# Studying Sites of Buddhist Leisure
A Discussion of Justin Thomas McDaniel's Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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Architects of Buddhist Leisure

Socially Disengaged
Buddhism in Asia's
Museums, Monuments,
and Amusement Parks

Justin Thomas McDaniel
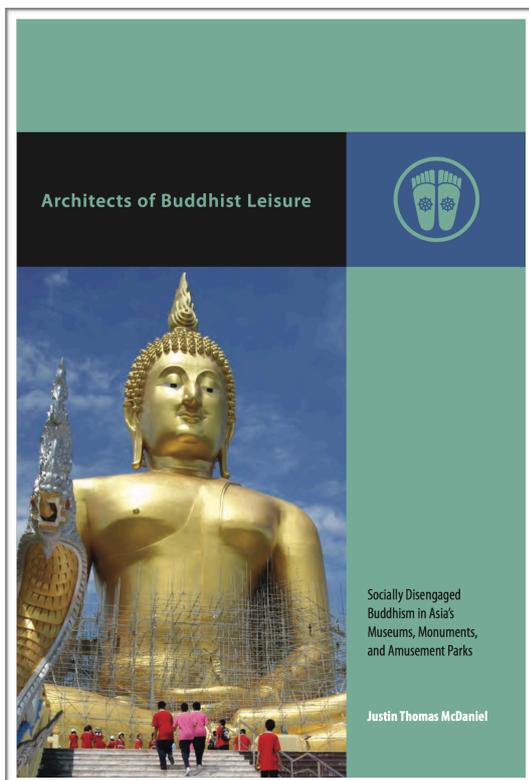
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Abstract: Justin McDaniel's most recent book theorizes 'Buddhist leisure' through a critical comparison of public Buddhist sites in several countries. He aims to show how the people who create and visit these places see them as transcending the boundaries often thought to separate secular and religious spheres of life. Grounded in closely observed studies of sites in Japan, India, Singapore and elsewhere, McDaniel argues that these practices of leisure reflect a growing Buddhist ecumenism that is at least partially the result of new technologies of construction and global communication. The discussion, organized by Thomas N. Patton, brings together a group of scholars with differing disciplinary and regional areas of expertise to reflect on the claims and implications of the book.

Participants

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Buddhist Wonderlands
A Discussion of Justin Thomas McDaniel's Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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Many years ago, when I traveled to Myanmar for the first time, a Burmese monk and friend of mine living in the United States asked his family to pick me up at the Yangon airport. After some brief greetings the family whisked me away in their car, telling me they wanted to take me to one of their favorite Buddhist sites. I assumed we were going to visit one of any number of venerable spots I had read about in guidebooks: Shwedagon Pagoda, Botataung Pagoda, Chaukhtatgyi Pagoda, and so on. You can imagine my surprise, then, when we drove into the parking lot of Mei Lamu Pagoda, a complex described by many tourists as 'Disneyland-esque'.[1] As one travel blogger recently described it: 'Mei Lamu is certainly not the grandest pagoda complex in Yangon, but it is one of the largest and kookiest. It's great fun to explore'.[2] Jet-lagged and confused, I was taken aback when I saw children playing tag around the Buddha image, families having picnics in front of the image, and teenagers flirting and giggling in the dark corners of the shrine complex. When I asked where the bathroom was, I was pointed to a giant cement crocodile that had a bathroom installed in its belly and a pagoda built onto its back.

This visit left little impression on me, and I had completely forgotten about the site until last year when, reading Justin McDaniel's latest book on *Architects of Buddhist Leisure,* a flood of memories returned of all those unusual Buddhist sites I had visited during my many trips to Myanmar. At the time these sites hadn't registered as 'properly' Buddhist spaces, because they did not fit my preconceived notion of what a Buddhist site should be—e.g., in terms of architecture, ritual and behavior. It was just as Justin noted, when he wrote that '[v]isitors to

monasteries across Asia are often surprised by the lack of decorum in many places and the amount of social and familial activity' (12). Indeed, my initial shock of eating a picnic lunch with the family at a pagoda compound while singing along to a cassette tape of John Denver's single, 'Country Road', was likely due to my lack of understanding that 'many monasteries in Asia often find themselves used as public spaces where children play and run around, groups play cards and board games, people gossip and drink tea, and the like' (12).

What dawned on me over time, and what has attracted me lately to such edifices in Myanmar, is the phantasmagorical nature of these spaces. I am fascinated by the dreamlike quality of the structures and pagoda compounds. Indeed, some of these structures were inspired by the dreams of their developers, who have tried to turn their dreams into reality. The Thambuddhe Pagoda in Monywa, Myanmar, for example, is one such site. Built in 1938 by the Burmese-Chinese entrepreneurial brothers of Tiger Balm fame, Aw Boon Haw and Aw Boon Par, the pagoda's blueprints were taken directly from the dream of a famous monk. Known as Monhyin Sayadaw, this monk was a spiritual mentor to the Aw Boon brothers and requested that the brothers develop the site based on their Tiger Balm Garden Parks, which they had built in Hong Kong (1935) and Singapore (1937).[3] John Falconer *et al.* (2000: 90) described the place well when they wrote that the Thambuddhe Pagoda – also known as 'A Wonderland in Monywa' – is like the 'Hong Kong Tiger Gardens done up in Victoriana'. Grandiose, baroque, and lavishly detailed with flowers, dragons, winged cherubs, tigers and 'weretigers' (the Burmese equivalent of a

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[1] *http://israeliabroad.com/explore-myanmar/yangon/meilamu-pagoda/*. See Stadtner (2011: 50-51) for more on this pagoda complex.

[2] *http://livinginmyanmar.tumblr.com/post/76394374238/mei-lamu-pagoda-yangon*

[3] McDaniel addresses the Singapore park in his book (2016: 82-84).

werewolf), such places of religious leisure are, as Justin points out, 'heavily ornamented. The ornament of these sights, whether it be the arabesque floral edges and intricately carved nymphs in Lek Wiriyaphan's Sanctuary of Truth in Thailand; the ghoulish statues at the Suối Tiên Amusement Park in Saigon; or the golden inlaid floors, wrathful Bodhisattvas, and sculpted dragons of Shi Fa Zhao's multi-leveled museum, garden, ritual-space, and tea-house in Singapore, works on the visitor and in total possesses an affective potential' (23). Buddhist pilgrims by the truckload come daily to take in the wondrous sites of this pagoda complex. Here there are no monks or nuns teaching Buddhist lessons of morality and meditation. Nor are there the hushed murmurs of pilgrims chanting Buddhist *gāthā* or discussing Buddhist philosophy. Such places 'do not teach through narrative', Justin writes, 'but by immediacy. They keep a person in the moment of aesthetic enjoyment' (24). Indeed, as Justin continues, 'These are not places of didactic sermons, forced spirituality, or ethical directives. They are fun' (16). Such was the reason why, of all the places we visited in Myanmar, the Thambuddhe Pagoda complex was my daughters' favorite. They had a wonderful time running through the complex making friends—not only with Buddhist children, but also with the Hindu, Sikh, and Christian children who had come to enjoy these wondrous sites with their families.

Revisiting these Burmese Buddhist wonderlands after reading McDaniel's book has helped me to see these places in a new light; it has even inspired me to engage in a similar form of study at places of Buddhist leisure in Myanmar and Hong Kong. McDaniel's *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* is expansive and comparative, moving across South, Southeast and East Asia, as well as North America. It examines Buddhist efforts to create a pan-Asian Buddhist 'ecumene', and reflects on the reasons why these efforts mostly fail. Theorizing the notion of 'Buddhist leisure', the book looks at specific public Buddhist sites to show how and why the people who visit these places consider them to be spaces in between the secular and religious. McDaniel illustrates how such sites exemplify a growing Buddhist ecumenism that is partially the result of global communication and construction technologies, as well as the Buddhist value of learning through affective encounters 'without an agenda'. McDaniel describes Buddhist sites in Nepal, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, and the United States. Grounded in historical and ethnographic research, he explores the ways in which architects, monks, and creative thinkers with money and vision have established Buddhist spaces that promote ecumenism, and how such eclectic public leisure projects have been affected by local conditions and material agency, as well as how they have developed into complex adaptive systems changed and influenced by visitors, budgets, materials, and both local and global economic conditions. Like these ecumenical Buddhist architects, McDaniel does not emphasize distinctions between 'Theravada' and 'Mahayana', but instead focuses on how these public Buddhist places of leisure have attempted to appeal to a wider audience by abandoning particular sects' rituals, liturgies, symbols, and teachings to promote a new vision of Buddhism without borders.

