape, because even if the sublime thing threatens material life, the conscious soul is eternal.[33]

By the fact that he captured the iceberg photographs appearing in his installation while on his own Arctic expedition, Kessler refers to the sublime pursuit of the Arctic. He also refers to this pursuit through the form and content of the photographs themselves. They show pristine icebergs floating in dark water. Through this stark contrast, Kessler portrays the ice both as an aesthetic entity and a menacing imposition. With his installation Kessler does not attempt to replicate the Arctic sublime paintings of the nineteenth-century; rather, he is critical of Romantic depictions of nature, arguing that they are the source of our contemporary misguided understandings of nature:

> Think about Romantic landscape painting in the context of greenwashing. Think about mimesis and how artworks reproduced the world around us. ... Since then, I feel strongly that the idea of mimesis and abstraction have created a second world on the Internet, allowing us to slowly remove ourselves from the actual place in which we live.[34]

[32] Whyte, "The Sublime: An Introduction," 16.
[33] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment,* 144.
[34] "A Conversation between David Ross and Mathias Kessler," 217.

Romanticized conceptions of nature, according to Kessler, make their way into the virtual realm where they create a world detached from its actual material conditions. In a way, Kessler's visual presentation of ice photographs in *The Taste of Discovery* refines Kant's notion of the sublime: instead of the eternal life of the conscious soul, it is virtual technology which represents human superiority over nature. In placing the iceberg photographs in close proximity to the cramped room containing an electric generator — the human world dominated by fossil fuels — Kessler reveals the environmental burden of the production of such pictures. This de-romanticizes the experience of Kessler's installation.

The two juxtaposed depictions of ice in the installation are based on the two different notions of ice. Firstly, in the photography, ice is displayed as a solid object that can be looked at from a distance. The ice is something to be marveled at by the human spectator, who takes a detached position. This is equivalent to the position people take when looking at catastrophic climate change scenarios as if they were not implicated, even though these scenarios are consequences of humanity's willful lack of response to the climate crisis. Secondly, in the installation's use of water, ice exhibits its materiality, its capacity to melt and otherwise change in response to outside influences. The transition from one aggregation state to another — solid to liquid — shows the material's agency. In portraying the different aggregation states of the ice in connection to human actions, *The Taste of Discovery* gives ice visual and material identities.

The human observer and the materiality of glacial ice are connected through the prevailing cold temperature in the room containing photographs of icebergs. The coldness of the room has an effect on the visitors' body. They start to experience ice not exclusively with their eyes but also partly with their bodies. Hairs begin to rise, muscles to contract and noses to run: the ice's immanent materiality influences the human body; thus, an aesthetic field develops wherein humans' experience of their own materiality fuses with their perception of an environment. This can be considered as an affect, as O'Sullivan describes it: an impersonal bodily reaction to the surrounding environment. Clearly, the affect arising from entering the cold room is based on an utterly

impersonal process: every human involuntarily responds to temperature with their matter. In stimulating a physiological response through the artwork, Kessler invokes affects that intertwine perception of the environment with the perception of one's own body. The artwork situates humans in an ecosystem — where Latour argues humanity must urgently see itself situated — and creates a bond between the two entities.

Acoustic and Visual Sensation

Unlike experiencing the physical materiality of ice, experiencing the sound of ice seems more difficult. While other natural phenomena like wind, fire, and water have a variety of specific and identifiable sounds, ice would seem limited in its noise-generating qualities. Ice makes a sound when it crushes under tension and makes some other sounds related to changes in its aggregation state, as when it melts into water or freezes from water. Other than that, ice is fairly quiet. In order to grasp sound, a special physical process is required. Sonic perception sets itself apart from the other senses in that, in addition to the perceiver and the perceived, it also includes the proximate environment into the interaction. Sound arises from the vibration of an entity which produces waves moving through space.[35] The characteristics of the milieu in which the sound is generated, therefore, have a great influence on the quality of the sound. But sound also connects humans and the environment in a non-auditory way, as Makis Solomos remarks. Due to the physical genesis of sound, humans are able to feel it.[36] Thus, sound is a trace of agency and constitutes agency's immersion in its environment. According to O'Sullivan's understanding of affect, to place one's corporeality into such a sound environment is to open up new worlds of reference.[37] Being affected by materialities allows for what O'Sullivan calls "resingularisation," the reconfiguring of our position in the world.[38] In other words, sensing ice on an auditory level helps to develop an understanding of the environment and to discern the place humans take up in the modification of the environment.

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[35] Solomos, "From Sound to Sound Space," 95-96.
[36] *Id.*, 99.
[37] O'Sullivan, The Aesthetics of Affect, 129-130.
[38] *Id.*, 129.

Katie Paterson's artwork *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* (Fig. 3) consists of three records that are made not out of vinyl but glacial ice water. During a residency in Iceland, Paterson recorded the sounds of three different glaciers melting and preserved their melted water. Subsequently, she froze the water again and pressed the resulting ice into three phonograph records, each with a track containing the recorded sound of their original melting. It takes the records an approximate duration of two hours to completely melt again. The artwork's short lifetime stresses the comparably fast progress with which permanent ice is now disappearing. Moreover, the unrepeatability of the record track reflects the uniqueness of its natural source; once the ice is gone, it is gone forever and only a digital testimony of its disappearance remains. The seeming assimilation of the artwork and the natural environment, however, also highlights their difference: the artwork can be played over and over again in the form of a video, but the source of the material and the sound — namely the arctic ice — cannot on the basis of current scientific knowledge be rehabilitated.

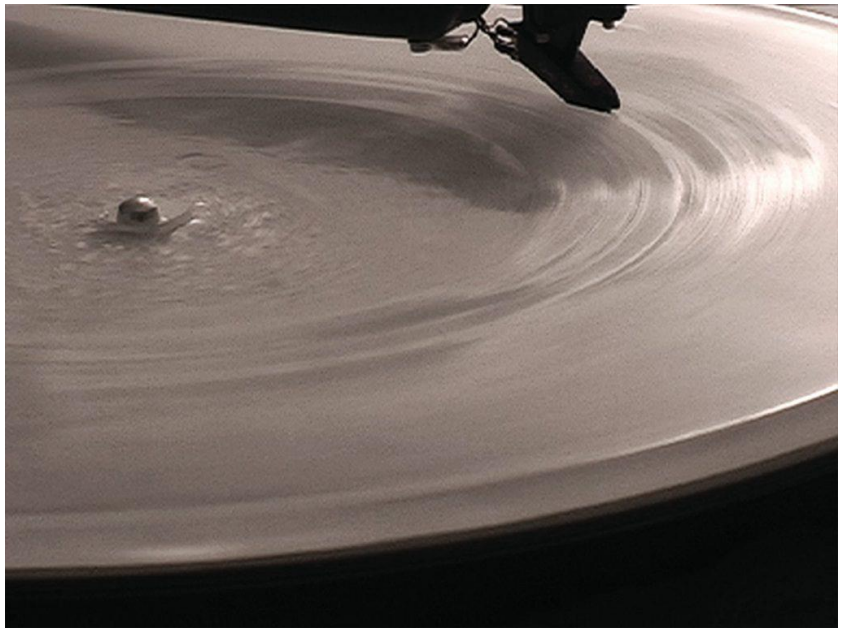

Figure 3: Katie Paterson, *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökul*l, 2007, Film Still

Paterson makes the many lives of permanent ice — ranging from its past materiality to its future negativity — accessible through the intimate medium of sound.

The sound installation aligns space with time as Paterson creates an aesthetic field in which space and materiality are experienced through time. This entanglement refers to the specific function of permanent ice as the Earth's archive. Every layer of the centuries-old ice provides information about climate conditions throughout history. The ice becomes a witness to human agency. As reports show, human agency can already be detected in the ice in the form of microplastics.[39] Paterson's records illustrate this inextricability of human time and Earth time, their spaces and their materiality, by recontextualizing vanishing ice within the human activity of listening to music on a phonograph record. As the artist explicates, her work is informed by an "understanding that we are not separate from the Universe, but are intrinsically linked."[40] As the time and space of the Arctic ice environment comes to an end, the time and space of humans will too, making the artwork an illustration of the Anthropocene and attempt at envisioning the direction in which Earth in the Anthropocene is headed.

In that sense, the artwork utilizes the absence of sound as a trigger of affect. The inevitable decay of the records ultimately results in silence. This draws attention to the silencing of the glacial environment brought about by climate change.[41] The silence Paterson's stages takes its gravity from the fact that it explicitly grows out of a sound. *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull* not only visualizes and materializes the implications climate change has on permanent ice, but also gives it an acoustic form. Silence in Paterson's work, therefore, is not a meaningless void; it is the sequence of the art installation most pregnant with significance because it foreshadows the Earth's future.

[39] Kanhai et al., "Microplastics in sea ice and seawater," 1.
[40] Ball, "Artist of deep time," 457.
[41] McKinnon, "Dead Silence," 74.

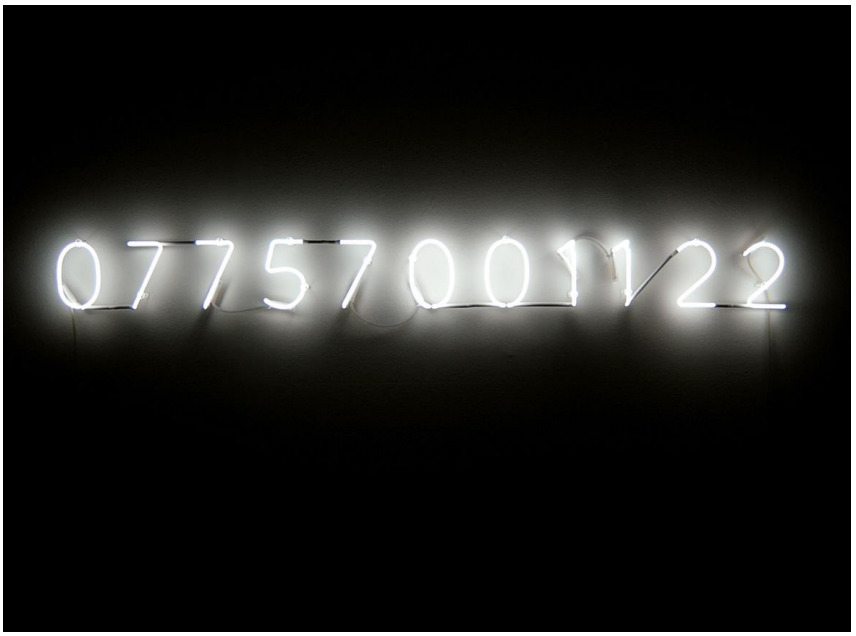

Figure 4: Katie Paterson, *Vatnajökull (the sound of)*, 2007/8, Photo © Katie Paterson, 2008, installation view, Modern Art Oxford

Paterson's sound installation establishes an intimate connection between humans and vanishing ice, yet the ice in this installation lacks agency and resists being known other than as an object to be observed. Paterson grants ice agency in her installation *Vatnajökull (the sound of)* (Fig. 4), which consists of a telephone number made out of neon lights on a wall. When calling this number, visitors were connected to a live phone line placed on the Icelandic glacier Vatnajökull. Though the telephone connection, the visitor could hear the glacier melt in real time. In this work, like *Langjökull, Snæfellsjökull, Solheimajökull*, the geological time of the glacier and human time are aligned.[42] The physical distance that lay between the human caller and the glacial environment is overcome, bringing close what is distant. The connecting phone line creates a space that for a moment of time is prepossessed by both parties of the call. The caller experiences sound in a familiar situation of intimate communication, a situation that brings with it particular expectations for conversational behavior. This makes it

[42] McKinnon, *Dead Silence*, 74.

possible to experience the ice as a dynamic entity on Earth equal to oneself. The caller hears the melting ice's dripping sound not as a melody to which they listen to, but as part of a conversation between two parties. The conversational situation of the phone call prompts a response. The glacier on the line not only elicits a literal response but also a metaphorical one: the environment calls on humans to respond to the climate crisis.

Multi-sensory interaction

Having demonstrated the potential of contemporary art to visualize the materiality and agency of ice, I will turn to an ice installation by the artist Olafur Eliasson. This work offers a further possibility for sensory experience of ice: engaging the viewer's sense of touch. In 2014, Eliasson worked with geologist Minik Rosing to develop the installation *Ice Watch* (Fig. 5). This installation was a response to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's publication of the *Fifth Assessment Report on Climate Change*. *Ice Watch* consist of twelve large ice blocks placed for exhibition not in museums or galleries but outdoor public spaces in Copenhagen, London, and Paris. Viewers freely approach and experience the ice blocks

Figure 5: Olafur Eliasson and Minik Rosing, *Ice Watch*, 2018, bankside, outside Tate Modern, London, Photo © Justin Sutcliffe, 2018

without a formal exhibition framing. Although the installation is conceived as an answer to the IPCC report, this is not made explicit on site. In this, Eliasson creates a space for aesthetic experience informed principally not by the artist's own interpretation of his own work, but the viewer's physical sensations and affects.

That said, Eliasson and Rosing construct the installation in a way as to intervene in the climate debate. In a prominent public location in the city of its installation, the twelve blocks of ice are arranged to form a circle, as if each one was a number on a clock face. The blocks, which were found freely floating in a fjord in Greenland, together weigh 80 tons, the same amount of ice that melts in the Arctic every millisecond.[43] Through the visual representation of a clock and artwork's ongoing melting process, Eliasson and Rosing imply that time is running out to prevent further environmental damage. Furthermore, the placement of the ice in the city shows that the atmosphere that humans create — whether it is climatic or political — is threatening the environment. The artwork becomes a call for action, predominantly one directed at people of power because of its temporal overlap with the publication of the IPCC report. In addition to a clock face, Eliasson calls the circular composition a "parliament,"[44] a name which indicates the importance of human political involvement in responding to the climate crisis and the ice's own agency that makes us aware of this crisis.