The sites described in this book illustrate the importance of religious public culture, demonstrating that leisure is not antithetical to the study of religion. The secular and religious, which McDaniel shows is in many ways a false binary, are categories broken down at these sites. Local people visit these sites, like foreign tourists do, not just for religious or ritual reasons, but for leisure activities and family vacations. As such, the book allows us to ask scholars working on different religions – and in different parts of the world – to comment on its theoretical implications for the field as a whole. What, for instance, are the book's most innovative theoretical claims? What ideas could they see extending to the study of other religious cases or situations?

The contributions to this discussion were originally presented on a roundtable organized for the 2016 Annual Meetings of the American Academy of Religion in San Antonio, Texas.[4] The presentations and response from Justin McDaniel were followed by a lively discussion

that challenged our understanding of Buddhist sites and the people who develop and visit them. In assembling the panel my aim had been to invite a group of discussants whose research expertise ran the gamut of Buddhist Studies, Islamic Studies, religious visual and material culture, architecture (secular and religious), anthropology, and history. David Morgan opens the discussion by bringing his expertise in Christianity and both material and visual culture to bear on what McDaniel refers to as Buddhist 'ecumenism without an agenda'. In addition to connecting McDaniel's work to similar places in Christian Europe, Morgan argues that the sites of Buddhist leisure in McDaniel's book are comparable to Disneyland and other similar places of secular fantasy, capitalism, and commercialism. In the next commentary, Anne Hansen and Thomas Borchert provide us with a concise overview of McDaniel's previous scholarship in Buddhist Studies, and how it has informed this latest monograph. They go on to discuss what McDaniel's work on leisure can offer scholars of Religious and Buddhist Studies, especially in terms of overcoming the still present, yet outdated, binary of the lay-monastic divide in Buddhist Studies scholarship. Richard Fox also discusses the benefits of this book for the fields of Religious and Buddhist Studies, but he does so by directing our attention to three important questions he sees running through the book's analysis of 'Buddhist leisure'. Indeed, these questions are fundamental to McDaniel's thesis, and yet, as Fox points out, they are not explicitly addressed in the book—not even by McDaniel himself. Fox illuminates aspects of the book's discussion that many of us may miss upon first reading through. Justin McDaniel concludes the volume with a personal, thoughtful, and at times humorous response to each of the authors' insightful comments.

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The Lure of Nowhere
Commentary on Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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It was a pleasure to read Justin's book for several reasons. I enjoyed the wide-ranging tour across Southeast and East Asia and the easy manner of his prose. I found the ethnographic method full of insight, color, humor, and a personal presence that made very unfamiliar worlds accessible. The focus on material culture in the form of images, objects, and the built environment was very welcome. And I found compelling his thesis that the Buddhists parks, museums, and monuments he has examined pursue what he calls Buddhist ecumenism without agenda. I'd like to focus my remarks on this final point.

Are these non-places? In an intriguing way, they are often more or less detached from programs of national boosterism, local self-justification, and sectarian identity. That tends to make them spaces that do not exhibit certain kinds of coordinates. They might present themselves as utopias, literally, no places, but they are in fact carefully crafted commercial phenomena that modernity has produced within the virtually universal medium of capital. They often seek state funding, raise private capital, and secure donations of USD from organizations such as the United Nations.

Pleasure parks are, of course, ancient. Virgilian pastoralism was the aristocrat's rural escape from the hectic, competitive, and violent urban space of Rome. Arcadianism was the fantastic evocation of a rustic age of simplicity, richly signified in an urban elite's iconography of shepherds, forest nymphs, minstrels, fauns, and sylvan wilderness. It was a literary escape that was rejuvenated in the Italian Renaissance. And one might limn a comparable tradition in the mountain imagery of classical eras of Chinese and Japanese painting, populated by scholar-hermits and the wispy epiphany of dragons and magical beasts. These are all non-places in the sense that they deliberately float free of the spaces anchored in class conflict, competition, status anxiety, and imbalance of power. In the non-place of pleasure parks, the poor, injustice, labor, violence, and privilege are absent or disguised. They are not utopias in the sense of surpassing injustice; they are fantasies built on wealth in a way to forget or render invisible the imbalance of power that enables them. To be sure, the lure of nowhere is not new, but it is as irresistible today for those who can indulge it as it was in the ancient world for denizens of elite leisure.

But are Disneyland and the parks Justin visited comparable non-places? In many ways they are. At least Disneyland and places like it rely on concentrations of capital and disproportionate consumption to exist as a fantasy. But these places also bear important differences, one of which is related to class: the modern non-place draws large numbers of visitors under the auspices of tourism and the occasion of families seeking leisurely escape from their urban and suburban lives of daily toil in jobs, schoolrooms, and city traffic. That means they take the form of commerce that comprises family vacations and tourism: hotels, restaurants, entrance fees, refreshments, picnicking, gaming, and gift and souvenir purchase. One is not there as a religious pilgrim in any rigorous sense, though the visit may certainly involve a degree of devotion and include the advantage of producing karmic merit. But the point is that it need not and does not appear to do so for most visitors, or at least that was my impression. What appears to be going on is a search for calm and relaxation, enjoyment and diversion, a momentary escape from the work world. This is enabled by assembling spectacular, curious, amusing, monumental sites that surround visitors as an alternative to their ordinary world.

Justin argues that the creators of these spaces do not appear to be concerned to purify, simplify, or reform Buddhism for the public, but to draw from its considerable archive a range of images and building types that recognize the

diversity and the broad kinship of Buddhists (170). This is what he means by 'Buddhist ecumenism without an agenda'. He explicitly rejects an essentialist approach, and borrows the Christian tradition's practice of ecumenical councils and organizations. Councils were celebrated or infamous gatherings that assembled a variety of traditions within Christendom in order to come to agreement on important ideas that issued in statements, which individual groups either endorsed or rejected. In 1948, a modern version of this was created in the World Council of Churches, a standing organization rather than an ad hoc council meeting, which includes Protestant and Orthodox churches. Roman Catholicism participates, but does not belong as a permanent member. The idea is not to eliminate differences, but to examine them in order to enhance understanding and certain forms of cooperation where unity of purpose allows. Christians have long felt compelled to undertake what they call ecumenism because of the universal pretensions of the religion. Jesus commanded his disciples in a famous commission to go to all nations and preach his gospel. And the polity of Christianity has from the beginning focused on metropolitan centers of teaching, study, and ecclesial authority that have over time become closely associated with the imperial state. Most famously, Rome and Constantinople long assumed themselves to be the truest version of the Christian religion and have at various times invested themselves in an imperial infrastructure that established their version as divinely mandated in one way or another. There is nothing quite like this in Buddhist traditions, at least in terms of universal ambition and presumption to commanding exclusive truth, though the close association of monastery and state is a signature feature of Buddhism's nationalist articulation and is well known in such states as Burma and Thailand. Christian ecumenists also stress that their task is not interfaith, but focused on groups within Christianity alone.

Why then refer to Buddhist ecumenism without an agenda? Some people Justin examined did purport to engage in interfaith dialogue aimed at uniting religious opposition to Communism in places like Thailand (105). But for the most part the founders and architects of parks that Justin studied stressed neither political aims, sectarian ideals, nor anything like a strongly articulated idea of a universal essence of Buddhism. Speaking as a non-specialist, it seems to me that Justin is correct to argue that they are better described as having pursued the public culture of leisure that deploys Buddhist iconography and structures in order to attract Asian consumers to a place they might recognize without expecting them to assume the subject position of the pilgrim or religious devotee, that is, without tasking them with conversion, allegiance to a cause or temple, or amassing centralized power or minting and celebrating a universal Buddhist identity. And I like his point that even though some founders were driven by strong religious and often idiosyncratic motives, the parks and monuments they left behind took on a life of their own within what we might call the medium of global capital—certainly not as successfully in financial terms as Disney, nor anything like the branded commercial entity that Disney represents, but able nevertheless to entertain large numbers of people with Buddhist imagery and built environments that cater to spectacle, cult of personality, and occasionally to comedy and the absurd. And even when they fail commercially, as they often do, the sites mark out something new on the landscape of modern Buddhism—places where leisure and religion are not presumed to conflict, but to work together in achieving entertainment. And this may be described as the point of global capital in the lives of so many in the world today: entertainment is the new form of consuming politics, nationalism, religion, self-reflection, and child-rearing. Indeed, in what is now called the Age of Trump, an era of robust entanglement, when politics and religion are inextricable from entertainment, entertainment is the act of consuming everything. And media of all sorts – from Twitter to amusement parks – are the preeminent forms of consumption nourished by global flows of capital.

To this view of entertainment we should add curiosity in the form of collections of objects unfettered by scholarly constraints. I was intrigued by the practices of collecting that so many enthusiasts and entrepreneurs engaged in. Sometimes these collections are able to surpass the conventional boundaries of museums by allowing visitors to touch the objects and to deposit candles, prayers, and gifts (89, 158). The

sites deliberately blur tourism, devotion, commerce, and art appreciation. They erase, as Justin aptly put it, 'the distinction between museum and temple, the collector and monk' (135). I am much persuaded by his claim that the curators, architects, and monks he has studied 'favor display over dogma, curiosity over conversion, spectacle over sermon, and leisure over allegiance' (135).

Finally, it is noteworthy that the visionary founders and creators in this story called on art and architecture to realize their aims 'independent', as Justin writes, 'of particular sectarian affiliation or adherence to specific Buddhist monastic rules or specific teachings' (172). This is a strikingly modern phenomenon because it has meant the reconfiguring of religion in modern life. And it is evident elsewhere. For instance, in Europe and the United States in the course of the nineteenth century, art came to be considered a spiritual achievement independent of religious institution and patronage. Associated with 'Culture' as the achievement of the internal or spiritual life of a civilization, parallel to but not dependent on organized religion, the arts generally were valued as the indices of cultural vitality, keyed to national tradition, and active as repositories of the life, race, and ethnicity of discrete peoples. One finds something like this happening among the collectors, architects, and visionary builders documented in Justin's book. Their modern conception of the arts certainly facilitates the ecumenism without an agenda that Justin finds so widely at work in Southeast Asia. And it clearly suits the audience-oriented experience of consuming leisure and the creation of public culture that put Buddhist artifacts to work as art, as discrete stylistic manifestations of national traditions that showed how Buddhism could become the medium of leisure in a world reshaped by consumption and the definition of happiness as a momentary release from the daily world of work and urban life.

Travels through the Buddhist Ecumene
Commentary on Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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Now that 'Southeast Asian Religions' has become an established field at the American Academy of Religion, it seemed appropriate to focus the Program Unit's 2016 session on a significant theoretical contribution to this relatively new field —namely, Justin Thomas McDaniel's *Architects of Buddhist Leisure*. At one level, the book is a study of Buddhist leisure sites across Asia and what they can tell us about how such sites, their builders and visitors blur the perceived scholarly binary of 'religious' and 'secular', and how 'public' Buddhist spaces are inhabited. McDaniel's comparison between these sites yields some preliminary characterizations of an emerging Buddhist 'ecumene' that is neither unified nor systematic, but that suggests some similarities in the ways in which Buddhists in Nepal, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam (and a few other locales along the way) have begun to situate themselves *vis-à-vis* their notions of Buddhism as a global truth. At another level, the book plunges forward with McDaniel's latest articulation of his emerging approach to understanding Buddhism – and religion in general – as a messy, contradictory and cacophonous human project. For McDaniel, religion may indeed reflect, order and illuminate reality in Geertzian fashion. But just as often it makes no sense, obscures, or just makes us grin. In this latest book, McDaniel offers a method for studying 'religion' through building materials, giant statues and museum exhibits.

Architects of Buddhist Leisure in many ways continues and amplifies some of the larger theoretical contributions that McDaniel has made to Southeast Asian Religions, and to Theravāda Studies, in his previous Benda Prize and Kahin Prize winning books, *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words: Histories of Buddhist Monastic Education in Laos and Thailand* (2008) and *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand* (2011). With this new book, he has succeeded in widening his sights even more broadly, to put himself – and by extension, the field of Southeast Asian religions – in conversation with scholars in Religious Studies such as David Morgan, who joined us for the AAR panel and is a contributor to this symposium (McDaniel 2016: 6). As the Theravāda Buddhism specialists on this panel, we will start off the conversation by situating *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* in relation to themes in McDaniel's previous books and the field of Theravāda studies, after which we will turn to assessing the contributions and limitations of McDaniel's key notions of religious repertoire, Buddhist leisure and the Buddhist ecumene, as well as considering methodological and stylistic innovations in *Architects of Buddhist Leisure*.

Within Theravāda studies, McDaniel's voice has often been contrarian. In his first two books, he seems to be having an argument with the field of Buddhist studies, though perhaps with a more conservative and Orientalist part of the field than many of the rest of us inhabit. While ethnography is part of the toolkit for many recent Theravāda scholars, and the field includes anthropologists as well as Buddhist studies specialists, McDaniel, who was trained as a Sanskritist and textual scholar, discovered after spending several years in Thailand and Laos that 'my study of texts was only partially useful in understanding Buddhist education in Laos and Thailand' (2008: 5). After a stint as a Buddhist monk in Thailand, he began conducting fieldwork on Buddhist learning in the Thai-Lao region, further confirming what he had observed as a monk—namely, that the Buddhist textual world was far different than what he had supposed in his graduate training. He discovered that Buddhists 'did not have to live up to an ideal Buddhism', but rather that 'Buddhist teachings had to live up to the needs of the Lao and Northern Thai' (2008: 249). Thus began his shift away from an Indological and philological view of texts as the fulcrum of religious understanding. And, as he surveyed religion 'on the ground' in Southeast Asia, there proved to be 'many types of ground' (2008: 17).

In *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words,* McDaniel argues that American students' interest in uncovering Buddhist ideas and technologies for meditation and enlightenment, and scholarly concern with 'textual history, textual integrity, provenance, and datings, as well as philosophical and ethical coherence', contrasts with what past and present Lao and Thai Buddhists have valued: order, safety, wealth and ritual efficacy. This 'incongruity' can be traced to a scholarly obsession within Buddhist studies with texts, canons, elites and the study of elite institutions as though they were monolithic entities (2008: 7-8). *Gathering Leaves* also argues against recent historical work on Buddhist modern reformism in South and Southeast Asia, seeing continuity rather than 'rupture' or change in Thai/Lao monastic education since the sixteenth century. It disputes the wide influence of the purist 'demythologizing' Dhammayut reforms across the region, showing that on the religious peripheries (such as Laos), monastic learning went on in much the same way it always had—that is, without much reference to the canonical Pali scriptures. Above all, McDaniel wants us to know that the evidence from Southeast Asia suggests that religious people do not always do, say or even pay the faintest attention to what the texts say they do. Nor are their actions and motivations necessarily in line with the ways in which scholars describe them. McDaniel reminds us often in *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words* that what people wanted most from their religious teachers was not sacred teachings *per se* but rather, words to help them heal sick mothers and protect their rice fields from drought and vermin (2008: 17, 127, 248-50). This is not an argument McDaniel started, but one to which he has added an important and exhaustive new body of evidence by focusing his first book on *curriculum*—the notes and methods by which monks actually teach each other about Buddhism, rather than through an idealized notion of a Pali canon that was scarcely consulted or even collected in rural parts of Thailand and Laos. *Gathering Leaves and Lifting Words* joined an ongoing examination of 'the very idea of canon' and 'practical canon' – *viz.* what Southeast Asian Buddhists actually do with (and without) texts – that was begun by Charles Keyes (1983), Steven Collins (1990), Charlie Hallisey (1995), Anne Blackburn (1999) and

others. This extensive body of work on 'canon' in turn led to an appraisal of our 'very assumptions' regarding the category and boundaries of 'Theravāda Buddhism', in a widely read volume called *How Theravāda is Theravāda?,* edited by Peter Skilling, Jason Carbine, Claudio Cicuzza, and Santi Pakdeekham (2012).