The work visualizes and materializes the ice' agency: its melting process. The visitors are encouraged to touch the work and thereby come into direct physical contact with the melting ice. Eliasson breaks with the habit of displaying art at a distance, where guards customarily supervise gallery and museum visitors and ensure that they keep a distance from the art and remain merely spectators rather than participants. Rather, Eliasson and Rosing's ice blocks immersively engage the humans who wander amongst them. As Hélène Frichot notes about Eliasson's works, "the atmospheric pressure of Eliasson's work is such that it demands the visitor's engagement beyond that of a mere onlooker; it is an interaction that

[43] Eliasson, "Ice Watch."
[44] *Ibid.*

encourages the mutual transformation of both the visitor and the work."[45] The performance of *Ice Watch* entails both the vanishing of the ice blocks and of the visitor's preconceived notions about bodily engagement with art. The bodily behavior that the work encourages is inherently different from the behavior that museum visitors must show when moving through a gallery space. As a video of the installation illustrates, people touch the ice and press their ears to it, listening for the sound of its melting, and children play on it.[46] Allowing unrestricted access to their work, Rosing and Eliasson want to underline the importance of discussing climate change in a way that is based on appreciation of sensory experience rather than assignment of guilt.[47]

With the viewer's simple experience of ice's coolness, the artwork creates an aesthetic field that engages the human body. Eliasson imagines that his atmospheric works of art might have transformative potential: "We learn to see ourselves in a different light."[48] Frichot, writing of this potential, argues that affect in Eliasson's work is not an evocation of an emotional state but the performance of a shift in emotional states, as for example from happy to sad.[49] The affect, rather than corresponding to specific emotions, is a play of intensities that enables the reordering of the human world. It supports the rethinking of preconceived concepts because it makes abstract information comprehensible. Although it is common knowledge that ice is cold, directly experiencing this coldness intensifies such knowledge. The direct experience of vanishing ice can lead to a similar intensification. A multitude of reports and statistics illustrate scientifically the accelerating melting process of glacial ice and attribute this clearly to human activity. But in directly perceiving the vanishing of ice, an affect is inscribed in the viewer's body which shifts the bodily state of the viewer from detached observer of the problem to active participant. The outcome of this shift — whether this leads the viewer to feel a sense of active participation in the process of destroying nature, or to the

[45] Frichot, "Olafur Eliasson and the Circulation of Affects and Percepts," 32.
[46] Youtube, "Arctic Ice Art displayed in Paris," Eliasson, "Ice Watch."
[47] Eliasson, "Ice Watch."
[48] Frichot, "Olafur Eliasson and the Circulation of Affects and Percepts," 34.
[49] *Ibid.*

viewer feeling a sense potential to respond to the crisis, is dependent on the cultural, social and political filters with which the viewer approaches the work.

Conclusion

Art installations that thematize the role of permanent ice in the climate crisis predominantly use the ice's melting process to illustrate the urgency of the global situation. All three artists whose works I have considered as case studies portray permanent ice as a vanishing ecosystem and each relates this ecosystem to the human realm: Kessler in disclosing Arctic exploration and fossil fuels as a reason for disappearing ice, Paterson in giving a voice to ice by playing the sound of its melting on a record player and by transmitting this sound through a telephone line, and Eliasson in placing ice blocks in an urban environment. In my analyses, Latour's concept of nonhuman agency played an important role in illustrating the drastic climatic transformations currently affecting the materiality of permanent ice. Unlike in the Arctic landscape paintings of Romanticism, the artists I have studied portray ice as the suffering entity in the human-nature relationship. Putting vanishing ice on center stage, these artists reverse the sublime motif: while in the nineteenth century ice is the threatening entity, in the twenty-first century ice turns into the threatened entity.

In order to make it possible for a viewer to experience the agency of permanent ice, the artists use different strategies to engage the senses, contributing to an expansion of ice-related phenomenological experience. Reaching viewers through modulations of temperature, sound, haptic feeling, and taste, these artists elicit affects having the potential to generate environmental awareness. Although it cannot be stated in what ways the affects elicited by the artworks discussed actually influence moral understanding, they at least establish a space for interaction that provokes a rethinking of the human-nature relationship.

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Conspiring Algorithms: Tracing the Anti-Vaccination and COVID-19 Conspiracy Movement on YouTube

Didi Spaans

"We're not just fighting a pandemic; we're fighting an infodemic," World Health Organization (WHO) director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus claimed in a 2020 speech on the COVID-19 virus.[1] While "infodemic" is not an established concept in academic research,[2] the term has been used to describe "information epidemics" where statements mixing fear, speculation, and rumor are amplified and relayed worldwide by modern information technologies.[3] A report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH) notes that, since the start of the international coronavirus vaccination program against SARS-CoV-2 (COVID-19, or 'the coronavirus'), social media accounts that downplay the severity of the COVID-19 and propagate anti-vaccination claims have increased their followings by at least 17 million people worldwide.[4] On the popular video-sharing platform YouTube, CCDH calculates, 7,8 million people have subscribed to such accounts over the course of the pandemic.[5] YouTube, a company owned by Google, has been the most influential social media platform in propagating anti-vaccine and COVID-19 denial movements, with Facebook in second place. How can we understand the role of YouTube's technological make-up play in influencing the discussion on COVID-19 and the related vaccines,

[1] "Munich Security Conference," *World Health Organization,* https://who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/munich-security-conference.
[2] Nielsen et al., "Navigating the 'infodemic."
[3] Orso et al., "Infodemic and the Spread of Fake News in the COVID-19-era"; Patwa et al., "Fighting an Infodemic"; Solomon et al., "The 'Infodemic' of COVID-19," 1806.
[4] "Disinformation Dozen," *The Center of Digital Hate,* 2020.
[5] *Ibid.*

and what are the political implications of YouTube's video-recommendation algorithms?

The current state of popular uncertainty regarding the nature of the virus and the safety of vaccination appears to be affected by the great amount of data that individuals find online. On the web, and specifically on social media, anti-vaccination movements have flourished. In addition, public reaction to government-imposed social restrictions aimed at COVID-19 containment often takes place on social media platforms. Since the very first reported cases of the COVID-19, pharmaceutical companies have worked at unprecedented speed to develop an effective vaccine to help keep the virus under control. Nevertheless, the safety and efficacy of the vaccine has and continues to be questioned by a large number of people.[6] This distrust seems to be partly founded on the fact that prior to COVID-19, no vaccine for an infectious disease had ever been developed in such a short amount of time, and moreover, that no vaccine for preventing a human coronavirus infection had ever existed.[7] Vaccine hesitancy has taken on many conspiratorial forms. Some of these theories claim that Microsoft co-founder and billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates invented COVID-19 in a secret laboratory.[8] Other theories claim that COVID-19 vaccination injects a chip into the arm that tracks one's movements.[9] Others claim that the Great Reset, an economic plan offering proposals for recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, is orchestrated by a group of world

[6] Rosenbaum, "Escaping Catch-22," 1370.
[7] Iboi et al., "Will an Imperfect Vaccine," 515.
[8] "A bizarre conspiracy theory puts Bill Gates at the center of the coronavirus crisis — and major conservative pundits are circulating it," *Business Insider* (19 April 2020), https://www.businessinsider.nl/coronavirus-conspiracy-bill-gates-infowars-2020-4?international=true&r=US.
[9] "Coronavirus vaccine will be a way of injecting people with microchips? Don't fall for this Facebook hoax," *Times of India* (30 September 2020), https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/health-fitness/health-news/coronavirus-vaccine-will-be-a-way-of-injecting-people-with-microchips-dont-fall-for-this-facebook-hoax/articleshow/78404956.cms.

leaders that fabricated the pandemic to take control of the global economy.[10]

Such notions are examples of "conspiracy theories." Karen M. Douglas et al. define conspiracy theories as "attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant social and political events and circumstances with claims of secret plots by two or more powerful actors."[11] Conspiracy theories, Douglas et al. write elsewhere, are alternative worldviews attributing to perceived social, governmental, political, and even supernatural elites a power over "the people" exercised through the relations of production and ideological structures of domination.[12] Importantly, these theories can form monological, holistic belief systems: self-sustaining worldviews which make complex global systems intelligible. Those who do not believe in these theories often regard their adherents as "stupid" or "irrational." These vocal attacks also happen the other way around: people who believe COVID-19 conspiracy theories regard those who adhere to the virus containment measures introduced by the government (masking, social distancing, self-isolation) as "sheep" who refuse to "think critically."

Van Prooijen and Douglas have remarked that conspiracy theories flourish specifically during periods of crisis.[13] They state that "people who have a relatively strong external locus of control ... are more likely to report high levels of interpersonal mistrust, paranoia, and belief in conspiracy theories."[14] Feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness increase people's tendencies to resort to narratives that go against claims made and measures taken by authoritative institutions.

COVID-19 conspiracy theories predominantly concern health-related topics: supposedly, governments and large corporations aim to either kill "the people" or to intentionally make them ill. Such beliefs are disseminated and made cohesive through

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[10] Goodman, Jack and Flora Carmichael, "The coronavirus pandemic 'Great Reset' theory and a false vaccine claim debunked." *BBC*, https://bbc.com/news/55017002.
[11] Douglas et al., "Understanding Conspiracy Theories," 4-5.
[12] Douglas et al., "The Psychology of Conspiracy Theories," 539.
[13] Prooijen and Douglas, "Conspiracy Theories as Part of History," 324.
[14] *Id.*, 328.

online materials and the virtual communities that are organized around these materials. A pandemic has serious social, economic, cultural and political consequences, and its effects on society are strong and internationally overwhelming. When the first vaccine against COVID-19 was developed, many negative responses were posted on the internet through Western social media platforms.[15] As of now, 85% of people search for healthcare information online,[16] where they are susceptible to influence by misleading information. It is necessary to examine the operational structure of the web to understand the spread of COVID-19 conspiracy theories. It is the word "social" in social media, I argue, that strengthens existing coronavirus-related uncertainties and the conspiracy theories sprouting from them.

In recent years, social media has come to play an increasingly large role in facilitating consumption of news and information. This movement has led to an increase in ideological polarization as social media generates so-called echo chambers and filter bubbles,[17] where we are "hearing our own thoughts about what's right and wrong bounced back to us by the television shows we watch, the newspapers and books we read, the blogs we visit online ... and the neighbourhoods we live in."[18] Distrust of authority and conspiracy theories thrive in these environments.[19]

YouTube, a platform on which anyone can post a video on the condition that it follows the content guidelines set by Google is currently the most popular social media website for finding information about health issues.[20] At the same time, there has been a rise in cases of users being affected negatively by misleading information provided by YouTube's recommendation algorithm.[21] With such a multitude of people searching for health information on YouTube, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the

[15] Chadwick et al., "Online Social Endorsement and Covid-19 Vaccine Hesitancy in the United Kingdom."
[16] Ahmadi et al., "Glioblastoma," 1.
[17] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 7.
[18] Bishop, *The Big Sort*, 39.
[19] Zimmer et al., "Fake News in Social Media," 41.
[20] D'Souza et al., "YouTube as a Source of Medical Information on the Novel Coronavirus 2019 Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic," 935.
[21] Khorsun, "Understanding and Responding to Algorithm," 1.

platform is structured. How does YouTube's technical design influence and reinforce conspiracy theories related to the COVID-19 crisis and the global vaccination campaign?

Appeals on YouTube to emotion rather than reason have led to a widespread condition of distrust which, in turn, has resulted in a crisis of trust.[22] This crisis of trust corresponds to Lee McIntyre's definition of "post-truth."[23] In critical studies, the term "post-truth" refers to a historical shift in what Foucault calls the "regime of truth," marked by the breakdown and reassembling of a particular apparatus of institutional truth production and maintenance.[24] However, I believe that it is not fruitful to solely study truth as a philosophical concept. Therefore, this article will leave aside the problem of defining absolute truth in virtual space. Rather than arguing that no truth is possible, which arguably is the same as stating that we will never understand each other, we should examine how truth claims manifest themselves in different spheres of life, be they virtual, cultural, or geographical. I follow N. Katherine Hayles in her argument that digital information is characterized by the "capitalist mode of flexible accumulation."[25] Studying technology alone fails to take into account the ways in which information is implicated in the socio-political structures that make the information society of today possible. As digital culture accelerates the spread of conspiracy theories, it is necessary to study human-technology interaction to understand this spread.

Some conspiracy theories that circulate online are innocuous. Many COVID-19 conspiracy theories are not. Conspiracy-fueled distrust in science during the coronavirus pandemic has led to political polarization around the world and unnecessary loss of life.[26] Because I wish to understand how information circulates on YouTube and how this results in radical polarization, I build upon Jayson Harsin's notion of *emo-truth*. Emo-truth, according to Harsin, is a manner in which truth is *performed*. Specifically, it is a performance of aggressive and often masculine trustworthiness that

[22] McIntyre, *Post-truth*, 1-2.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Krasmann, "Secrecy and the Force of Truth," 690.
[25] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 131.
[26] Havey, "Partisan Public Health," 319.

corresponds to a code of recognition.[27] We can observe the rhetoric of emo-truth in the most popular anti-vaccination videos on YouTube, which deny scientific expertise and perform displays of hate, violence and rage. The emotionally charged comments under these videos demonstrate that they operate on an affective level. Because these comments, which also contain emo-truth rhetoric, give us insight into the reception of anti-vaccination videos on YouTube, I will also examine them in this study. These videos, each of which appears on YouTube alongside a queue of recommended similar videos, attract a community of like-minded YouTube users who are repeatedly exposed to the same rhetorics. The popularity and similarity of anti-vaccination videos is a product of the YouTube recommendation system, which on the basis of keywords appearing in particular videos determines what content might be recommended to a user. This mediation, I will argue, gives anti-vaccination videos an inherent affective coherency which is knotted together by the viewer's engagement in these videos through YouTube's recommendation system.

Algorithms

Algorithms have been silently present throughout the course of this article. The background presence of algorithms is analogous to the manner in which they operate within the current COVID-19 crisis: algorithms control YouTube's video-recommendation system, promoting to viewers content similar to what they have already seen. This reduces the diversity of content consumed by any particular viewer, a process which leads to ideological polarization. When such algorithmically determined processes have consequences impacting global health and public trust in institutions, as is the case in the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, it is important to understand and frame how polarization takes digital form in times of crisis.

When watching a video on YouTube, a viewer will not fail to notice the list of recommended videos displayed at the right side of the webpage. The composition of this list is determined by two elements: the user's search history on YouTube itself and elsewhere, and the user's digital profile, which YouTube determines according

[27] Harsin, "Trump l'Œil," 514.

to specific algorithms programmed by the platform's developers. Recommending videos to users on the basis of these datasets, YouTube seems to know exactly what each viewer likes, is interested in, and might want to watch next.[28] Selecting one video directs to others similar to the first. This process of data-informed content personalization tends to expose viewers repeatedly to the same or similar content and advertisements. This is the work of the algorithms.