McDaniel's focus on 'lived religion' is further elaborated in a second book, *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. This book models an innovative lived religion approach to Thai Buddhism – combining the ethnographic, literary and material-focused study of protective ritual technologies – that allows us to see it in all its messy complexity, overlapping with other cultural phenomena in its obsessions and practices (rather than as neat and systematically 'religious'), contradictory, often commercial, material, and open to incessant individual interpretation. In *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk*, McDaniel proposes viewing Thai Buddhism from the standpoint of what he terms the 'repertoires' ('words, stock explanations, objects, and images' social actors use to construct meaning in their interactions with others) of Thai Buddhists, as well as their religious 'technologies'—that is, the practices people employ to solve problems, such as astrology or the protection gained from amulets (2011: 9-14). The idea of 'repertoire' is that people aren't just 'Buddhist' or 'religious'. They draw their values and practices from all kinds of cultural sources, and combine them in an individually idiosyncratic fashion, unselfconsciously drawing from or integrating Buddhist teachings about impermanence, values from their parents, hiphop lyrics, the amulet trade, and life lessons from the soccer field. 'Religion', in this book's vision, is disorderly, contradictory, and generally 'cacophonous', a noisy descriptor McDaniel uses often in this book when talking about religion (2011: 7, 139-41, 223). As in *Architects*, one of McDaniel's primary approaches to religion in this book is through material culture. Thai altars are layered, even piled high, with objects. And the more these sometimes seemingly unrelated objects come in contact with each other, the more likely they are to start working together. As objects associated by 'accretion' and 'concomitant associative power', they take on

new meanings and efficacious potency in relationship to each other (2011: 165, 226).

This latter kind of associative 'accretion' among Buddhist objects also becomes a concern in *Architects,* especially as a way of understanding the aesthetic construction of Buddhist leisure sites such as monuments, amusement parks, museums, and curio cabinets. McDaniel's focus in *Architects* is on a group of places that are difficult to categorize, at least from the location of Buddhist Studies or Religious Studies. Monuments, museums, spectacular sights, amusement parks and leisure gardens, which are sometimes falling apart (and so 'failures'), are not the same as temples or *wat*s ('monasteries'), though sometimes they are tied to a temple or a temple is located inside one. They are odd places that strike one (whether in the pages of McDaniel's book, or in person) as not quite religious, but also very clearly religious. Our usual scholarly criteria for categorizing places as religious, which are too often implicit, do not quite work for these places—and so they trouble our categories. In this respect, *Architects* takes up one of McDaniel's refrains in *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk,* that Thai Buddhism is very often aesthetically marked by 'abundance and accretion' rather than the clean rational lines of our imagination of the Buddhist world (2011: 21). As in *Lovelorn Ghost,* the question is why have just one Buddha image when you can have ten on a platform? Why have a sixteen-meter Guanyin, when you can have a sixty-meter Guanyin? In *Architects,* the places that McDaniel visits are marked by excesses and the idiosyncratic visions of the people who built them.

Architects of Buddhist Leisure theorizes the concept of Buddhist leisure by examining the construction of Buddhist monuments, amusement parks and museums in different parts of Asia, as well as how the 'affective encounters' visitors have at these sites contribute to how they live their lives, and how the feelings and aesthetics generated by these encounters construct 'a type of Buddhist learning' that is rarely acknowledged. The scale of the book is global and 'comparative', looking at a handful of Buddhist leisure spaces in Singapore, Nepal, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, and the US. Although the sites are unconnected and very different (replicas of Buddhist hells, a temple housed inside the belly of a giant elephant,

museums, gardens, tourist sites), it turns out they do have some things in common. First and most notably, they are all putting forward visions of a Buddhist ecumenism, a comparison that in McDaniel's analysis reveals that there is in fact no single, unified vision of a Buddhist ecumene. Rather, there is 'ecumenism without an agenda'—meaning that they are all trying to be ecumenical on their own, but not in any coordinated way (2016: 5-6, 19-20, 169-175). They make no attempt to proselytize or make claims about authenticity. They are not trying to be inter-connected or create a global Buddhist ecumenical network or aesthetic. But, importantly, they are sites that provide 'affective encounters' where people learn to be Buddhist simply by seeing, doing, feeling, imbibing, resting, eating, or hanging out while talking on their cellphones (2016: 17-24). (And sometimes they don't learn how to be Buddhist as, for example, when these monumental sites fail to attract an audience; 2016: 4.)

In approaching these places, McDaniel is most concerned with giving us a close study of the individual 'architects' who created them. (He uses 'architects' broadly, to also include builders, engineers, monks and nuns, merchants, creators, funders, curators, and other contributors.) This focus on individual builders is one of the most powerful aspects of the book. Yet, while these individuals are singular in McDaniel's telling, they are not particularly exceptional. There is nothing to suggest that they will be listed in books of eminent Buddhists in the distant future—which is part of the point. McDaniel's understanding is a deeply humanistic one, in which he explores the material manifestations of the worlds that these architects envision. Even though many of them did have global visions about the spaces they were constructing, their intentions may not have been realizable or sustained. Rather than offering a cohesive vision about what 'Buddhism' is or should be, the sites he examines seem to have thousands of individual parts that come together through necessity, negotiation, and the logic and demands of local actors and circumstances or 'local optima' (2016: 24-7). The built spaces themselves sometimes overcome the architects who built them. They show us very clearly that things are not always consciously thought out according to a central blueprint. And, even when they are, the

blueprint often gets shoved to the side and forgotten in the 'cacophony' of local factors, negotiations, disputes, brainstorms, and alterations over time. As a chapter on Lumbini Park in Nepal shows, built spaces are always changing and being repurposed: 'spaces are complex adaptive systems where material and people co-evolve over time' (2016: 36).

There is a curious hitch in the way that McDaniel frames his approach to individual builders, which suggests a survival of the lay-monastic divide that has long been a dominant – if questionable – binary in Buddhist studies. In the introduction, McDaniel justifies his attention to these spaces and figures by noting that the architects 'show us that monks are not always the prime movers of Buddhist art, practices, and ideas … the laity have often been and often are the drivers of Buddhism, but the few studies of lay Buddhism generally study "them" as large groups and parts of mass movements, not as purposive and complex agents in complex systems' (2016: 26-7). This statement is both curious and problematic. It is curious because it fails to recognize or acknowledge the degree to which there has been a shift away from a simple lay-monastic divide in the study of Buddhist communities, certainly in the accounts of contemporary Buddhist communities, such as Gareth Fisher's study of lay Buddhists in contemporary Beijing (2014) or Jessica Starling's forthcoming work on temple wives in Japan. Moreover, the emphasis on lay builders over monastics implicitly creates a binary formulation of scholarship that McDaniel overcomes through his refocused attention. This is problematic not just because one of McDaniel's architects is a monk (Shi Fa Zhao of the Temple of the Tooth Relic in Singapore), but because it reinforces the idea that monastics are the 'superhero zen warriors' of McDaniel's childhood imaginings (15). Although he sometimes retains vestiges of outdated generalizations in his analysis, McDaniel's humanistic work in *Architects* and elsewhere shows us that most monastics are just like other people whose backs hurt and whose feet get sore, and who laugh as often as lay folks (and sometimes more). The lay-monastic divide in the framing of the question is doubly curious because it is not necessary, and is not a part of what he does in the book.

What does Buddhist leisure have to offer us? Here, we benefit from McDaniel's push against assumed binaries and his preference for contrariness. He likes to put together things that seemingly don't belong together, in order to push home the point that there's no way to separate out religion from other things. He wants us to realize that studying Buddhism also involves looking at and learning about a lot of things and people that are not 'Buddhist'. To cite just one small example from the conclusion: in order to understand a particular 'very rare Chinese statue of the Buddha … next to a small Japanese bridge', we have to learn about the geography of Avery Island, Louisiana, as well as how the founder of the Tabasco Sauce company articulated his company's philosophy (2016: 162).

Buddhist leisure, in McDaniel's hands, also offers us a topography of the Buddhist ecumene. Buddhist ecumenism is a topic that has received relatively little explicit scholarly attention. A few studies look at the global spread of Asian Buddhisms (for example, Prebish and Baumann 2002), or the globalizing aspirations of a particular Buddhist movement, such as Soka Gakkai (Seager 2006). But the concept of ecumenism in Buddhism has not been widely theorized. One of the real strengths of *Architects* is McDaniel's implicit idea about the non-unified unity of Buddhism, which inspires in some way the choices that the architects make in creating their spectacles. All these spectacles assume pan-Buddhist vision, though they do so in different ways. Here, McDaniel seems to be tapping into a curious dynamic that inhabits Buddhist studies of the last twenty years. Everyone knows this is a pan-Asian religion, marked by transnational flows of various sorts. But it is a weak form of transnationalism. As McDaniel notes, Buddhists have tended to be bad empire builders (2016: 18-19). Buddhism has spread, and there are links between vastly different modes of Buddhist communities. But it acts as a weak connecting force, established by individual Buddhists and changing technologies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and through shifts taking place in other religious formations (such as Muslim networks and global Christianity). Buddhist pan-Asianism is not the result of strong ecumenical institutions. One can see it only in its effects, such as in the movement of monks across national and sectarian lines for

a Buddhist education (Borchert 2017), or in the museums that McDaniel discusses in Chapter Three, which assume a pan-Buddhist history and sensibility without really being concerned with the result. Not located in any given institution, school or sect, 'Buddhism' becomes a malleable glue that binds communities but is also open to manipulation and appropriation; it additionally seems to give rise to funky statues.

This is a scholarly book, but it is also partly a travelogue that could be sub-titled 'travels with Jane and Henry' (McDaniel's young children). McDaniel uses a personal and almost experimental voice to address us in *Architects*, not dissimilar to Richard Seager's narration of his struggle to come to terms with the death of his wife running through his Soka Gakkai book, *Encountering the Dharma* (2006). McDaniel's voice is a more lighthearted one than Seager's, suited to chasing around amusement parks and marveling at Buddhist-inspired spectacles. A high point in the book for both of us was the photo-for-fee on page 99, in which McDaniel was dressed as a celestial being sitting on a heavenly throne at the Sanctuary of Truth near Pattaya, Thailand. Part of what we think McDaniel wants to do with the familial voice he uses throughout the book – periodically interrupting his analysis like a parent multitasking at a playground to tell us that Jane 'grabbed a young monk's arm and just started laughing' (xi), or that Henry 'splashed, slid' and like the hundreds of other kids there, 'certainly did not wait thirty minutes' after his ice-cream to go swimming at the 'Beach of the Gods' (32) – is to ask us why we try to act and think differently as scholars than we do in our everyday lives. If as scholars we tend to believe there is an opposition between religion and non-religion, then we will focus our studies on certifiably 'religious' things like monasteries and monks, and we will *miss* seeing so much else about how people are and learn to be Buddhist. And we may also miss that they are not in fact trying to be either religious or non-religious at all, but rather just going about their lives.

Buddhist leisure sites show us that it is not possible to break Buddhist lives – or any of our lives – into separate categories.

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The Imitation of Life
Commentary on Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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As the final panelist to speak I benefit from the wisdom of those who spoke before, and have the privilege of presuming on the part of our audience a certain familiarity with Justin's new book. So I would like to forego a general description. Moreover, having already heard from specialists in Buddhist Studies, architecture and material culture, I am also happily relieved of the burden borne by the expert witness.[1] In place of disciplinary or regional specialism, then, my remarks will focus instead on what I see to be some of the fundamental questions driving the book's analysis of 'Buddhist leisure'. These questions, I hasten to add, are neither those most proximately addressed by the book, nor do they even receive explicit formulation. And yet, on reflection, I feel these questions are crucial for understanding why one might set out to write a book – and perhaps even to read a book – about 'the architects of Buddhist leisure'. Very briefly, these questions are as follows:

- First, what is the object of study proper to Buddhist Studies in particular, and to Religious Studies more generally?

- Second, where and under what conditions might this object become known?

- And, finally, how is it best represented?

I would like to take each of these questions in turn, and reflect briefly on how – at least on my reading – they helped to shape the line of enquiry embodied in this new book. My primary interest is in teasing out the reasons why these questions matter, and what difficulties Justin encounters – perhaps necessarily – in the course of trying to answer them.

The Object of Study

Let us begin with the object of study. We get a clear sense right from the start that this is a departure, one might even say an initiation, into a new field. And yet, as with William Carlos Williams – whose poem, *The Wanderer,* figures in the book's epigraph – this departure is simultaneously meant to embody a return—only under the spell of a new muse. Much as Williams' 'Wanderer' retraces the poet's steps through his native city a changed man, with new vision and purpose, it seems Justin's book is similarly meant to mark a homecoming of sorts —but, again, with newly rediscovered aims and ideals. Inspired by theorists of materiality, and of spatial practice, this is yet another book about Buddhism—and, once again, written from within the context of Religious Studies. However, it aims to approach its object from a new angle, with new eyes—or better still, new questions. And, in so doing, its aim is to have a transformative effect on its field.

So, what is the object of study? Well, in a word, it is *Buddhism*. But, recalling those old advertisements for 'the new Cadillac', this isn't your supervisor's Buddhism. It is a Buddhism of surprising juxtaposition and transformation— where brothels become temples, and museums reside in the bellies of giant copper-encrusted elephants. Each of the book's three central chapters announce the unexpected—shanty towns at the Buddha's birth site; a mural depicting Keanu Reeves in a Thai monastery; and a Pennsylvania Freemason bedecked in the robes of a Mandarin scholar. Yet, beyond shock value and literary conceit, these juxtapositions have a serious point—namely, to draw our attention to those seemingly incongruous spaces in which living, breathing Buddhists are at leisure – and are distracted – and yet somehow, at the same time, are learning about and experiencing a Buddhism that our Buddhologists may well *know*, but that they rarely *discuss*. So why this shift in perspective?

Justin's interest in leisure is no mere distraction, but rather carries forward a double

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[1] Lawrence Chua presented an architectural perspective, which, unfortunately, could not be included here.

critique. For Religious Studies in general, his central target is the artificial separation of the religious and the secular, as a disciplinary boundary overtly breached by the spectacle of these Buddhistically inspired museums and amusement parks. Meanwhile, for Buddhist Studies, it is a more specific problem of what I would describe as *monastic myopia*—the tendency to focus on texts, monks and formal rituals. As he notes, 'the affective encounters at Buddhist ecumenical leisure places are a neglected part of Buddhist daily life that have been excised from scholarly studies because they fall on the wrong side of the secular-religious divide'. He continues, 'These affective encounters are a type of Buddhist learning, but they are more accessible and common than ethical arguments, philosophical treatises, and doctrinal formulations' (24).

So, by focusing on a rarefied conception of what constitutes Buddhism proper, it seems we have missed much of what actually matters to many Buddhists. And, at the same time, there's a certain recognition that not everything Buddhists do is itself an overt expression of Buddhism. So, if I have understood correctly, Justin is suggesting we must work harder to recognize the importance of less formal aspects of Buddhist practice, while at the same time addressing the seemingly non-Buddhist elements that contribute to Buddhist lives. Running just beneath the surface of these empirical concerns is, I believe, a more general – and arguably constructive – desire for a life characterized by *coherence*, or at the very least *wholeness*—an issue that I suspect may be more important for Justin's line of questioning than it first appears. But, if *not* as a textual or ritual ideal, under what conditions might this more integrated conception of Buddhism become *accessible* – and so *knowable* – as an object of study?

Under What Conditions?

Now, it is here that things begin to get a little tricky. For, rather like some of the curio cabinets discussed in the book, Justin's approach gathers together an assemblage of theoretical ideals, some of which may not always be self-evidently congruous with one another. Let us consider very briefly one example—namely that of what he describes under the rubric of 'Buddhist public culture'.