What are algorithms and how can they be understood in relation to YouTube? In the book *Introduction to Algorithms*, Thomas H. Cormen et al. offer a timely description of the concept:

> Now that there are computers, there are even more algorithms and algorithms lie at the heart of computing. ... Informally, an algorithm is any well-defined computational procedure that takes some value, or set of values, as input and produces some value, or set of values, as output. An algorithm is thus a sequence of computational steps that transform the input into the output.[29]

According to this classic definition, an algorithm is a series of computational instructions put into a machine, which are to be followed step-by-step in order to solve a problem or achieve an optimal result. It is important to note, however, that this definition of an algorithm as a set of defined steps is somewhat of a simplification. What constitutes an algorithm has changed over time and the concept can be approached in a number of ways: technically, computationally, mathematically, politically, culturally, ethically, etc. Technical specialists, social scientists and the broader public consider and implement the term within different contexts.[30] At present, the term refers to more than simply a set of instructions. "Rather," Mazzoti says,

[28] Airoldi et al., "Follow the Algorithm," 8.
[29] Cormen et al., *Introduction to Algorithms*, xiv.
[30] Gillespie, "Can an Algorithm be Wrong?"

> the word now usually signifies a program running on a physical machine — as well as its effects on other systems. Algorithms have thus become agents, which is partly why they give rise to so many suggestive metaphors. Algorithms now do things. They determine important aspects of our social reality. They generate new forms of subjectivity and new social relationships.[31]

When placing algorithms within a discursive framework, we should not only be aware of what algorithms are, but also what their application and impact is. What is the role of the programmer in relation to the algorithm? Does the algorithm have agency? If so, what kind of agency is this? What is the role of computer users in relation to algorithmic structures? As algorithms solve problems by organizing what is unorganized, structuring what seems unstructured, they construct order out of chaos. Or as Ulf Otto states, "[t]hey introduce order into the world of data."[32] This observation allows us to see that algorithms are what computers were built for initially: the task of finding order within numbers, reducing thinking to some sort of mechanical repetition. Algorithms calculate new experimental outcomes in order to reach an optimal outcome.[33]

When people speak of "YouTube's algorithm," they often refer to YouTube as a company and the choices it makes. The algorithm, and the way it is structured and implemented, have become one and the same with the company. As Tarleton Gillespie says, "the term [algorithm] offers the corporate owner a powerful talisman to ward off criticism, when companies must justify themselves and their services to their audiences, explain away errors and unwanted outcomes, and justify and defend the increasingly significant roles they play in public life".[34] The algorithm, then, is held responsible for a platform's undesirable effects rather than its designer or the corporate owner. Is YouTube or its algorithm to

[31] Mazzotti, "Algorithmic Life," 33.
[32] Otto, "Theatres of Control," 125.
[33] Amoore, *Cloud Ethics*, 2020.
[34] Gillespie, "Can an Algorithm be Wrong?," 21.

blame for the spread on the platform of coronavirus-related misinformation and conspiracy theories?

YouTube's recommendation system

To their designers, YouTube's algorithms arise from a certain model: a protocol. This protocol entails the formalization of a goal for the algorithm, which is articulated in code. Ultimately, the company YouTube is organized to make profit, and its development and utilization of algorithmic video-recommendation technology reflects this objective. It is in YouTube's interest to keep the viewer engaged by presenting videos that match the user's interests, because this increases watch time and generates more advertising clicks.[35] YouTube's recommendation algorithm is designed to achieve this engagement by promoting the videos that users are most likely to watch to the end.[36] The recommendation system is optimized for watch-through, because a user who watches a video in its entirety is likely to watch the next recommended video as well. In this way, the user comes in contact with as many advertisements as possible. YouTube profits from selling advertisements, which are placed adjacent to or embedded within videos. For this reason, AutoPlay (where the next video automatically plays without having to select it) is YouTube's default setting, ensuring that users spend as much time as possible watching recommended videos. According to tech-reporter and data scientist Karen Hao, 70% of all watch-time on YouTube is a result of the platform's algorithmic recommendation system.[37]

This algorithmic recommendation system follows a two-step process to select the particular videos that will be presented to any particular user: firstly, it classifies videos according to a score based on performance analytics. This score is based on several elements including the popularity of the video, the date of its publication, the upload frequency of its creator, the amount of time users spend watching the video, and how long users stay on the platform watching other videos after viewing the video.[38] The second step in

[35] Alfano et al., "Technologically Scaffolded Atypical Cognitio," 3.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] Hao, "YouTube Is Experimenting."
[38] Davidson et al., "The YouTube Video Recommendation System," 296.

the algorithmic recommendation process is matching videos to users. This process is determined by the user's watch history, their subscriptions, and what they *do not* watch.[39]

Radicalism, echo chambers, and filter bubbles

The design of the above-described algorithmic system may seem innocuous, but it has several problematic consequences. Because the platform is optimized to maintain user engagement, the algorithm tends to offer recommendations that reinforce a viewer's already-existing outlook on the world. Emphasizing the concept of this *mere familiarity effect*, Alfano et al. note that "people tend to develop positive associations with the things, people, and concepts to which they've been directly exposed."[40] Furthermore, they state that "people tend to believe or think they know the things that they've encountered before."[41] The effectiveness of YouTube's algorithm comes from its having been designed with two psychological considerations in mind: a viewer desires enjoyment, and a viewer is inclined to believe information that conforms to their worldview. YouTube praises itself for the way, they say, the platform creates communities. YouTube content creators (so-called YouTubers) mirror this language. Popular YouTubers often use nicknames for their audiences which suggest that these audiences are communities united in common interest.[42] The danger lurking in this interplay between the algorithm and its psychological effects is that it has the ability to generate echo chambers and filter bubbles rather than heterogeneous communities.

Dubois and Blank define the concept of echo chamber as "a situation where only certain ideas, information and beliefs are shared."[43] Echo chambers occur when people with similar interests and ideology interact primarily with like-minded people in a closed group. When certain beliefs are stimulated by communication

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[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Alfano et al., "Technologically Scaffolded Atypical Cognitio," 8-9.

[41] *Id.*, 9

[42] Examples of these are some of the most-viewed YouTubers, such as PewDiePie (108 million subscribers), who calls his fan base "bros" and James Charles (25,5 million subscribers) "sisters."

[43] Dubois and Blank, "The Echo Chamber is Overstated," 729.

inside an isolated system, internet users become entangled within a web of selective exposure. Hence, echo chambers are primarily formed by *users*. Filter bubbles, alternatively, are a form of "algorithmic filtering which personalizes content presented on social media."[44] Through personalized search engine results and recommendation systems, filter bubbles aggravate a user's inclination to search for and consume media content that reinforces the user's existing ideas, swiftly entrapping people in knowledge-closed circles.[45] In that they can distort one's reality in ways that cannot be altered by outside sources, echo chambers and filter bubbles have the potential to create significant barriers to critical discourse.

A second peril of YouTube's recommendation algorithm is that it seems to favor divisive, extreme and sensational content.[46] This kind of extreme content thrives within the recommendation system because it is highly effective in capturing a user's sustained attention, which is, as mentioned before, one of the key metrics YouTube uses to sell advertisements. As a result, Röchert et al. explain that "[t]he YouTube recommendation algorithm partially paves the way for staying on the politically extreme path, especially if the user has had the impulse to visit something politically extreme from the beginning."[47] But this is not always the case, Marc Tuters observes: "[a]cademic researchers exploring this phenomenon have ... found that YouTube's 'recommendation algorithm' has a history of suggesting videos promoting bizarre conspiracy theories to channels with little or no political content."[48] Working within a continuous feedback loop of metrics data, algorithms are optimized to recommend content that users are most likely to watch. Extreme and sensational content is successful not just because it is more interesting than the sobering reality,[49] but also because algorithms

[44] *Id.*, 731.
[45] Pariser, *The Filter Bubble*, 10.
[46] Papadamou et al., "Understanding the Incel Community on YouTube."
[47] Röchert et al., "The Homogeneity of Right-wing Populist and Radical Content in YouTube Recommendations."
[48] Tuters, "Fake News and the Dutch YouTube Political Debate Space," 217.
[49] Vosoughi et al., "The Spread of True and False News online," 1147.

operate in formats that engage a large number of users and learn from their engagement.

As a result, algorithmic recommendation procedures serve users with content that confirms their existing worldview. The fact that the recommendation system favors extreme content plays a major role in spreading and reinforcing radical ideas.

The Great Ban

YouTube's algorithms, I have argued, lead users onto following specific ideological paths. But during the process of writing this article, I stumbled upon a problem that simultaneously demonstrated and frustrated my research. It had been my intention to investigate the algorithmic paths that facilitate the spread of holistic conspiracy theories which, in turn, carry enormous political and social consequences. However, in March 2021 the direction of my research was interrupted when YouTube started a campaign to actively ban videos containing material contradicting healthcare information issued by the WHO.[50] In my argument above, I have considered the algorithm — a highly complex theoretical term within the humanities[51] — according to an assumption that for YouTube its sole purpose is to serve the commercial objective of maximizing the amount of time that users spend watching YouTube videos. While I was familiar with YouTube's fight against conspiracy theories, I was not aware of its active cancellation of COVID-19, and specifically anti-vaccination related, misinformation. The ban on videos countering information provided by health organizations such as the WHO involves an altered algorithm as well.[52] Users interested in anti-vaccination-related videos no longer see content reinforcing such ideas, as this content is either deleted at all or removed from the list of recommended content. This is an extremely political choice on behalf of YouTube: they are making a truth claim that denies alternative worldviews. For this reason, I have added another

[50] YouTube, "Community guidelines," https://www.youtube.com/howyoutubeworks/policies/community-guidelines/.
[51] Kátai, "The Challenge of Promoting Algorithmic Thinking," 287.
[52] Also see: Cooper, Paige, "How does the Youtube Algorithm Work? A Guide to Getting More Views," *Hootsuite*, 18 August 2020, https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-the-youtube-algorithm-works/.

dimension to the question as to what role algorithms play in the spread of disinformation in times of COVID-19: what are the political implications of YouTube's claim for truth?

Videos spreading coronavirus-related conspiracy theories and misinformation about vaccines are not the only kind of content that YouTube moderates. Videos containing pornography, flat earth theories, and neo-Nazi propaganda have, since prior to the pandemic, been routinely "cropped" from the algorithm. The algorithmic suppression of videos on these topics, as well as on coronavirus skepticism, has led to the advent of "borderline content" that tests the limits of YouTube's content rules. This kind of content continues to be recommended by the algorithm because, despite its borderline-objectionable themes, it tends to generate views. COVID-19 anti-vaccination content is especially potent as "borderline content" because the COVID-19 anti-vaccination movement is relatively young, such that the border between acceptable and unacceptable vaccine-related content is not yet clearly defined. Inappropriate and divisive content should be banned according to YouTube's policy. These videos, however, concur with the recommendation algorithm's overall goal, which is to generate views.

Emo(tional) truth on *Sky News Australia*

In order to detect the "borderline" quality in anti-vaccination videos, I employ Jayson Harsin's idea of emo-truth, which he defines as follows:

> Emo-truth then is truth that often appears as "losing control." While the surrounding promotional culture demands bragging (and that people be inured to it), emo-truth refers to the implosion of emotion, knowledge, and trust, in truth-telling/trust-giving and truth recognition and trust-granting. Emo-truth is aggressive, and must mix boasting with insults, attacks, and outrage. It must perform authenticity or

> truthfulness as aggressive emotion, in order to garner "active trust".[53]

In short, emo-truth is where emotion serves an inference. It interferes with a user's affective response and has the potential to alter one's entire belief system.[54] Harsin takes Donald Trump's media persona as a prime example of the inherently aggressive emo-truth rhetoric, stating that the former President's extreme expressions, boastfulness, and willingness to insult are examples of emo-truth's inherently aggressive rhetoric. Harsin names several specific aspects of Trump's digital persona that utilize emo-truth rhetoric: the abundant use of capital letters and exclamations in his social media posts, his brash body language, and the sarcastic and mocking tone of his voice all contribute to the "outrageousness" of his political communication.[55] Very often, the information Trump attempts to convey through his words, be they verbal or textual, is loaded with racism, sexism and xenophobia. In this, Trump's digital persona is exemplary of emo-truth rhetoric.

If the algorithm were granted any kind of anthro-pomorphistic qualities, it would 'like' the emo-truth rhetoric. Many of the videos that it recommends most frequently have sensationalizing all-caps titles containing exclamation points and other "clickbait" devices. The effect of Donald Trump's emo-truth rhetoric is that not only his partisans become attracted to his social media posts. Even those who do not support Trump's political agenda can be fascinated by the manner in which he expresses himself on social media. Guillaume Chaslot, a former Google employee who helped to program YouTube's recommendation algorithm, writes that "[e]ven if a user notices the deceptive nature of the content and flags it, that often happens only after they've engaged with it ... As soon as the AI learns how it engaged one person, it can reproduce the same mechanism on thousands of users."[56] As a consequence, both the

[53] Harsin, "Trump l'Œil," 516.
[54] *Id.*, 520.
[55] *Id.*, 519.
[56] Chaslot, Guillaume, "The toxic potential of YouTube's feedback loop," *Wired* (13 July 2019), https://www.wired.com/story/the-toxic-potential-of-youtubes-feedback-loop/; See, as an example, Donald Trump's post on his (meanwhile

algorithm and the user contribute to the promotion of deceptive content. Algorithmic recommendation of content based on user engagement frequently entails the promotion of incendiary and controversial content. The more borderline a video is relative to YouTube's content moderation policy, the more engagement it generates. As recommendation algorithms are informed by user activity, they prefer content that provokes the engagement of its viewers. A single click can be enough.

Emo-truth rhetoric is strongly present in COVID-19 conspiracy and anti-vaccination videos, as well as in the comment sections of these videos. Two examples of videos which use emo-truth rhetoric are "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout"[57] and "Australians must know the truth - this virus is not a pandemic."[58] Both of these videos were uploaded to YouTube by *Sky News Australia*, a right-wing 24-hour news channel that, at the moment of writing, has 1.47 million subscribers on YouTube. Despite this channel being favorable to COVID-19 conspiracy theories and encouraging anti-vaccination sentiment, its videos remain online as of May 2021.[59] This could be because *Sky News Australia* has been in a business partnership with YouTube, since mid-2019.[60] As a result of this partnership, both parties have mutual

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removed) Twitter page: "To Iranian President Rouhani: NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE SUFFERED BEFORE. WE ARE NO LONGER A COUNTRY THAT WILL STAND FOR YOUR DEMENTED WORDDS OF VIOLENCE & DEATH. BE CAUTIOUS!" (posted 22 July 2018).

[57] "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout," *Sky News Australia, YouTube*, (25 February 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa1oZV7O3h0.

[58] "Australians must know the truth - this virus is not a pandemic," *Sky News Australia. YouTube*, (16 September 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGBEaYEtiys.