The book sets out to examine 'public culture' as a *corrective* to the monastic preoccupations still prevalent in much of Buddhist Studies. And his point of departure is very generally that of architectural design. But, as Justin is quick to point out, even 'the best laid plans' are no guarantee of success—subject, as they are, to the vicissitudes of popular usage and everyday practice. As he rightly notes, buildings and other public spaces have a way of developing 'lives of their own' (6). And this he theorizes in terms of a double-pronged critique, directed to highlighting the underdetermination of use by intention—that is, again, the possibility that popular practice will exceed architectural expectation.

The first prong in this critique is that of material culture, which highlights the 'agency' of objects in the formation of public space. Here we discover that such things as the availability of concrete, and sudden turns in the weather, may be as important in shaping the affective experience of Buddhist leisure as anything wrought by design. So it seems that the study of public culture entails more than the teleology of an originary moment—a point with potentially wider-reaching implications for Religious Studies.

The second prong in Justin's critique of intention – and to my mind the more lethal of the two – comes only in passing, and derives from the Bakhtinian critics of Habermas. Here, he rightly notes that public discourse does not run in straight lines—if indeed it runs in *lines* at all. As with the plurality of agencies at play in architectural implementation, we find multiple voices vying for pertinence and authority, or perhaps just for entertainment. But, crucially, these voices – at least on Bakhtin's own account – are not reducible to individual agents—human or otherwise. Heteroglossia is not simply a plurality of voices, but rather the inextricable intertwining of multiple and often incongruous ways of being in the world, and working to transform it. On such an approach, public culture is revealed as unruly, and resistant to analytic domestication. And it is here, I believe – in engaging with the messiness of everyday life – that we may run into a bit of trouble.

For, having peered over the edge into the swirling abyss, it seems we are then forced to pull back to a more manageable account of what Justin describes in terms of 'complex

adaptive systems'—an idea notably at odds with both Bakhtinian heteroglossia and the 'democracy of objects' characteristic of at least some accounts of material culture. Where system – and *a fortiori* 'systems theory' – leave academic authority intact, both material agency and the Bakhtinian critique of Habermas potentially decenter the human subject—and so threaten to reveal scholarship as yet one more agency struggling to make itself matter. This, I should emphasize, is not necessarily meant as criticism. For it seems rather close to what Justin himself actually wants to say—and, indeed, *does* say at various points. But, at least on my reading, the book reflects something of an unfinished battle—in which a recalcitrant will to knowledge is holding out against an opposed desire for a more open-ended and inclusive approach to scholarly enquiry.

Life Imitating Art

And this brings us to the question of representation—and, once again, back to Williams' poem, *The Wanderer*, in which the poet pointedly asks, 'How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?' And here it seems Justin's response, which we only encounter directly toward the end of the book, is a form of comparison that he calls 'semblance'. In his words,

> Instead of dictating what should and should not be comparable, whether by ethnic, sectarian, linguistic, or historical designations, I present these sites and allow the reader to make the comparisons themselves. I picked the examples, and so I am gesturing to comparative possibilities, but not stating what aspects of these sites are proper to compare. (168)

In eschewing an explicit agenda, these semblances appear to mirror the 'associative juxtapositions' that we find in the Buddhist monuments and amusement parks themselves— a point Justin seems to acknowledge in passing (167).

It was Oscar Wilde who famously suggested that it is life that imitates art, and not the other way around. We come to experience wine as romantic, or London as the consummately foggy city, precisely because that's how it has been depicted by our poets, novelists and other artists. And perhaps there's some truth to this. But the

riposte is equally pertinent. For, as George Bernard Shaw replied, the unfortunate thing about life imitating art is the art that people choose to imitate.

And, with this, I'd like to raise a couple of questions—the first pertaining to form. Simply put, are these 'associative juxtapositions' – or 'semblances' – really as open-ended as they are meant to appear? Justin has suggested at various points that leisure itself may be a form of action without *telos*, or purpose. And we're made to believe that his style of analysis follows suit—a comparative ecumenism without an agenda. But I do rather wonder whether the denial of purpose embodies an ideal that, as he says of others, may actually tell us more about the author in question – and his views – 'than it does about the culture [that he is] trying to display' (167).

There is secondly a question of historical depth. I began by expressing relief at not having to serve as expert witness. But, at a couple of points, the book touches on places in Indonesia that I happen to know a little something about. And, without wishing to quibble over detail, my sense is that by skating so cleanly over the surface, and taking in but impressionistic views of local practice, at times the most important bits may get lost in the play of 'semblance' and 'comparative gesture'. I am not qualified to say whether this applies to the examples from Japan, Korea and elsewhere—which are obviously far more numerous, and provide the load-bearing support for the book's argument. But it is a bit of a worry when it comes to the examples from Bali and Java.[2] So where does this leave us?

Metabolism

Justin's new book sets out to soar above the skyline, and to appreciate the familiar from a new vantage—rather like the crow in the epigraph lifted from the opening lines of the Williams poem. But it is worth bearing in mind that, although that is how *The Wanderer* begins, it ends with a rather different image—that of baptism in a river of filth. In striving to become a poet, Williams discovers that he must first become one with the polluted city. And therein, I would argue, lies an important lesson. One can

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[2] The two examples in question are the Garuda Wisnu Kencana statue in Bali (see, e.g., Suasta & Connor 1999), and the Taman Mini amusement park in Jakarta (see, e.g, Pemberton 1994).

remain a step removed, as a systems theorist and student of architectural design—a disembodied head stranded in a tropical jungle (174). *Or* one can sink down and submerge oneself in the messiness and the mire – that is, in the *practices* – that bring spaces alive—and make them 'metabolize', to borrow the language of one of Justin's architects. But, in my view, one cannot do both at the same time—that is, without imitating – either wittingly or otherwise – the incoherence of the leisurely and distracting art, which this new book takes as its object. Picking up Justin's own question, how are we to judge whether this timely – and in many ways elegant – study of architectural success-through-failure has itself been a success? My sense is that, rather like its monuments, museums and temples, this will depend largely on what his readers find themselves able to do with it.

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Response
Architects of Buddhist Leisure

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Let me state from the outset, this essay won't have a conclusion. It is a response, but not a conclusion. I despise conclusions. For years, grammar school teachers, college professors, editors, and well-meaning colleagues have forced me to write conclusions. The external reviewers of the initial draft of *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* complained that my book didn't really have a conclusion. I was hoping they wouldn't have time to get to the end—and so wouldn't notice there was something missing. I added one, reluctantly, like I always do, but only under duress. This is probably why I adore Joris-Karl Huysmans's novel, *À Rebours,* and unresolved love stories, like Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* or Elena Ferrante's *Days of Abandonment.* This is why I delight in tales of everyday despair, like Jose Saramago's *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis.* They present problems—some profound, some simple. But they don't pretend they can be solved and resolved. Like Huysman's ridiculously obsessive, impractical and woefully disconnected character, Des Esseintes, I often feel like I am devising useless theories about the connection between certain liquors and certain musical instruments, or trying hopelessly to fix precious jewels to the shell of a living tortoise. I observe. I ruminate. I look for junctures and disjunctures. But I don't resolve. This is also probably why I frustrate the readers of this book, who have so kindly tried to find a way to make sense of it—to give it a proper conclusion.

In trying to make sense of the book they have identified problems, made astute observations and offer practical suggestions. I have learned a great deal about the book from their comments, and I come to it with fresh eyes now. Indeed, they forced me to do something I have never done—read one of my own books from cover to cover. It was not a pleasant experience, like hearing your own voice on a tape recorder. But it wasn't entirely useless either. I now appreciate how Borchert, Fox,

Hansen and Morgan's responses formed a proper conclusion to the book. They provided what I was reluctant to offer. In response to their kind efforts, I want to return the favor and offer observations about two trends I found in their comments: 1) the art of writing against; and 2) the search for the strange attractor.

Writing Against

In my writing, I try to stay positive. I find academic score-settling, scholarly chest puffing, and most hard-fought theoretical arguments to be self-serving and increasingly arbitrary in a world with so many political, social and economic problems. I attempt to argue *for,* instead of arguing *against.* This can be, as my colleagues have pointed out, a bit of a cop-out. In trying to push the field in new directions, I leave readers wondering where my arguments are situated in its history and development.