[59] See other titles of Sky News Australia's videos in regard to COVID-19: "Vaccine passports place all of our freedoms under threat" (21 April 2021), "Vaccine passports 'serious concern' for humanity's 'freedoms' and 'social interaction'" (15 April 2021), "The Great Reset is a 'coup' by the globalist elite" (11 February 2021), and "Plans to use COVID for Great Reset are 'very sinister'" (8 February 2021).

[60] Blackiston, Hannah, "Sky News partners with YouTube, Microsoft News, Facebook and Taboola on content distribution deals." *Mumbrella*, 5 August

financial interests. From its launch in 1996 to its takeover in 2018, *Sky News Australia* was little more than an oddity, located at the periphery of the Australian broadcasting system and watched only by a few distracted channel-hoppers.[61] When it started to shift its focus to digital platforms — hiring former *Daily Telegraph* digital editor Jack Houghton, entering partnerships with social media platforms, and covering non-Australian cultural figures such as Donald Trump, Greta Thunberg and Meghan Markle — the channel experienced an explosive growth in popularity. With its provocative right-wing editorial stance, *Sky News Australia* produces highly partisan opinion content targeted at a global audience. The channel's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the ensuing crisis has been to double down on their digital strategy: they frequently post videos that deny the existence of COVID-19, insinuate that the virus was man-made, demonize scientific institutions, and encourage anti-vaccination sentiment.

The videos "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout" and "Australians must know the truth - this virus is not a pandemic," as of May 2020 viewed an astonishing 1.4 million and 4.1 million times, respectively, are two products of this strategy. Both show Australian commentators and interviewees discussing the coronavirus and international vaccine production and distribution. One of these commentators is Alan Jones, whom *Business Insider* describes as "among the most sensationalist out of all the hosts."[62] Jones' catchpenny statements fit within the emo-truth rhetoric Harsin proposes, for example when he says: "What I do find more disturbing is the fact — I'm sure you're not aware of this — [that] healthcare providers and doctors have [been] banned from revealing which vaccine they're offering." This assertion is proven to be

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2019, https://mumbrella.com.au/sky-news-partners-with-youtube-microsoft-news-facebook-and-taboola-on-content-distribution-deals-592069.

[61] Davies, Anne, "Sky News Australia is tapping into the global conspiracy set – and it's paying off," *The Guardian*, 23 February 2021, https://theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/feb/24/sky-news-australia-is-tapping-into-the-global-conspiracy-set-and-its-paying-off.

[62] Wilson, Cam, "'In digital, the right-wing material is 24/7': How Sky News quietly became Australia's biggest news channel on social media," *Business Insider*, 6 November 2020, https://www.businessinsider.com.au/sky-news-australia-biggest-social-media-channel-culture-wars-2020-11.

untrue, as visitors to the website of the Australian Government Department of Public Health can find which vaccine they will receive.[63] Jones' use of emotional emphasis to make questionable statements sound convincing is a strategy of emo-truth rhetoric. Intonation allows what is proven false to be claimed as true.

By deploying words such as "disturbing," "disgraceful," and "terrifying," these *Sky News Australia* videos illustrate Harsin's point that "[e]mo-truth pertains to a style (regardless of content that might be false) that is highly aggressive; it often demonstrates outrage, disgust, and humiliation."[64] People often perceive these emotions to be in themselves "indexical signs of truth and/or honesty, because they supposedly are harder to fake."[65] We detect this emotional rhetoric when the commentators position themselves in their accounts of the "truth," as in lines like "that is how *I* felt, when the government paid millions of dollars, of *our* money for a lump of land in Leppington"[66] and "that's what *I* have been saying for months."[67] Both of these lines are articulated in tones indicating feelings of stress, alarm and anger. Conveying these feelings, the commentators of *Sky News Australia* position themselves as "the voice of the people." The commentators become whistleblowers of the truths that government and scientific authorities do not share with the public. The title "Australians *must* know the truth," which implies that Australians are being lied to, also demonstrates this self-positioning by the commentators. Both videos downplay the risk of COVID-19 and undermine the efficacy of the vaccines.

Harsin states that "[e]mo-truth pertains first to the perception by citizen-audiences that someone is a truth-teller because they address supposedly hot button topics, too controversial for more cowardly communicators to touch."[68] *Sky News Australia* continually claims to have inside information, implying that to ignore any of

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[63] See: "Which COVID-19 vaccine will I receive?," *Australian Government Department of Health*, https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/covid-19-vaccines/getting-vaccinated-for-covid-19/which-covid-19-vaccine-will-i-receive.

[64] Harsin, "Post-truth Populism," 46.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout," *Sky News Australia*.

[67] *Ibid.*

[68] Harsin, "Post-truth Populism," 45.

their claims or suggested actions will bring serious adverse consequences. By targeting an audience that is already vaccine-hesitant and winning the active trust of this audience, *Sky News Australia*'s emo-truth rhetoric only reinforces the mistrustful viewer's idea that governments and health institutions are deceitful. The overall sentiment in the comments sections of these videos illustrate the perception of *Sky News* as the ultimate truth-teller. Comments such as "Thank you SkyNews Australia for telling society a TRUTH. Unfortunately it's very rare these days to hear something like that from world media,"[69] "It's bad when US citizens have to get their news from Australia,"[70] and "Thank you AUSTRALIA Sky News. From USA..OUR NATION IS CENSORED LIKE COMMUNIST CHINA,"[71] exemplify a belief amongst viewers that *Sky News Australia* is the only source of substantial and trustworthy news. Furthermore, the blusterous rhetoric of these comment sections mirror the emo-truth performance of the videos themselves: displays of emo-truthful investment are, following Harsin, insulting and boasting modes, expressed textually through an abundance of exclamation points and capitalized words.[72] Such comments are, Rose-Stockwell contends, "strong indicators of engagement."[73] When processed through YouTube's recommendation algorithm, "[t]his kind of divisive content will be shown first, because it captures more attention than other types of content."[74] When users are engaged, the algorithm is as well.

In closely examining the comments sections of the two videos, we find that another misinformation-related danger lurks, however subtle it may be. Although several videos published on *Sky News Australia*'s YouTube channel are sympathetic to conspiracy theories involving the Great Reset, Bill Gates, and vaccine-induced DNA alteration, the two videos that I discuss above are not among them.

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[69] YouTube comment, "Australians must know the truth: the virus is not a pandemic," *Sky News Australia.*

[70] YouTube comment, "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout," *Sky News Australia.*

[71] YouTube comment, "There is a 'disturbing' element to the vaccine rollout," *Sky News Australia.*

[72] Harsin, "Trump l'Œil," 517.

[73] Rose-Stockwell, "This is How Your Fear and Outrage."

[74] *Ibid.*

But when we delve further into the comments sections of these videos, it becomes clear that many viewers are very much concerned with coronavirus-related conspiracy theories. The trigrams most common in the comments section of the video "Australians must know the truth — this virus is not a pandemic"[75] are, ordered by frequency, "the great reset," "build back better," and "new world order."[76] Even though the Great Reset and Build Back Better are slogans related to various economic, social, political, and environmental programs to tackle COVID-19 and other global crises, the conspiracy-minded have interpreted these slogans as code words signaling the advent of a new world order in which the virus functions as a "plandemic:" a pandemic staged by the global elite to impose new forms of social control. In its other videos, *Sky News Australia* encourages the idea that these terms have become "proof" of a (global) conspiratorial plot by a cabal of elites. The interplay between new forms of emo-truth rhetoric and already-existing political uncertainty facilitates the development of contemporary conspiracy theories.

Recommendation to recommendation...

Conspiracy theories have existed long before the invention of the internet, having been documented since ancient times in multiple cultures around the world.[77] Documented conspiracy theories date as far back as to AD 64, when the great fire of Rome transpired and Emperor Nero, who was out of town when the fire erupted, was accused of deliberately starting the fire in order to seize power and rebuild Rome according to his own political vision. Nero, displeased, reacted by spreading his own conspiracy theory, which held that the Christian community was to blame for the fire. Nero's conspiracy theory caught on, leading many Christians to be crucified

[75] Other most common trigrams were 'not the vaccine', 'take the vaccine' and 'there is no'.

[76] I have implemented the following codes in order to find the most used words in the comment section. To scrape all comments of the videos, I implemented the code https://github.com/MAN1986/LearningOrbis/blob/master/scrapeCommentsWithReplies.gs. Then, I used the code proposed by Tirthajyoti Sarkar, https://towardsdatascience.com/very-simple-python-script-for-extracting-most-common-words-from-a-story-1e3570d0b9d0, to find the most commonly used words.

[77] Uscinski et al., "A Web of Conspiracy?," 118.

or burned alive.[78] In the many centuries since the time of Nero, conspiracy theories have continued to capture individuals' imaginations. On the contrary, the internet has proven to provide billions of people with information that they would not get as quickly and efficiently, or at all, for that matter, and it is much easier to communicate and form groups with like-minded people. The internet has accelerated the spread of conspiracy theories. A quick search on the web can give almost any statement substance.[79] At the same time, the internet also poses a potential challenge to conspiracy theorists. As Steve Clarke observes, in the same way that the internet allows people to instantly disseminate conspiracy-informed explanations for certain events, it similarly allows for anti- and non-conspiracy-theorists to express criticisms just as quickly.[80] With all of these considerations in mind, the internet — and YouTube as an extension of that — fulfills an important role in the circulation of contemporary conspiracy theories.

In the coronavirus pandemic, YouTube videos and their comments sections are not exclusive in espousing conspiracy theories. Until recently, the recommended videos listed next to these videos did so as well. When a user would watch the video dismissing the factuality of the COVID-19 pandemic in October 2020, a month after the video was originally published and before YouTube's strict campaign against misinformation began, the list of recommendations looked very different from what it looks like after YouTube's altered algorithm. In October 2020, videos with titles such as "63 Documents the Government Doesn't Want You to Read," "Are We Being Told the Truth About COVID-19," and "Global Elite's 'Great Reset' Agenda (Shocking Discoveries Revealed)" appeared in the playlist of recommendations. In these playlist recommendations, we can clearly see the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles where users dive further into misinformation about COVID-19 and the COVID-19 vaccines.[81] Writing this article, I have had a front-row seat to watch YouTube

[78] Prooijen and Douglas, "Conspiracy Theories as Part of History," 326.
[79] Uscinski and Atkinson, "A Web of Conspiracy?," 107.
[80] Clarke, "Conspiracy Theories and Conspiracy Theorizing," 79.
[81] *The Wayback Machine*, https://web.archive.org/web/20201122113123if_/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kGBEaYEtiys.

tweak and refine its recommendation algorithm. In late March and early April 2021, the list of recommendations accompanying this specific video consisted of non-conspiracy-promoting videos telling me how I, a "suspicious" content-chaser, should be aware of the many conspiracy theories online and should further be informed about the virus and the myths surrounding it.[82] In mid-April, the same query pushes me toward videos titled "Why I HAVEN'T yet taken the COVID VACCINE," "Vaccine Passports: THIS Is Where It Leads" and "Perspectives on the Pandemic." The *goal* of the algorithm has been changed multiple times, leading to different outcomes.

This change has manifested itself in multiple ways. First, YouTube has altered the programming of its recommendation algorithms. The result of this alteration is that when a hesitant web user queries their coronavirus-related insecurities online, they will no longer be directed to filter bubbles assenting to the idea that COVID-19 is harmless. Second, YouTube has started to ban and delete videos and accounts that promote "fake news" about COVID-19 and encourage doubts about vaccine safety. Third, alterations have been made to the auto-complete function of YouTube's video search engine, which the user finds on YouTube's default page: the first page displayed when a user visits YouTube. These changes mean that search queries that situate COVID-19 and the vaccines in a negative light are no longer recommended to users. Fourth, YouTube now promotes videos that follow WHO guidelines and that encourage coronavirus vaccination.[83]

These changes lead to a contradiction. On the one hand, YouTube's policy prohibits content disputing the statements of the WHO. On the other hand, the algorithm is programmed to promote content that engages as many viewers and generates as many views as possible. If that promoted content is against the YouTube policy, it becomes borderline content. The videos denying that COVID-19 is a pandemic and doubting the safety and efficacy of vaccination fall under this category. This brings us to the

[82] I research these websites in "incognito" mode and through VPN in order to stay as "clean" as possible.

[83] Google, "COVID-19 medical misinformation policy," https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9891785?hl=en.

following questions: What exactly do algorithms do? What is their agency — if they have any at all? I argue that the algorithm, and YouTube's recommendation system specifically, has been enormously successful in exploiting already-existing popular opposition to COVID-19 containment measures. Nevertheless, even users who are not opposed to COVID-19 containment measures find that YouTube's recommendation algorithm leads them to videos expressing fringe viewpoints. As a result of its tendency to recommend these kinds of videos which cast doubt on the WHO's statements about the coronavirus, YouTube's algorithm has become highly political.

Conspiring algorithms

The goal of YouTube's recommendation algorithm is to generate user engagement. Sensationalist and conspiracy-promoting videos are often recommended by this algorithm because they have provocative "clickbait" titles and concern controversial themes which stimulate user engagement. YouTube's commercial interest conflicts with the interest of global health, and YouTube's promotion of videos which question scientific expertise may have dire consequences for humanity. The dynamics of the relation between humans and technology play an immense role within this conflict. It is crucial to acknowledge the role of users as participants in the world of data for understanding the political implications of algorithms on social platforms. If users are interested in a particular type of content, the algorithm will be as well. The algorithm responds to what people do online: what links they click on, how long they watch a video, and what they scroll through. When one attempts to understand YouTube and its use of algorithmic technologies, one should take into account the different factors involved in algorithmic systems. It is important to analyze what algorithms do, how they relate to YouTube's prominent subcultures, what roles they play in political polarization, and how they are utilized in YouTube's monetary and commercial ambitions. Many actors are involved in the distribution of information online: institutions, governments, web users, content creators, and uploaders — and, of course, YouTube itself.

Information distribution, then, is an interplay between human and machine. If the datafication of information has societal consequences, the human being is inevitably located in the "emergent processes through which consciousness, the organism and the environment are constituted."[84] The individual is not simply a consciousness "in control."[85] In a state of crisis, when declarations of truth concern global health, the consequences of datafication are weighty. If it is not a doctor telling what is best, but the web, how can a person decide how to act? We must consider the role of YouTube and other social media platforms in determining and distributing claims of "truth." Because social media algorithms reinforce outlooks on the world, it is necessary to delve further into the workings of social media and their role in global health.