David Morgan points this out directly. In responding to my description of several Buddhist leisure sites (amusement and memorial parks, museums, sculpture gardens, and the like) as places caught between religion and the secular, as well as public and private, he observes that these leisure places aren't simply benign. They are often 'carefully crafted commercial phenomena that modernity has produced within the virtually universal medium of capital'. Indeed, Morgan is right. In this book I did not write directly about religion and commercialism, or the ways these sites are not only places of leisure and community, but also places of unapologetic capitalism. This was not simply an oversight, though. It was a conscious decision, but one that I should have made explicit. I was writing against the very idea of reducing these sites to commercial enterprises and tools of economic exploitation. However, I wanted to stay positive and push a new approach, instead of writing against one. This is something that David Morgan has been pushing me to do in the past few years, and I have failed to take up his

good advice. Indeed, in a short article I published in his journal – *Material Religion* – two years ago, I wrote against this—and should have brought this into this book.[1] In that piece, I explained directly why I oppose an approach to Buddhist material culture and economic activity that assumes religion shouldn't be involved in commerce.

I argued that, when scholars have criticized modern Buddhism as being increasingly commodified, they have all too often seen it as a reflection of the rise of religious commercialism. Selling Buddhist items like amulets, statues and entrance tickets to Buddhist amusement parks is seen as getting in the way of Buddhist values like simplicity, non-attachment and impermanence. These are studies of longing for the other—longing for a Buddhism that fits more in line with a certain Protestant rationality, which eschews materiality in favor of an undefined spirituality. However, I assert that if one looks closely at these Buddhist businesses they will see a powerful economic tool that benefits tens of thousands of mostly poor or middle-class small business owners, craftspeople and lay communities that are operating monasteries.

Here it should be noted, first, that the profit is widely distributed. Amusement parks, museums, 'hell gardens' and amulet markets are labor-intensive businesses with hundreds of ride operators, craftspeople, food vendors, security and first-aid personnel, etc. These places attract locals, students and monks, as well as pilgrims. These people need places to eat, sleep, and shop. So hundreds, if not thousands, of people profit from these events—including astrologers, the renters of sound equipment (mics, speakers, stages, cables, etc.), local shop-keepers, souvenir makers, florists, motel owners, charter bus companies, and the like. The economy of amulets offers a desperately needed boost to the local economy. Moreover, people from all classes are profiting. Monks and business owners are not simply manipulating people into buying trinkets or riding rollercoasters; they are participating in a micro-economic environment.

Second, as Morgan notes, most of the museums, monuments, and amusement parks I mention in the book are not profitable businesses. There are much better ways to make

money. And some of the places I describe, like the Sanctuary of Truth or Lumbini, actively lose money. However, even when they are profitable businesses, they are not centrally controlled—like a brewery, oil company, toy factory, or automobile producer. Amusement parks, for example, are an industry that the uneducated, non-elite, and manual laborers can break into and become valued workers. The owner of Suối Tiên Amusement Park is wealthy, but employs hundreds of people. And this has really boosted the local economy, helping both the lower and middle classes.

Finally, on a more abstract level, the Buddhist leisure economy creates communities. Families, foreigners, serious practitioners, casual observers, pilgrims, students, the elderly, and young children are brought together to spend time with one another without any particular agenda. This is a result of a form of Buddhist commercialization and commodification that I do not see as destroying Buddhism, or as contrary to Buddhist values.

David Morgan's essay was also valuable because he connected my studies of Buddhist leisure to similar places in Europe. He writes:

> Pleasure parks are, of course, ancient. Virgilian pastoralism was the aristocrat's rural escape from the hectic, competitive, and violent urban space of Rome. Arcadianism was the fantastic evocation of a rustic age of simplicity, richly signified in an urban elite's iconography of shepherds, forest nymphs, minstrels, fauns, and sylvan wilderness. It was a literary escape that was rejuvenated in the Italian Renaissance.

This is an excellent point, and I should have made this connection. They are not only ancient, of course, as one can see by visiting the pilgrimage places of Fatima, Lourdes, Mount Athos, the religious markets in Jerusalem, and so on.

Recently I had the opportunity to help identify Siamese and Lao manuscripts at the Vatican Library. I turned this work trip into a family occasion. While I was in the archive, my children were able to visit famous sites in Rome. After work, I took them to the Vatican Museum, St. Peter's Basilica, and the Catholic gift shops to purchase presents for their relatives and friends at home. Although we were being tourists, and participating in the crass commercialization of

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[1] See McDaniel 2015.

religion, in my mind I was doing something educational and historical. The children were learning something about their heritage. We also met pilgrims and tourists from Uruguay, Serbia, Sierra Leone, the Philippines, Poland, Peru, Vietnam, and India; and my children got to run around with lots of other children. The Vatican can seem like a Catholic Disneyland, but it 'felt' more authentic – and more valuable – because it was religious, even if that was only in my imagination. In talking with hundreds of families and individuals over the years at Buddhist leisure sites in Japan, Thailand, Nepal, etc., I learned that they often felt the same thing. What I wish to suggest is that these affective encounters in Buddhist and other leisure spaces can offer a competing narrative to scholarly lamentations of religious commercialism, emphasizing the importance of the emerging affective turn in Religious and Art Historical Studies.

Anne Hansen and Thomas Borchert, two scholars that have spent their careers pushing Buddhist Studies in new directions in the fields of emotion and vernacular literature (Hansen) and citizenship, politics, ethnicity and education (Borchert) have also encouraged me to be more assertive in my criticism of earlier scholarship. They note that in my first two books I argued against creating false divisions between textualist and ethnographic sides of Buddhist Studies, but that in *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* I have moved in a different direction completely. Between 1996-2011, while I was researching my first two books, the field of Buddhist Studies was changing dramatically (well, as dramatic as scholars can be, which is not so dramatic). By 2012, when I started writing the *Architects of Buddhist Leisure* book in earnest, I was not arguing against the imaginary old fogeys and hardline textualists of Buddhist Studies. I was more arguing against myself.

I have long harbored a sense of self-contempt when it comes to being an academic. I have adored learning Sanskrit and Pali (I like grammar and puzzles), and still spend most of my days reading and cataloging manuscripts. Indeed, while writing the *Architects* book I also published two edited volumes on Lao and Thai manuscripts and ran a three-year Luce grant preserving and digitizing manuscripts. Old texts are my day job, and it is one that makes me feel both unengaged with the world and rather useless. Writing the *Architects* book was my guilty

pleasure. I have argued against my textual/archival-self, because I almost resent the fact that I have the privilege to do this—spending hours and hours in archives, often alone, reading beautiful old manuscripts in which very few people are interested. I learn more and more about less and less. Most days, I am an orientalist, a collector, working in the Ivory basement. It feels selfish, and the guilt weighs like a cloak made from chainmail. I mitigate this guilt by spending time volunteering, working on political campaigns, raising awareness about military abuses in Thailand and Laos, etc. I also try to learn from practicing Buddhists, and from my children, outside of the archive. They remind me not to be so selfish with my time. Therefore, I was motivated not by a criticism of the field, but a criticism of myself.

Sensing this guilt, and the desire to take a break from the archive, Hansen and Borchert write:

> [*Architects of Buddhist Leisure*] is a scholarly book but it is also part travelogue that could be sub-titled 'travels with Jane and Henry' (McDaniel's young children). McDaniel uses a personal and almost experimental voice to address us in *Architects* … McDaniel's voice is a more light-hearted one, suited to chasing around amusement parks and marveling at Buddhist-inspired spectacles … Part of what we think McDaniel wants to do with the familial voice he uses throughout the book … is to ask us why we try to act and think differently as scholars than we do in our everyday lives.

It is important, I believe, to be honest as a scholar in what motivates you, and how research is actually conducted practically. I have had the privilege of being able to combine my work and home life on occasion, and this is something I find fulfilling and important. I also have found, quite surprisingly, that in fieldwork my children are a benefit to my work—in that they both see things that I sometimes miss, and help me to make connections with informants who often have their own children and enjoy combining work and family life as well. They also remind me not to take myself so seriously, that I am in the wonderful business of learning from and about people, places and things. I should have argued for this approach more directly, and more honestly showed how embedded I became in my field sites—since, like the people I was interviewing, I was also spending leisure time with my children.