What defines "conspiracy," and who, in contemporary society, decides whether something is "true" or not? With so many people relying on social media for information, health-related and otherwise, we have entered a novel digital paradigm where neither God nor science determines what the "truth" is. Notions of truth may be out of our hands. In the digital space, algorithmic information processing is purely a mathematical process involving zeroes and ones. But without web-users to make decisions about "interestingness" or "clickability," mathematical theories of information do not have any substance or meaning. The algorithm needs users, because it depends on user participation. If the algorithm "likes" sensationalist videos, it is partly because humans virtually perform and illustrate their interest in this kind of content. In order to achieve its intended optimal results, an algorithm needs to learn its users' desires. As our lives are increasingly shaped by algorithmic processes, let us not forget those without which the algorithm could not be: the designers of the algorithm, the users that modify their practices in response to algorithms, and lastly, the institutions, companies and individuals who upload to the internet the data that algorithms process.

[84] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 288.
[85] *Ibid.*

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New Bodies in an Ecological Crisis: The Unforeseeable Future in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Frank van den Boom

In recent decades, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* has received a surge of newfound interest. The Latin epic still proves to be relevant to some fundamental problems of the present. One such problem is the ecological crisis, and the *Metamorphoses* are garnering more and more attention by ecocritics and environmental theorists alike.[1] In a crisis induced by human's destructive behavior toward the nonhuman in a relationship based on capitalist exploitation, a literary work that blurs the lines between human and nonhuman embodiment is a useful instrument for rethinking human's relation to the environment. On another level, Ovid's presentation of the world as a collection of perpetually changing bodies has provoked comparisons to modern conceptualizations of history and future.[2] Thinking through these comparisons is of urgent

[1] There have been quite some studies that have focused on landscape and "nature" in the *Metamorphoses*. Some of the more recent ones that have proved essential in providing a basis for ecocritical research include Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's* Metamorphoses; and Hinds, "Landscape with Figures." Studies that have approached the *Metamorphoses* from an ecocritical or environmentalist perspective include Hallett, "Mortal and Immortal"; Gowers, "Talking Trees"; Da Silva, "Ecocriticism and Myth"; Lada-Richards, "Closing up on Animal Metamorphosis,"; and Sissa, "Apples and Poplars, Nuts and Bulls". A concise overview of the contingencies between the *Metamorphoses* and environmentalist discourse is provided by Martelli, *Ovid*.

[2] Time has been an important subject of study in the discourse on the *Metamorphoses*. The fact that Ovid presents his work as a history of the world through transformations, as well as a *carmen perpetuum* ("infinite song," 1.4), has incited many studies in Ovid's rendition of time, see for example Steiner, "Ovid's *Carmen Perpetuum*"; or Cole, *Ovidius Mythistoricus*. The rendition of time in the *Metamorphoses* is specifically related to the ecological crisis by Markley, "Time, History and Sustainability."

importance in a time when the uncertain future of humanity looms ominously over our heads. Furthermore, in the various stories of Ovid's epic, metamorphosis often comes as a response to critical and violent situations, which can invite us to reconsider how we approach our own crises. With this in mind, Francesca Martelli writes, "the manifold ways in which the *Metamorphoses* answers to different areas of contemporary environmental discourse make this a text that speaks to some of the most pressing existential concerns of our own time."[3] I will propose here a line of interpretation that elucidates the work's contribution to a frame of mind conducive to a cogent and viable response to the ecological crisis.

In the plethora of stories which make up Ovid's epic, there is one space that appears frequently, figuring as the stage for many metamorphoses: the *locus amoenus*, or pleasant place. This space is characterized by woods, creeks, shadows, groves, pastures, springs and grottoes, which have informed many of the idyllic, pastoral landscapes that occur in classical literature.[4] The rhetorical function of the *locus amoenus* as the ideal location for composing poetry is often noted, and can be recognized in many classical poems.[5] Because the description of the *locus amoenus* is very formulaic, it is often treated as a literary device that highlights its own fabrication.[6] These spaces, presenting a high level of self-referentiality, lend themselves to being read meta-poetically: the constructed landscape reflects on its state of being constructed. In its performance of

[3] Martelli, *Ovid*, 36.

[4] Most of the contemporary conceptions of the classical *locus amoenus* stem from Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, 195. For a more precise detailing of the constituents of the *locus amoenus* in the *Metamorphoses,* see Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's* Metamorphoses; or Bernstein, "Locus Amoenus and Locus Horridus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," 67-98. For a study on the *locus amoenus* in Roman poetry, which also includes a chapter on the *Metamorphoses,* see Newlands, "The Transformation of the 'Locus Amoenus' in Roman Poetry," 76-108.

[5] Some exemplary poems for *loci amoeni* that display this function come from the pastoral genre: Theocritus' *Idylls* and Vergil's *Eclogues* are often taken as bywords for the *locus amoenus*. But the formulaic space appears in other poetic genres as well, such as epic (e.g. the meeting between Odysseus and Nausicaa in Homer's *Odyssey*, see Haller, "Landscape Description in Homer's *Odyssey*", 60) or elegy (e.g. Propertius 1.18, see. Grant, "Propertius 1.18," 48-54).

[6] Hinds, "Landscape with Figures," 122.

"wilderness," the *locus amoenus* also demonstrates that "wilderness" itself — and by consequence the distinction between nature and culture — is a construct. Martelli makes a pertinent observation on the relevance of Ovid's *loci amoeni* in a time of ecological crisis:

> [T]he "wilderness" understood by environmental discourse is likewise a highly cultural, artificial construction. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, it shares a number of features with the *locus amoenus*. Attending to the formulaic components of the *locus amoenus* allows us to map Ovid's wilderness discourse quite precisely onto that of modern environmental criticism.[7]

The spatial configurations of the *locus amoenus* in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and the ways in which it demonstrates the artificiality of the opposition of culture and nature, can allow us to rethink the position of human in the ecological crisis.

The French philosopher and environmental theorist Bruno Latour has taken important steps toward undoing the binary oppositions which distinguish culture from nature and the human from the nonhuman. In the second lecture of his book *Facing Gaia* (2017), called "How not to (de-)animate nature," Latour discusses the concept of agency, arguing that it cannot be employed as a criterion by which to define the human body. Arguing against the exploitative relationship between human and nonhuman — a relationship which functions to deny the agency of nonhuman bodies — Latour shows that both human and nonhuman embodiments share a common repertory of agency. In place of a configuration in which human and nonhuman embodiments are dichotomized such that the former are attributed agency and the latter are not, Latour proposes that differences in embodiment are not constituted on the basis of a disparity in levels of agency, but rather constituted by the *form* of agency active in any particular embodiment.[8] Latour's

[7] Martelli, *Ovid*, 45.
[8] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 49-54.

proposal that human and nonhuman embodiments have different forms of agency opens up space for a spectrum of different embodiments that are to be defined on the basis of their interactions with each other.[9] Because these interactions vary by occasion, the definitions of bodies vary procedurally as well. As a result, fixed definitions of particular bodies, including the human body, become unstable.[10] The position of human in the world, or that of any embodiment for that matter, is never definitive. There is always space for a new transaction between bodies to redefine their configurations. Latour calls this space of transaction and reconfiguration the "metamorphic zone."[11] As I read the Ovidian *locus amoenus* as a space to map out current issues in environmentalist discourse, it will prove fruitful to explore the collision between the *locus amoenus* and the metamorphic zone.

In order to explore this collision, I will analyze the *loci amoeni* in two stories from the *Metamorphoses*: one that presents a human-nonhuman relationship that *denies* the possibility of metamorphosis (the story of Orpheus, 10.1-11.66), and one that presents a human-nonhuman relationship that *enables* this possibility (the story of Cyparissus, 10.106-142).[12] The open-ended, negotiated configuration between human and nonhuman active in the story of Cyparissus is further highlighted, I will argue, by the work's force as a *carmen perpetuum* ("perpetual song," 1.4). Studying the passages of Orpheus and Cyparissus, I intend to show that the *Metamorphoses* exemplifies Latour's concept of the metamorphic zone in that it makes open-ended configurations of human and nonhuman embodiments highly tangible. Ovid's text, I will propose, offers an

[9] *Id.*, 55-58.
[10] *Id.*, 57.
[11] *Id.*, 58.
[12] There are more stories that one could discuss in order to trace environmentalist discourse, as there are pluriform *loci amoeni* throughout the *Metamorphoses* that function in different ways. Such analyses have been done for the stories of e.g. Philemon and Baucis, and Erysichthon, amongst others by Gowers, "Talking Trees"; Da Silva, "Ecocriticism and Myth"; and Martelli, *Ovid*, 35-36. These contrasting stories may be comparable to the "positive" of Cyparissus and the "negative" of Orpheus, and there are more stories that can be read in a similar manner, but the particular stories of Cyparissus and Orpheus show aspects that will prove to be fundamental for my argument.

effective conceptual framework for responding to the contemporary ecological crisis.

Sustainable Orpheus

The character of Orpheus in the *Metamorphoses* has features that can be recognized in certain contemporary ecological practices. His relationship to the *locus amoenus* typifies the prevailing understanding of the relationship between human and nonhuman bodies in today's capitalist society. The contemporary tendency to privilege the human above the nonhuman — a tendency which has caused the ecological crisis we now face — can also be seen in Orpheus. Orpheus' story presents a situation that not only prefigures the human-nonhuman hierarchy of the modern era, but also points to the inefficacy of the modern era's current response to the ecological crisis — a response that involves practices associated with the term "sustainability." It has been argued that the ideological underpinnings of sustainability serve to reinforce the hierarchical configuration that privileges human over nonhuman.[13] Orpheus pointedly demonstrates the consequences of such hierarchization as taken to the extreme, and the passage can thus provide today's readers with a framework for understanding the implications of contemporary sustainable practices.

Let us delve into the Orpheus story, and specifically, its *locus amoenus*. The tenth book of the *Metamorphoses* opens with the famous story of Orpheus and Eurydice (10.1-85). Orpheus travels to the underworld to recover his recently deceased fiancée on the condition that he does not look back at her when they climb back to the overworld. But Orpheus cannot resist to look back at Eurydice, causing her to relapse into the underworld and die for a second time. Orpheus experiences extreme grief, rejects new female suitors, and decides to retreat to a hill to play the lyre and console himself with song. But before Orpheus puts his vocal chords in action, he starts plucking on his strings. As he plays, he exercises his power of musical telekinesis, luring trees, animals, plants, vines and rocks. This power is part of a long mythological tradition

[13] For arguments against sustainability or discourse related to it, see for example Crist, "Beyond the Climate Crisis," 29-55; Dale, "Sustaining What?"; or Jacobsson, "In the Name of (Un)Sustainability," 19-37.

surrounding the figure of the bard.[14] A large number of trees come to envelop Orpheus, and they are each identified in an extensive literary catalogue. We will come to see later that the transformed Cyparissus is actually one of these trees. This summoned throng of trees becomes the *locus amoenus* in which Orpheus can begin singing. He sings stories of metamorphosis, which appear as direct speech, making him the embedded narrator of the remainder of book ten. After he stops singing, Orpheus' story comes to an end, but not with the resolving metamorphosis we are used to from Ovid's other stories. Rather than transforming into a new body, Orpheus dies. He is violently ripped apart by a group of Maenads, Thracian priestesses of Dionysus, who are angry at him for his turn away from women.

In order to investigate Orpheus' relationship with the nonhuman actors in the story, it is fruitful to take a closer look at the construction of the *locus amoenus* (10.86-91):

> *Collis erat collemque super planissima campi*
> *area, quam viridem faciebant graminis herbae.*
> *umbra loco deerat; qua postquam parte resedit*
> *dis genitus vates et fila sonantia movit,*
> *umbra loco venit. non Chaonis abfuit arbor,*
> *non nemus Heliadum, non frondibus aesculus altis*
> *nec ...*
>
> There was a hill, and on that hill an entirely flat field which showed green with shrubs of grass. The place was devoid of shadows. After the bard, born from gods, sat in that place and moved his resounding strings, the place was full of shadows. The tree of Chaon was not absent, nor the Heliad woods, nor the Italian oak with high loaf, nor...[15]

[14] For an overview of the mythical traditions surrounding Orpheus, see Robbins, "Famous Orpheus"; and Lee, *Virgil as Orpheus*, 1-10.
[15] All translations are my own.

When Orpheus situates himself upon a hill after his loss of Eurydice, it is not yet a *locus amoenus*. The space lacks the unmistakable characteristics that make a site a *locus amoenus*: a lovely forest, an idyllic spring, a cooling shade, etc. In this passage, shadows play an essential role in constituting the *locus amoenus*.[16] The transformation of the plain hill to an idyllic space is a transition from a state of absence to presence of *umbra* ("shadow"). The parallelism of *umbra loco deerat* ("the place lacked shadows," 88) and *umbra loco venit* ("the place was full of shadows," 90) highlights this contrast. Significantly, the verse in between these lines shows that it is Orpheus himself who summons trees to bring him shadow. Orpheus thus forges his own space: he is the creator of this *locus amoenus*. It is clear that Orpheus brings about this spatial transformation because he deems it a necessary condition for song. In this, one can recognize the traditional function of the *locus amoenus* as a space that engenders poetical inspiration.[17] But this *locus amoenus* diverges from the model in that it does not emerge autonomously: its existence is a result of Orpheus' will.[18]

This fact has important implications for the relationship between human Orpheus and nonhuman *locus amoenus*.[19] In the

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[16] Shadow is more widely considered to be an important constituent of the *locus amoenus* (Hinds, "Landscape with Figures," 127): it takes a prompt position in such exemplary *loci amoeni* as in Vergil's *Eclogues* 1.1-5.

[17] The *locus amoenus*, or the woods more generally, were often considered the ideal space for composing song. Especially in Roman poetry, the image of a forest that gives poetic inspiration is used regularly and stems from the widely appropriated poetry of the Hellenistic poet Callimachus: see Hunter, *The Shadow of Callimachus*, 7-41.

[18] Many *loci amoeni*, just as many "settings" within literature, are often read like they are just there. Space is not regularly thought of as a literary component that needs causal justification: there is an existent world, and that is that. This is visible even in the beginning of the quote above in line 86. Whereas the *locus amoenus* needs to be constructed, the hill is introduced by just being there: *collis erat* ("there was a hill"). For Orpheus' influence on the construction of the *locus amoenus*, see Bernstein, "Locus Amoenus and Locus Horridus," 75-76.

[19] There have been earlier studies concerning Orpheus' relation to "nature." Horace, in his *Ars poetica*, prompts an interpretation of Orpheus that resounded in modern discourse as well: "Orpheus, the priest and interpreter of the gods, deterred the savage race of men from slaughters and inhuman diet; hence said to tame tigers and furious lions" (Hor. *Ars* 391-393). Orpheus epitomises the human's turn away from "nature" towards "civilization." This reading of the

traditional model of the *locus amoenus*, the space has an agency: it is capable of acting upon a human by granting poetic inspiration. Its agency can be described as a capacity to give impetus for song. While in this story the *locus amoenus* retains its inspiratory function, this function is subordinated to Orpheus' will. Whereas traditionally the agency of the poet to write poetry and the agency of the *locus amoenus* to offer poetic material are equally present, the agency of the *locus amoenus* in this instance is subdued by Orpheus' ability to summon his poetic inspiration by himself: the *locus amoenus* is deprived of its agency and Orpheus elevates his own. This entails that Orpheus relates very differently to the poetic material that the *locus amoenus* grants him than is traditional. The discrete roles of subject and object are reinforced: the human poet is highlighted as the subject with agency, while the nonhuman de-animated *locus amoenus* merely functions as the background to which Orpheus' narrative unfolds. Orpheus' subjectivization and the objectivization of the *locus amoenus* are emphasized further by the fact that Orpheus is an embedded narrator. His installment as a narrator gives him the power to tell the story the way he wants to. Although with regards to the level of embedded narratives — Orpheus sings his own stories, and Ovid narrates the story of Orpheus — the fact that Orpheus is in control of forcing his own surroundings vis à vis his poetic inspiration, suggests that he is the master of his own story as well.[20] In this manner, he becomes the ultimate meta-poetic

character is to be seen in e.g. Robbins, "Famous Orpheus," 3-6. Another turn of interpretation has incorporated the upsurge of ecocritical idioms, which problematises this simple transference from nature to civilization. However, in these readings, Orpheus is often taken as the emblem for the musical harmony between human and nature (see e.g. Jung, "The Orphic Voice and Ecology," 329-340; or Pittaway, "Broadening the Context of the Ecological Crisis," who calls this relationship to nature an "Orphic attitude"), which puts the character in a more ecologically positive position. This line of argumentation opposes my own problematisation of the way Orpheus relates to his poetic inspiration and shows a forceful human-nonhuman hierarchy.

[20] Orpheus is often considered the perfect bard, to whom poets often parallel themselves. Orpheus often carries some meta-poetical or programmatic force, as poets who use Orpheus as a metaphor for themselves, can signify their own program through Orpheus (see for example Mader, "Amphion and Orpheus" and Schultz, "*Latet Anguis in Herba*". Equating Orpheus to Ovid is thus not

subject, both narratee and narrator, and by controlling his own story he is able to reify his own subjectivization. The passive role of the nonhuman as mere backdrop is thus also reinforced by Orpheus, who makes it the lifeless audience of his song.[21]

Rendering everything nonhuman inanimate — considering the nonhuman to be an *environment* of the human in the etymological sense of this word — is a mode of anthropocentrism.[22] Later I will consider this anthropocentrism in relation to Latour's process of "de-animation." Within ecocritical discourse, it is often acknowledged that the anthropocentric views that have developed over the centuries are at the roots of the ecological crisis.[23] This crisis is a result of humanity's scant apprehension to use every little bit of the planet as a resource to be exploited for profit. The continual commodification of nonhuman bodies, which has led to the human population explosion, has become a familiar story. Within the history of the human civilization, there was a turning point when anthropocentrism prompted a response from the objectivized world in the form of climate change, or in other words, when the human system started to be of dominant geological impact. This period is now identified as the beginning of the Anthropocene. A lot of ink has been spilled on the question of when this turning point occurred, as well as on the question of whether naming an era after human's

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difficult, which makes Orpheus' self-induced subjectivization as narrator even more apparent.

[21] See Wheeler, *A Discourse of Wonders*); or Johnson, *Ovid Before Exile*, 96-116. They both interpret Orpheus' tales in light of this arboreal audience. There is a striking contrast: such studies have often read these trees as possessing agency (for they can move), while in my argument, Orpheus' subjectivization utterly rids them of their agency.

[22] The word "environment" stems from the French adverb *environ* ("around") or *environner* ("to surround"). The word "surroundings" is a close synonym, which implies that there is something in the middle to surround. To call the nonhuman bodies the "environment," points to the human body as the centre of that environment, which can in itself be considered as an anthropocentric way of envisioning the world.

[23] See for example (amongst many others) Buell, "The Ecocritical Insurgency"; Crist, "Beyond the Climate Crisis"; Iovino, "Ecocriticism and a Non-Anthropocentric Humanism"; Adamson, "Environmental Justice", 170-171; and Grober, "The Discovery of Sustainability," 14.

disastrous behavior is anthropocentric in itself.[24] It is a matter of envisioning the past, writing an historical narrative in which a chapter called the Anthropocene might leave little room for other nonhuman actors to take the stage. The term potentially entails that within the Earth's recent ecological history, human action is central, with nonhuman entities left in the margins, despite the fact that the term comes about in order to highlight human's systematic foreclosure of other forms of embodiment.

Orpheus' subjectivization of his own character sharply points to the manner in which humans have been able to center themselves in the narrative of world history. Historiography has a predilection for human's agency as an unstoppable force that propels the narrative forward.[25] But whenever the events of the past are said to follow some certain historical narrative, that narrative is necessarily imposed by the present. Installing the human as the main character of a grand historical narrative does not affect the past, but affects the way we think about ourselves today, and the way we will exert our agency tomorrow. The story of Orpheus presents this tension quite explicitly: he endows himself with the status of ultimate subject right before he starts singing his narrative. What the future narrative entails for Orpheus is very much dependent on this moment in which he divides the roles of subject and object and authors his relationship with the nonhuman.

Today we live in a time when, like Orpheus, our actions of today can have detrimental consequences for the future, hence the widespread use of the term "crisis" to designate this moment. In response to the ecological crisis, a framework of "sustainable" practices has come about. An examination of the framework of sustainability will show that it fails to address the problem at the root of the ecological crisis: the hierarchy of human over nonhuman.

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[24] For a clear overview of the Anthropocene debate, see Chernilo, "The Question of the Human." Chernilo makes some remarks about the anthropocentrism of the term Anthropocene as well (page 47): "[T]here is a fundamentally anthropocentric core to the idea of the Anthropocene: it is another realization, as it were, of how powerful human action actually is."

[25] The famous opening of the *Historiae* by the father of historiography, Herodotus, comes to mind: "This is the display of the inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, so that things done by man not be forgotten in time ..." (Hdt. 1.1.0).

Rather, just as Orpheus installs himself as ultimate subject, the framework of sustainability continues to centralize human as the unalterable main character in the future of the objectivized world.

The framework of sustainability presupposes that we must keep something as it is. The word derives from the Latin *sustinere*, which means "to maintain" or "to uphold," and this sense of the word is still very much apparent in the English derivative.[26] Sustainability asks that we *sustain*. But the term itself does not specify what is to be sustained.[27] The transitive verb requires an object to be sustained, but specifying this object is not straightforward, especially because the act of sustaining something comes as a response to a *crisis*, a *critical* situation that requires change and adaptation.[28] But the level of counteraction that a crisis necessitates inherently opposes the idea that matters can continue the way they have. Yet, sustainability does presume continuity for some matters, which means that the framework requires a careful consideration of which matters need to change and which need to stay the same.

One of the most relevant answers to this question comes from the UN Brundtland Commission, which the United Nations initiated in 1987 after the deterioration of the Earth's climate began to receive more attention. In its attempt to formulate a suitable response to this deterioration, the Brundtland Commission coupled the notion of sustainability with another key notion: development.

> Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.[29]

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[26] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary, ad sustineo*.

[27] Markley, "Time, History and Sustainability," 44-45.

[28] The word "crisis" (as well as "critical") comes from the Greek κρίσις, which means "decision" or "judgement." Used to describe a situation, crisis thus takes on the meaning of "a situation upon which one has to make a choice," which entails inherent change. See Liddell, Scott and Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon, ad* κρίσις.

[29] World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*, 47.

The most striking claim made in this definition, which functions as an answer to the question of what is to be sustained by sustainability, is that sustainable development involves "meeting needs." In this approach to the ecological crisis, the ability to meet needs is the matter to be sustained. It is that which both current and future generations should be able to do.[30] However, this intended continuity between present and future contains a paradox, which is important for understanding the notion of "sustainable development."

The definition presumes that the continuity of being able to meet needs both in present and in future is in danger of being compromised. It acknowledges that the way in which present humans meet their needs has been very "unsustainable." Over the course of modern history, generation after generation has become more and more accustomed to the capitalist order that seeks perpetual growth. Such processes of normalization have reified wants and desires into needs. Human thinking is thus pervaded by the "need" for economic growth:[31] throughout the last centuries, there has been so little apprehension to continually fulfil the desire to capitalize on nonhuman bodies, that humans easily deem it a necessity. Meeting the "needs" of the present by exploiting the nonhuman puts future generations in jeopardy, and the definition of sustainable development recognizes this. But it simultaneously reinforces the idea that this desire to exploit the nonhuman is a true "need." Sustainable development thus becomes a practice of satisfying present needs, ensuring that they can continue to be met in the future, and paradoxically acknowledging that present needs also jeopardize that future. It advocates a response to crisis that holds the human species accountable for the ecologically destructive nature of their supposed needs, but simultaneously refuses to abolish these needs. In this, sustainable development undermines its own effectiveness.

This paradox manifests itself in sustainability's conceptualization of the future. Sustainability seeks to propose a

[30] See especially Markley, "Time, History and Sustainability," 44, who investigates sustainability as a "function of particular ways of conceiving time."

[31] See for example Crist, "Beyond the Climate Crisis"; and Grober, "The Discovery of Sustainability," 14.

response to the ecological crisis that already takes into account what future generations deem necessary. It enables itself to know what the future will need because its intended continuation of present needs entails that present and future are the same. In this conceptualization, the future is then already fully disclosed: future humans will have the same needs as humans do nowadays. But of course, we do not know the future. Thinking present and future to be continuous denies the fact that futurity encompasses uncertainty, changeability and alterability. Positing that future generations will hold the same needs as the present, reinforces the idea that present humans will not alter their needs and change their destructive ways. If sustainability did not project present needs into the future, the future would appear as uncertain as it actually is. By *disclosing* the future, the framework of sustainable development *closes* the future as well. If sustainability proposes to keep in place the harmful structures that privilege the human over the nonhuman, it precludes the changes necessary to counter the ecological crisis. We reach a dead-end when there is no possibility of a future different from the present.

Now, I will not invoke the story of Orpheus and his death at the end of the narrative as a means of saying that if the human species continues to privilege themselves over the nonhuman like Orpheus did, they will be ripped apart as well (although I am not denying that this a possibility either). The parallel between the sustainability framework and the Orpheus story, is the inability to change. In an epic work like the *Metamorphoses*, that deserves its title because of the plethora of metamorphosis stories it contains, it is surprising that the character of Orpheus does not metamorphose whatsoever. As the process of metamorphosis constitutes a change in embodiment from human to nonhuman, it perhaps makes sense that a character who installs himself as the ultimate subject, superior to the nonhuman, does not undergo such a transformation. Orpheus manages to maintain his superior position into the future, but that does mean that when he is presented with the critical attack of the Maenads, he is not able to adapt to the new situation by means of a metamorphosis. The hierarchy of human over nonhuman that Orpheus reinforced denies him the ability to rethink this relationship, and so any possibilities for his future to be different

than his present become closed. Orpheus becomes "sustainable" in the sense that what he sustains rids the future of its potentiality to be different, at the expense of his ability to change when the world around him presents him with a crisis.

Cyparissus and Bruno Latour

Responding to the ecological crisis, or perhaps any crisis, very much becomes a matter of thinking the future: the willingness to change is a matter of envisioning a tomorrow that is different from today. Sustainable Orpheus resists this: by presenting the future as disclosed, the possibility of change is denied. It is precisely the uncertainty of the future that creates an impetus to change. Whereas in the Orphean sustainability framework the future entails a continuation of the exploitative relationship of the human to the nonhuman, many other stories within the *Metamorphoses* dismantle the boundaries between human and nonhuman, such as the story of Cyparissus (10.106-142). In this story, one can see an instability of human and nonhuman embodiments that paves the way for an open, undisclosed bodily configuration. Whereas Orpheus managed to enforce a schema of human subjectivization and nonhuman objectivization, the Cyparissus story shows the boundaries between one and another embodiment, both in present and in future, to remain blurred. The French philosopher Bruno Latour argues that such configurations take place in what he calls "metamorphic zones."[32] The story of Cyparissus will present a *locus amoenus* that is an agent rather than, as in the Orpheus story, merely an object acted upon by a human agent. This *locus amoenus*, I will show, engenders a metamorphic zone.

Let us take a closer look at the story of Cyparissus and its portrayal of the *locus amoenus*.[33] The young boy Cyparissus befriends a giant sacred deer that dwells on Cyparissus' home island, Ceos. The two spend much time together, the boy tending to the deer's hunger and thirst and occasionally going for a ride on its back. Then, a new space comes to the fore: on a hot summer day, the deer

[32] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 58.

[33] See Connors, "Seeing Cypresses in Virgil," 1-17. The role of the *locus amoenus* in Cyparissus' story is briefly discussed by Bernstein, "Locus Amoenus and Locus Horridus," 76.

decides to take rest in the soft grass and the cool shadows of a grove. Right after this *locus amoenus* has come into play, Cyparissus accidentally pierces the deer with his spear and kills it. The boy is stricken by such sorrow that he wishes to die, and the god Apollo, who cannot console Cyparissus, grants him a metamorphosis into a cypress tree.[34] The story is connected to the larger cycle of Orpheus. As mentioned above, the cypress tree is part of the throng of trees that Orpheus summoned with music as his *locus amoenus*. Later on, it will become highly important that Cyparissus thus metamorphoses into a *locus amoenus* himself.

In order to understand the way the Cyparissus story denies a binary opposition between human and nonhuman, it is important to examine which constituents of the story show what form of agency. We can find in the Cyparissus story a configuration of bodies in which agency is not solely the preserve of the human, but also a capacity other bodies can have. The story allows us to see that different bodies have different forms of agency, the interactions of which form dynamic and unpredictable agential ensembles. In our usual reading practices, Latour explains, there is a tendency "to contrast human and nonhuman actors, for example, as subjects and objects."[35] The Orpheus story is a prime example of these acts of subjectivization and objectivization, which Latour calls processes of animating and de-animating actors. Orpheus' character epitomized these usual reading practices: as the narrator of his own story, he centralized a human actor, himself, in the scene, and decentralized the nonhuman actor, the *locus amoenus*, as the objectivized setting that simply surrounds the subject human. Although this manner of reading might seem normal, Latour argues that subjectivization and objectivization are actually "secondary and derivative operations."[36] Animation is not something that exists in language *a priori*, but is a conscious operation that can be altered through the way we use language. A primary function of language is representing agency in and of itself. Language constitutes a "common repertory" of agency

[34] On the aetiology of this tree, see Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 6-10*, 482, 486; and Connors, "Seeing Cypresses in Virgil".
[35] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 50
[36] *Ibid.*

shared by all actors, both human and nonhuman.[37] The story of Cyparissus shows such a common repertory of agency, which negates a hard dichotomy between the subjectivized human and the objectivized surroundings.