Strange Attractors

When I was in graduate school I was, like most students, short of money. I worked as a bartender, and would save food money by attending talks on campus that had free buffets and receptions. I noticed over time that the Physics Department had the best food at their talks, and so I went to several interesting Physics lectures and ate well. In one talk on 'strange attractors' and the history of Chaos Theory, I was inspired by talks about the mathematicians Henri Poincaré, David Ruelle, Edward Lorenz and Floris Takens. Although much of the talk was over my head, and I had to research more on my own afterward, I was struck by the term 'strange attractor' and how it helped me to understand – at least partially – the five 'aggregates' (S. *skandha-s*) in Buddhist conceptions of personhood and time.

In Chaos Theory there is a force that is not fully understood (which is why it is called 'strange'), which occurs deep in non-linear dissipative systems involving three or more bodies that have been set in motion. For example, imagine three billiard balls set into motion on a table—they hit each other, head in different directions, come back together at seemingly random points, etc. If this system were permitted to go on forever (as, e.g., in a computer program without the limitations of friction, gravity, and the like), it would become unpredictable deep into the series. However, Poincaré (and I am simplifying this ridiculously!) and others over time saw that, following a series of bifurcations and feedback loops, larger patterns started to form. I never conducted serious research on this topic. (I don't have the skills). But subsequently I had many fruitful conversations with mathematicians and my students about how the five Buddhist aggregates can look chaotic, but over time form patterns that give a person a seemingly coherent 'sense of self'. The fifth aggregate, *Viññāṇa*, was like a strange attractor producing a sense of coherence, but not wholeness or oneness. The strange attractor in mathematics doesn't form predictable patterns, but instead dynamic, slightly changing and forever-modulating events —which lead to others and others. Patterns, yes. Always reliable predictors, no. There is

dynamism without resolution; no need for a conclusion.

For years, I have been fascinated by just this —how can the world be both a series of complex, complicated and seemingly chaotic reactions and interactions (e.g., the neural interactions in the brain; between and within the operational environment and the cognitive environment; between members of various communities; or between humans and the natural world), and yet seem to have order, patterns and even meaning? How can we label such human diversity as 'culture' – and such a vast and complex world as 'earth' – and yet mange to retain some understanding of these terms as pointing to something knowable? Where is the ghost in the machine? Does the brain have a god module? It is not a religious or spiritual question for me. It is a question about the structural mechanics of reality.

Hansen and Borchert note my struggle with efforts to explain the cacophony of Buddhist ritual, material and culture—both in an earlier book and in *Architects of Buddhist Leisure*.

> The idea of 'repertoire' is that people aren't just 'Buddhist' or 'religious'. They draw their values and practices from all kinds of cultural sources and combine them in an individually idiosyncratic fashion, unselfconsciously drawing from or integrating Buddhist teachings about impermanence, values from their parents, hiphop lyrics, the amulet trade, and life lessons from the soccer field. 'Religion', in [*The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk* (2011)] is disorderly, contradictory, and generally 'cacophonous', a noisy descriptor McDaniel uses often in this book when talking about religion (2011: 7, 139-141, 223). As in *Architects*, one of McDaniel's primary approaches to religion in this book is through material culture.

They see that my earlier notion of Buddhists having a religious 'repertoire' helps in making sense of this cacophony. A repertoire includes the words, stock explanations, objects and images that a social actor can 'draw upon while engaged in meaning-making "on the ground"' in the context of interacting with others. These repertoires are never identical for each individual, and there is never one reason a person does something ritually or religiously. However, there are similar tools that each

individual can draw upon when performing and explaining the reasons for their performance.[2]

Fox does not see this tension between cacophony and order in my theory of religious repertoires, but in an as yet unarticulated desire for coherence. In regards to my attempt to bring heteroglossia into a larger idea of complex adaptive systems he writes:

> Heteroglossia is not simply a plurality of voices, but rather the inextricable intertwining of multiple and often incongruous ways of being in the world, and working to transform it … And it is here, I believe – in engaging with the messiness of everyday life – that we may run into a bit of trouble. For, having peered over the edge into the swirling abyss, it seems we are then forced to pull back to a more manageable account of what Justin describes in terms of 'complex adaptive systems'—an idea notably at odds with both Bakhtinian heteroglossia and the 'democracy of objects' characteristic of at least some accounts of material culture. This, I should emphasize, is not necessarily meant as criticism. For it seems rather close to what Justin himself actually wants to say—and, indeed, does say at various points. But, at least on my reading, the book reflects something of an unfinished battle—in which a recalcitrant will to knowledge is holding out against an opposed desire for a more open-ended and inclusive approach to scholarly enquiry'.

Hansen, Borchert, and Fox are right. I want to have my cake and eat it too. Parks, museums, monuments, gardens, hotels, temples and other large creations are not the product of individual genius. They are not the result of a chain of events that starts with an idea popping into a single visionary's head and then being carried to fruition. They are the dynamic and ever-evolving results of thousands of small decisions made by architects, city-planners, local government officials, construction workers who run into problems, materials suppliers, curators, gardeners, ticket-takers, visitors, security guards, etc. The trees, doors, wooden beams, glass panels, etc. also have their own tensile strength, chemical make-up, and lifespans. Each of the people involved in bringing material and ideas together have their own contradictory thoughts, bad moods, good days and changing opinions over time. Yet we retain the idea of a museum or a park as a coherent whole, a product, a thing with an aesthetic, a name and a history. I am in

an unfinished battle, without a conclusion in sight, trying to figure out how chaos and order work together in forming the reality we occupy.

In a more specific sense, I am fascinated and frustrated that such a diverse, old and widespread religion like Buddhism can be understood as a coherent religion. There is little connecting a Geluk Tibetan nun and a Jodo Shinshu priest, or a Thammayut forest monastery and a Jogye urban temple. Moreover, it should go without saying that no two Jodo Shinshu priests are the same. But scholars, tourists and the practitioners themselves understand these diverse elements as being part of Buddhism. Fox suggests that I am actually more hopeful about resolving this issue than I allow myself to believe when he writes:

> Running just beneath the surface of these empirical concerns is, I believe, a more general – and arguably constructive – desire for a life characterized by *coherence*, or at the very least *wholeness*—an issue that I suspect may be more important for Justin's line of questioning than it first appears.

The desire is there—for a dynamic coherence, yes; for wholeness, not so much.

Morgan sees my choice of subject in *Architects* as reflecting my understanding of modern Buddhism as caught between centripetal and centrifugal forces. He writes that

> Even though many of them [the architects and visionaries he studies] did have global visions about the spaces they were constructing, their intentions may not have been realizable or sustained. Rather than offering a cohesive vision about what 'Buddhism' is or should be, the sites he examines seem to have thousands of individual parts that come together through necessity, negotiation, and the logic and demands of local actors and circumstances or 'local optima' (2016: 24-27).

The built spaces themselves sometimes overcome the architects who built them. They show us very clearly that things are not always consciously thought out according to a central blueprint. Or, when they are, the blueprint often gets shoved to the side and forgotten in the 'cacophony' of local factors, negotiations, disputes, brainstorms and alterations over time. As a chapter on Lumbini Park in Nepal shows, built spaces are always changing and being

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[2] See Introduction to McDaniel 2011.

repurposed: 'spaces are complex adaptive systems where material and people co-evolve over time' (2016: 36).

It is the co-evolution that I am glad came through clearly in the book. I may be caught in a back-and-forth scuffle between studying wealthy visionaries and construction workers, monks and laypeople, memorial sites and leisure sites, the seemingly sacred and the consciously profane, as well as places that are profitable and those that are magisterial failures. It is in this vague middle that I find the best puzzles, the most intriguing mysteries, and the best therapy to stave off the guilt of being a person with a less-than-illustrious family history that has found himself teaching at an old and prestigious institution. I am despairingly caught in the middle. Enough said.

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