If we were to employ the conventional reading strategy, we could easily recognize Cyparissus and Apollo to be actors in this story. Their varying forms of agency interact with each other in particular ways to push the narrative forward. The story already denies this reading practice with the character of the nonhuman deer, who evidently shows to have agency as well. The transactions between the holy deer and the young boy create a unique friendship that seems to emerge from a mutual act of caring for each other. A conflict arises when the relationship between the two suddenly becomes one of hunter and hunted, a moment in which their agencies diverge.[38] Out of this conflict emerges Apollo to act as Cyparissus' consoler, putting an end to his misery by transforming him into a cypress tree and changing his form of agency altogether. Although these three actors differ with respect to their forms of agency, they do share the common characteristic of *having* agency. But the story compels us to acknowledge another nonhuman actor too, one that would conventionally be read as the object in the background on which the narrative is staged: the *locus amoenus* and its constituents. The form of agency exhibited by the *locus amoenus* becomes evident when we study the following passage (10.126-132):

> *Aestus erat mediusque dies, solisque vapore*
> *concava litorei fervebant bracchia Cancri;*
> *fessus in herbosa posuit sua corpora terra*
> *cervus et arborea frigus ducebat ad umbra.*
> *hunc puer imprudens iaculo Cyparissus acuto*
> *fixit et, ut saevo morientem vulnere vidit,*
> *velle mori statuit.*
>
> It was summer, in the middle of the day, and the hollow arms of coastal Cancer burned in the heat of

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] See Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 6-10*, 485-486 on how the deer is made "victim".

> the sun; the exhausted deer laid his body on the grass
> and drew the cold from the tree's shade. Him the boy
> Cyparissus unforeseen pierced with his sharp spear,
> and when he saw him dying from his severe wound, he
> wanted nothing but to die himself.

Right after the story portrays transactions of friendship between Cyparissus and the deer, the new *locus amoenus* is introduced. It comes as a new element in the story, only right at the moment before Cyparissus kills his friend. A direct cause for this misfortunate event is not given, except for the new designation of Cyparissus as *imprudens*, "not foreseeing" or "unaware". It is this unexpected unawareness (*imprudentia*) that leads to the deer's death. Where this *imprudentia* comes from is not immediately clear to the reader: the only thing that has changed is the emergence of the *locus amoenus.* This leads one to conclude that the physical environment has an active role in changing Cyparissus' heedfulness to heedlessness. Because the *locus amoenus* is able to activate this volta, it proves to have as much influence on the narrative as any of the other actors in the story.[39] The space interacts and transacts with Cyparissus and the deer: it actively changes Cyparissus from *prudens* ("heedful") to *imprudens*, and transforms his relationship with the deer from one of friendship to one of violence. When we acknowledge this form of agency belonging to the *locus amoenus*, we can reformulate the central conflict of the story as follows: Cyparissus and the deer were closely befriended, and the boy acted *prudens* with his spear. The *locus amoenus* influences the story by changing the boy's *prudentia* ('heedfulness') into *imprudentia*, a change which results in the boy's loss of his friend.

The confrontation of the two different agencies — Cyparissus on the one hand and the *locus amoenus* on the other — has significant implications for the configuration between human and nonhuman. The story shows that the subjectivization of the human and the objectivization of the nonhuman are not pregiven, but are rather secondary acts of animation and de-animation. Both the

[39] Anderson, *Ovid's Metamorphoses Books 6-10*, 485 notes that this location marks the volta from restful to violent action, but the active role of the *locus amoenus* is not mentioned.

human Cyparissus and the nonhuman *locus amoenus* primarily share a common repertory of agency; it is the *form* of agency that differs between them. The story demonstrates that possession of agency itself cannot be used as a criterion to distinguish the human from the nonhuman. Furthermore, it calls all possibility of ever making such a distinction into question. When the binary opposition between the human and the nonhuman is dismantled, there is no use in defining bodies as nonhuman. When the concept of the human body itself is made unstable, the term nonhuman becomes equally devoid of meaning. In place of human bodies and nonhuman bodies, we find in Ovid a spectrum of different embodiments with different agencies that interact with each other.

Latour argues it is circumstantial interactions between different embodiments that momentarily define what these embodiments are: "it is the tension that makes the actor."[40] To designate this manner of unstable embodiment, Latour introduces the term "morphism." A morphism, according to Latour, is a body that can be specified as a certain type of body, without presuming that this specification is an immutable definition. In Latour's terminology, such a specification can be made by adding a prefix to the word "morph." Like in a lot of the jargon in contemporary theory, these prefixes are based upon the ancient Greek roots of a word. Latour thus designates the human body as an "anthropo-morph" (from Greek ἄνθρωπος). In the same way, a body of water becomes a hydro-morph, a forest becomes a hylomorph, a sea a pelagomorph and an island a nesomorph, etc.[41] For Latour the "-morph" suffix denotes agency. The varying prefixes (anthropo-, hydro-, hylo-, and so on) specify that these morphisms have specific *forms* of agency. Because Latour poses these designations without a set of definitions, a morphism's form of agency cannot be defined on its own. This is rather based on the circumstantial transactions that occur between them, which means that embodiment is a

[40] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 53.

[41] Similarly to the word anthropomorph, these examples all take the Greek prefixes to designate what kind of body they are: ὕδωρ (hudor) means water, ὕλη (hule) means forest, πέλαγος (pelagos) means sea and νῆσος (nèsos) means island. One could infinitely expand this list to specify different kinds of embodiment.

dynamic process rather than a once-and-for-all imposition of unchanging order.

This very much highlights how configurations between bodies popularly assumed to be natural — such as the privileging of the human over the nonhuman or culture over nature — are socially constructed. Recognizing the "constructedness" of bodily configurations and the circumstantiality of transactions between agencies also paves the way for possible reconfiguration. Latour identifies a space for this open-ended and undisclosed configuration of embodiment which he calls a metamorphic zone. Metamorphic zones, Latour writes, facilitate "the exchange of forms of action through the transactions between agencies of multiple origins and forms."[42]

Let us trace a metamorphic zone in the story of Cyparissus. Now that we have identified a common repertory between both human and nonhuman actors in the narrative, we can apply the concept of procedural embodiment to the different actors. The actors we have recognized so far are two anthropomorphs (Cyparissus and Apollo), a cervomorph (the deer) and a hylomorph (the woods, being the *locus amoenus*).[43] Naming the characters in this manner, acknowledges that they have a common repertory of agency, but that they are different from each other. Their differences, in some yet to be disclosed manner, are to be constructed through their interactions with each other. In the beginning of the story, the interaction between the anthropomorph and cervomorph is constructed differently than in the common way of thinking which privileges human over animal. Their agencies are in tune and do not oppose each other to arouse conflict. However, once the hylomorph comes into the equation, it redefines the relationship between the anthropomorph and the cervomorph, changing their relationship into the more traditional hunter subject and hunted object. The form of agency that the *locus amoenus*

[42] Latour, *Facing Gaia*, 58.

[43] I take the Latin word for "deer," *cervus*, in order to designate the deer's embodiment. Strictly speaking, according to Latour there is a major difference between saying "deer" or "cervomorph:" the former implies a set definition for the embodiment, the latter keeps the embodiment undefined and open to change. However, I will sometimes use them interchangeably in favor of readability.

displays points to the constructedness of human's relationship with animal, and to the artificiality of configurations between different morphisms in general. By reconfiguring the transaction of agencies between the human and the deer — making close friends become subject and object — the *locus amoenus* shows how these bodies can rightly be called anthropomorph and cervomorph, with procedural and alterable definitions that are reconstituted by their transactions at any particular occasion. In other words, the *locus amoenus* engenders a metamorphic zone: a space that opens up the possibility of reconfiguring the relationships between different types of bodies.

The anthropomorph and the cervomorph are enmeshed in this metamorphic zone, but the *locus amoenus*, as a hylomorph, equally partakes in the space it engenders. The transactions between anthropomorph and hylomorph are equally circumstantial as the transactions between the anthropomorph and the cervomorph. In highlighting the artificiality of configurations between different types of bodies, the *locus amoenus* becomes self-referential, showing its own body and agency to be as constructed and open to reconstruction as the anthropomorph and the cervomorph. By partaking in the metamorphic zone, the meaning of the *locus amoenus* is as instable as is any other embodiment.

The uncertainty and unpredictability of possible bodily reconfigurations makes the volta from *prudentia* to *imprudentia* very significant. When Cyparissus enters the metamorphic zone conveyed by the *locus amoenus*, he goes from "aware" or "foreseeing" to "unaware" or "not foreseeing." Both translations of (*im*)*prudentia* are of relevance here: Cyparissus becomes "unaware" in the sense that he is simply not paying attention to his spear, thereby accidentally piercing his deer friend. But in my line of interpretation thus far, the act of "foreseeing" becomes striking too. The transaction between Cyparissus and the deer as close friends is constituted in the story as the initial continuous situation of normality, and in that sense becomes foreseeable.[44] It is only when Cyparissus enters the metamorphic zone that he is unable "to

[44] This is emphasized by the extreme prolongation of the use of the imperfect tense, which denotes an unchanged, unfinished situation. The perfect tense, on the other hand, signals a new action that drives the narrative forward. This perfect tense is kept out until the deer lies down in the *locus amoenus* (*posuit*, 128).

foresee" the ongoing stable transaction any longer, a situation which renders his future relationship with the deer uncertain. This reconfiguration is immediately consummated when Cyparissus accidentally kills the deer. His *imprudentia* thus prefigures the uncertainty in morphisms' possible future forms of agency, and marks the unpredictable changeability that the metamorphic zone implies. But not only does this capriciousness impose itself on the human and the deer. It also does so in the transactions between human and *locus amoenus*. The self-referentiality of the space will thus come into play, as the reconfiguration of the relation between anthropomorph and hylomorph is not merely presented as a possibility; we are at the point in the story where this reconfiguration will actually take place. Cyparissus is about to metamorphose and become one with the *locus amoenus*.

The altered transaction between Cyparissus and the deer, marked by Cyparissus' *imprudentia*, created conflict. The killing of the deer has put him in grave mourning, and Apollo gives him relief by transforming him into a cypress tree. Cyparissus' metamorphosis presents itself as the solution of the story: it is the end of the Cyparissus episode. Of course, as an agent, Apollo has obvious influence on the story. He executes the boy's transformation. But because it is the *locus amoenus* that engenders the metamorphic zone, the metamorphosis of the boy into a cypress tree — or in other words, his physical merge with the *locus amoenus* — is a kind of transaction between the boy and the *locus amoenus*. Whereas the anthropomorph and hylomorph initially confronted each other at the point of the anthropomorph's (*im*)*prudentia*, his physical transformation entails a complete reconstruction of their bodily configuration. The anthropomorph sheds its prefix and becomes a hylomorph, which emphasizes Latour's intention in coining the word "morphism:" the boundaries between one and another body are so instable that there is no difficulty for a body to altogether change into a new one, with a new form of agency that redefines it indefinitely. The anthropomorph becomes a hylomorph, inasmuch as the *locus amoenus* presents itself as a hylomorph. Their agencies become one and the same, and the change in transactions between Cyparissus and the *locus amoenus* is made possible by the metamorphic zone. From all the possibilities that emerged from the

imprudentia within the metamorphic zone, the story of Cyparissus has materialized one possible transformation in transactions, and the metamorphic zone enabled this transformation.

(Im)prudentia in a *carmen perpetuum*

The stories of Orpheus and Cyparissus contrast starkly. Cyparissus' *imprudentia* is what renders his metamorphosis possible. His undisclosed position in the world and open-ended relationship with the *locus amoenus* enables him to let go of his human embodiment when he is stricken with grief after killing his friend. On the other hand, Orpheus' relationship with the *locus amoenus* privileges the human over the nonhuman. Asserting himself as the narrator of his own story, he (dis)closes the future. In this sense, "sustainable" Orpheus thus obtains full *prudentia*: by disclosing the future relationship between him and the nonhuman, he foresees the future. Whereas Cyparissus transacted with the *locus amoenus* to enter a metamorphic zone and gain *imprudentia*, which kept his future uncertain and open to metamorphosis, Orpheus is fully *prudens* by reinforcing the continuation of his own subjectivization, thereby negating his metamorphosis.

Prudentia and *imprudentia* become the fundamental point of difference between the story of Orpheus and the story of Cyparissus. Cyparissus' *imprudentia* acknowledges that the future is always uncertain, in the sense that it is "unforeseeable." It therefore also denies any guarantee of continuity from present to future: tomorrow everything could be different. The entire narrative of the *Metamorphoses* goes to great lengths to emphasize this. The Orpheus story, although it does not end in a metamorphosis, does not put a stop to the ongoing narrative of the *Metamorphoses*. Orpheus might be killed because he resists any kind of adaptation, but the world around him still continues after his death. Cyparissus finds himself in the same world, but his *imprudentia* has made him transform and take a new position in it as a different body: his existence is prolonged through his adaptation. The *Metamorphoses* presents a world that continues to develop, and *prudentia* and *imprudentia* rather become modes of self-positioning in relation to that metamorphosing world. Those bodies acknowledging the capriciousness of fate undergo metamorphosis and become

constituents of this capriciousness themselves, while those denying it fail to adapt to it and are granted no future existence in the world. As Robert Markley puts it, the *Metamorphoses* constitutes a "climatological time – the sense of a natural world ... that marks the limits of narrative." This time, he argues, transcends the intradiegetic "embodied time" experienced by the text's particular characters.[45]

From the start, Ovid has made clear that this is what his work entailed. In the proem of the work, he programmatically states (1.1-4):

> *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas*
> *corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illa)*
> *aspirate meis primaque ab origine mundi*
> *ad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen.*
>
> I am prompted to tell of forms that have transformed into new bodies; gods, assist my undertakings (for you have changed those too) and lead my perpetual song from the beginning of the world to my own time.

Ovid asks of the gods to inspire him so that he can write his *carmen perpetuum* ("perpetual song") up until his own time.[46] That last verse seems to contain a contradiction: the *Metamorphoses* will continue at once perpetually and only up until Ovid's time. This highlights a tension between an intradiegetic embodied time, which does not reach further than Ovid's lived experience, and an extradiegetic climatological time in which the world perpetually continues its capricious course, also after Ovid's time. This shows the world's endless possible outcomes to be resistant to confinement within a narrative. Thus the *Metamorphoses* does not actually stop at a point in time; it embodies the continuation of its world, albeit extradiegetically. Because Ovid decides to put the narrative to a stop at the moment in time when he lives, he renders himself *imprudens* as well. He cannot foresee in what ways the world will continue to

[45] Markley, "Time, History and Sustainability," 44.
[46] The *Metamorphoses* ends with the deification of Julius Caesar, who died in 44 BC. This preludes the emergence of Augustus and the Roman Empire, under whose power Ovid wrote his *Metamorphoses*.

change, and does not vainly attempt to capture the future in his narrative. The only future that Ovid conveys with his work, is one of uncertainty, with which he highlights the constant possibility that the bodies of the world are reconfigured all anew.

The stories of Cyparissus and Orpheus show that it is the form of agency upon which human beings have to decide, and which positions them in relation to the other bodies of the world. Should one want to render oneself *prudens*, toil to reinforce a configuration with the world that ignores its agency and de-animates it completely, leading to an elimination out of the world altogether, like sustainable Orpheus? Or should one want to accept their *imprudentia*, establishing a human agency that acknowledges and transacts with the agency of the world, and maintaining the everlasting possibility that our transactions and bodily configurations will transform in the future, like Cyparissus? If one were to read any prescriptive force in the *Metamorphoses*, the stories of Orpheus and Cyparissus, and the work's instalkment of a world in perpetual transformation, show the latter to be the case.

Conclusion

Markley makes an interesting point about the *Metamorphoses* and climate change: Ovid's work, does not account for the anthropogenic nature of the Earth's transformations.[47] The world seems chaotic, its events driven by acts by gods and other capricious agencies unknown to puny and ignorant humans. But even though it looks as if the *Metamorphoses* presents this capriciousness as external from human action, it does show how transactions between anthropomorphs and the world relate to it. A transaction from human to nonhuman entails an equal reaction from nonhuman to human. The world responded to Orpheus' acts of violent subjectivization: he was expelled from it. Even though at the time of writing Ovid may not have had in mind human's geological impact on the planet, the *Metamorphoses* does show in what ways humans

[47] "For Ovid, the catastrophic changes that sever understanding from an inaccessible history of drowned cities and vanished passages are embedded within a belief in ceaseless change, including the transmigration of souls, rather than in the anthropogenic corruption of a prelapsarian Nature." Markley, "Time, History and Sustainability," 49.

interact with the world, and how the world is able to respond in unforeseeable ways.

In a world that is agent, human *prudentia* is impossible to uphold. The human system has been able to subjectivize itself so extensively, putting all nonhuman systems in the background, that it has been easy to think of the world as unanimated and inert. Humans were able to figure themselves *prudens*, until it became apparent that this planet we live on is not unresponsive at all: climate change is a reaction to human action. Persisting in the belief that humans can then still be *prudens* resists the possibility that the world might impose new and uncertain reconfigurations of bodies in which the human body is not given a place any longer. Trying to maintain a fixed position is an inability to adapt to such unforeseen changes.

Cyparissus showcases this ability to adapt through his *imprudentia*. His transactions with nonhuman morphisms render his position relative to these morphisms not superior at all. The configuration between Cyparissus and other morphisms is rather kept undisclosed, and as his position in the world becomes unforeseeable, he is given the possibility to adapt to a new bodily configuration. Therefore, *imprudentia* becomes a mode of thinking one can employ, an attitude towards the future that incorporates sudden change. Nowadays, the ecological crisis presents humans with a situation that has come as a response to the destructive growth of the human system, and that thus requires such change. The *Metamorphoses* beautifully shows that rendering ourselves *prudens* — making ourselves the poets of the human narrative without giving way to the agency of nonhuman systems — will lead to the gruesome expulsion of humans from the world, a world which now more than ever shows that it will change with or without us. Envisioning ourselves *imprudens* would contribute to an attitude towards nonhuman systems that incorporates the possibility of future changes in bodily configurations. The *Metamorphoses* reminds us that we are merely human. Our beings are unfixed and we are constantly liable to change. We must embrace our existence as morphisms and transact with the world accordingly.

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BOOK REVIEW

Solving a Crisis with a Crisis: *Tender is the Flesh* by Agustina Bazterrica

Kaspar Hendrichs

As recent world events demonstrate, a virus outbreak can cause the normal to become impossible and the unthinkable to become normal. Although the virus which sets into motion Agustina Bazterrica's novel *Tender is the Flesh* is of a different order than COVID-19, it likewise puts the normal in question. Bazterrica's novel, translated from the Spanish by Sarah Moses, explores the ways in which global infrastructures and flows of capital preserve themselves in the face of crisis, no matter the consequences for mankind and planet. Although the world Bazterrica imagines is strange and monstrous, the strength of her novel comes from the fact that this world is uncomfortably similar to our own.

The events of *Tender is the Flesh* take place following an outbreak of a virus which causes animal flesh to become toxic to humans. In this situation, people turn to cannibalism to satisfy their appetite for meat. At first, social disorder ensues: people begin hunting and eating the marginalized, primarily immigrants and the poor. But overhunting causes these populations to deplete rapidly. World governments restore order by passing laws allowing for the industrial farming of humans for meat. This both opens a way to satisfy the global craving for meat and serves the interests of large corporations keen to profit from selling human meat. The legalization of industrial human-farming and normalization of cannibalism is referred to by the media euphemistically as the "Transition."

To most people living in the world of this novel, cannibalism is not the morally objectionable practice which most would today

consider it. Rather, the events of the novel take place in a setting in which consumption of human meat has become normal. Cannibalism is the way out of a virus-induced crisis. But is it also a crisis of its own? Could it also be our own crisis? *Tender is the Flesh* is most lively and engaging when we read it as a text concerned not so much with cannibalism in particular but contemporary situations of crisis and crisis response more generally. While this novel presents the legalization of cannibalism as the solution to a specific meat-related crisis, might this crisis also be read as an allegory of several crises that we currently confront in the real world? Might our own efforts to preserve a global order tested increasingly by crises of climate and capital also lead us to embrace a normal that is also grotesque?

In *Tender is the Flesh*, this "normal grotesque" is so grotesque in no small part because it is presented as so normal. When the narrative begins, the world appears quite different from the one we live in. The novel is set some years after the Transition — a process in which, after animal meat became toxic to humans, government first legalized and facilitated the development of a human meat production industry. The fact that the novel does not begin in the midst of these social changes but after them creates an effect of shock in the reader: a world order that is extremely strange to us is presented as if uncontroversial. Whatever ethical qualms humanity at large may have had about eating its own are already successfully reckoned with. Cannibalism is routine.

This narrative structure provokes the question of where to locate "crisis" or crises in relation to the plot of *Tender is the Flesh*. Was there previously a crisis? Or is the state of crisis ongoing? In addressing these questions, it is helpful to consider what the term "crisis" means, as well as how it is used. According to Reinhart Koselleck, the term "crisis" is, among other things, a "structural signature of modernity" marking a "historically immanent transitional phase."[1] When exactly such a transition begins or ends depends on situation-specific factors, but in all cases, Koselleck implies, it involves temporal separations. A crisis makes a series of marks in the forward progress of linear time. Before a crisis, there

[1] Koselleck and Richter, "Crisis," 372.

is a pre-crisis state: the order to things is considered normal. Then a crisis occurs which disrupts the pre-crisis situation. The crisis prevents people from continuing with life as usual. The order to things is in flux. Only once people have adapted to the "crisis situation" does the crisis ceases to exist. In place of the crisis emerges a state of post-crisis: a settled order to things that is radically different from the pre-crisis order.

This crisis typology offers a guide to reading *Tender is the Flesh*, where crisis occurs not as a singular destabilizing event but as a period of adaptation to changing circumstances. In the world of *Tender is the Flesh*, this period is known as the Transition. The Transition, I would propose, does not *follow* the crisis but is itself a time of crisis.[2] While one might object that "crisis" is a term more appropriate to name the event which provoked the Transition — specifically, outbreak of a virus which made animal meat products toxic to humans — in this novel, as in Koselleck's typology, a phase of crisis and a phase of transition are interrelated to the extent that one cannot be named without simultaneously naming the other. In *Tender is the Flesh*, crisis is both the outbreak of a virus and the process of coming to terms with the outbreak response. The Transition is an ongoing human crisis.

Bazterrica is a careful stylist of language, and in *Tender is the Flesh* she is always attentive to the fact that particular words always mean in particular ways. The word Transition is no different: "Change, transformation, shift: the synonyms that appear to mean the same thing, though the choice of one over the other speaks to a distinct view of the world."[3] The word Transition speaks to a view of the world that is visible as crisis perhaps only from the outside. In the world of the novel, the Transition represents not a crisis but a resolution to what is perceived to be a crisis: the unavailability of meat products. Normalizing the consumption of human meat marks the possibility of ending the crisis and returning daily life to a kind of normality: a new era in which eating habits can be similar — although not completely similar — to how they had been before. The carnivorous diet returns by different means. But from the outside —

[2] Bazterrica, *Tender is the Flesh*, 12.
[3] *Ibid.*

our perspective as readers of *Tender of the Flesh* — the Transition can be read as a crisis in itself: the crisis that is the process of coming to terms with industrial cannibalism. Authorities frame the Transition to cannibalism as an end to the meat crisis — a "good thing" — but it actually represents a new crisis.

Early in the novel, we learn that some have doubts about reasons it was necessary for society to undergo the Transition. There are skeptics of the official narrative:

> The most eminent zoologist, whose articles claimed the virus was a lie, had an opportune accident. He thinks it was all staged to reduce overpopulation. For as long as he can recall, there's been talk of scarcity of resources.[4]

Throughout the novel there is a continuous play between two potential justifications for the Transition. On one hand, there is the fact that a virus has made animal meat toxic and inedible. Industrial production of human meat serves to prevent people who crave meat from causing social unrest. On the other hand, there is a theory, as in the passage above, that the virus is merely a pretext for an anti-overpopulation social intervention. This theory derives from a realization that humanity exerts a destructive and unsustainable impact on the earth's ecosystems. Slavoj Žižek notes that some people mistakenly assume nature to be capable in itself of neutralizing the destructive effects of human activities.[5] Nothing could be further from the truth. Our activities do have a lasting consequences for world. One such consequence is that natural resources are being depleted to manufacture consumer food products. Is industrial human meat production good for the planet? Or is it an intensification of global processes and systems that were already destructive of the planet?

The damaged ecology of our planet is an issue which features prominently in discussions of the contemporary climate crisis. In the 21st century, we realize that environmental problems are often consequences of human activity. Human impact on the

[4] Bazterrica, *Tender is the Flesh*, 14.

[5] "University of Dundee | Philosophy Lecture Series | Slavoj Žižek."

planet has been so great that some have argued that we are living in what should be called the "Anthropocene."[6] This term, which means roughly "age of humans," refers to a proposed geological epoch which commences as human activity begins to have a driving and irreversible impact on the Earth's geology and ecosystems. Rather than celebrating the achievements of mankind, the term "Anthropocene" implies that human activity is a destructive force.[7] As a destructive force, human activity negatively affects not only the earth's ecosystems, but also the fate of humanity itself. A 2019 Al Jazeera headline keenly recognizes this two-fold nature of the climate crisis: "We are destroying our own home."[8] Indeed, to lay waste to the planet is to deprive ourselves of a home. Ecological problems do not merely concern what is "out there." Rather, they directly affect humanity itself. When we destroy the earth on which we live, we destroy ourselves. In light of this, cannibalism in *Tender is the Flesh* could be read as a metaphor for anthropogenic climate change: man destroys man. To consume another is also to consume oneself. The novel's portrayal of a world in which cannibalism is normal parallels real-world obliviousness to the "cannibalism" that is climate change. In both cases, man is victim of his own self-destructive activities.

Tender is the Flesh's cannibalism also discourses with another contemporary crisis related to ecology, a crisis which many argue is the root of man's tendency toward ecological destruction: the crisis of consumerism. As I have mentioned, the legalization of cannibalism in Bazterrica's novel was due in part to pressure on government by wealthy corporate interests. When people stopped eating animal meat, the global animal meat production industry lost its business model. After this industry successfully lobbied government to legalize cannibalism, it went into the highly profitable business of producing human meat.[9] In the world of *Tender is the Flesh*, big business is more powerful than government and profit motive supersedes the worth of human life. Cannibalism keeps the economy going. To corporate industry, the use of humans as

[6] Ellis, *Anthropocene*, 3.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Al Jazeera, "'We are destroying our own home': UN report reveals nature crisis."
[9] Bazterrica, *Tender is the Flesh,* 14.

livestock solves a problem of basic supply and demand: the toxicity of animal meat generates massive consumer demand for which there is no supply. This gap in the market offers lucrative business opportunities.

Thus, the Transition. The virus which makes animal meat toxic to humans leads to a crisis for global industry and tests the resilience of the capitalist order. Just as, according to Koselleck, crises "not only contain immanent forces through which they can be overcome, but are also manifestations of tendencies pointing to the structural limits of capitalism," the virus in *Tender is the Flesh* makes visible both the limits of capitalism and capitalism's ability overcome limits.[10] The capitalist global order preserves itself by adapting in the face of adversity: without livestock there can be no capital accumulation, so industry turns humans into livestock in order to continue accumulating capital. Corporate interests conspire to make eating human meat socially acceptable. The human becomes a mass-produced consumer product, reduced to the materiality of its edible body. Capitalism's ever-lurking existential crisis — the inability to profit — is overcome.[11] Production, consumption, and accumulation of capital continue. But industrial cannibalism, capitalism's way out of crisis, is itself a new crisis: a human crisis.

The strength of *Tender is the Flesh* is that it allows us to see so clearly the relation of the first crisis to the second. Introducing cannibalism as a solution to a crisis of profitability is allegorical of the indissolubility of global capital systems. But in this novel, cannibalism is more than a generic trope of inhuman monstrosity. Specifically, it might be read as an allegory of man's destruction of his own existence through environmental degradation. Bazterrica reminds us that Earth suffers for capitalism to survive, and as inhabitants of Earth, we humans also suffer for capitalism's survival. Capitalism may well soon bring about the ruin of everything, but before that happens, surely, it will sell us ourselves to place on our own dinner plates. The nauseating power of Bazterrica's novel is

[10] *Ibid.*
[11] Bartolovich, "Consumerism," 211.

that imagining the dystopia she so vividly describes is easier than imagining the end of capitalism.

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