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Manchukuo, Capitalism and the East Asian Modern:

Transhistorical Desire in *Kishi the Vampire*

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Abstract

This article focuses on Royce Ng's Kishi the Vampire, a lecture performance on the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo (1932–45) and its finance minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896–1987). The article investigates the question of nationalism and pan-Asianism in Manchukuo, Kishi's invention of state-guided capitalism and its implication for East Asia until today, and then offers a historical materialism-inspired theoretical reflection on the mutation of desire under capitalism. The flow of decoded desire in conjunctive capitalism dislodges the man-heaven alignment in a traditional society, manifesting itself in the perversion of desire in the erotic-grotesque culture and necropolitics. Appropriating this aesthetics and focusing on the disenfranchised bodies, Ng's performance aptly enacts this flow of desire.

This article focuses on Hong Kong-based Australian artist Royce Ng's *Kishi the Vampire*,¹ a lecture performance on the Japanese puppet-state of Manchukuo (1932–45) and the invention of East Asian capitalistic system under its finance minister Nobusuke Kishi (1896–1987), portrayed as a vampire. Closely reading *Kishi the Vampire*, the article investigates the question of nationalism and

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pan-Asianism in Manchukuo, through Kishi's invention of state-guided capitalism and its implication for East Asia, to further move to a theoretical reflection on the mutation of desire under capitalism, manifesting in the perversion of desire in the erotic-grotesque culture and necropolitics. These interlocking questions are anchored in concrete historical annotations and, at the same time, construct a meta-level historical materialist frame of trans-historical flows of desire. The artistic project offers a fruitful site where these questions are explored, sometimes by way of interlocution, and sometimes tangentially.

Kishi the Vampire

Manchuria, the modern name given to designate the vast area roughly encompassing northeastern China today, was the homeland of the Manchu nomadic people who overthrew the Chinese Ming dynasty and established Qing in 1644, the last dynasty of imperial China.² Qing intentionally kept the vast land unpopulated to have a buffer zone to Russia. Starting in the 19th century, a large influx of Chinese peasants from the inland moved into the area to nurture the fertile virgin land; Korean peasants, too, moved from the peninsular. Russia's geopolitical interest in the Pacific ports led to the construction of the eastern part of the Trans-Siberian Railway through Manchuria, which Japan seized after the Russo-Japanese War and re-established as South Manchuria Railway Company to infiltrate its political and economic control into this area abundant in natural resources. On 18 September 1931, the Japanese Kwantung army staged a detonation on the rail route near Mukden as an excuse to effectively occupy Manchuria. In 1932, they installed the last Qing emperor Puyi as emperor and established Manchukuo as a constitutional monarchy. Though formerly independent and necessarily allied with local Chinese warlords and elites, Manchukuo was run, *de facto*, by Japanese technocrats and the military. The narrative of *Kishi the Vampire* takes Nobusuke Kishi, the finance minister of Manchukuo, as the main protagonist.

Ng, as the narrator, takes the audience through different historical chapters consisting of grotesque assemblages of spaces and scenes. In the 1927 segment, a heavily industrial landscape emerges out of a haze as the narrator recounts Nobusuke Kishi's absorption of western economic organisational models in the face of increasing Japanese economic stagnation. Nobusuke Kishi served as the vice minister of industry and deputy chief of the Office of Administrative Affairs in Manchukuo from 1936 to 1939. The economic success of Manchukuo largely provided for the Japanese war engine in the years

that followed. Kishi's lavish sexual appetite is explicated in the animation. The dark interiors of brothels are permeated with a sickly atmosphere, with scenes from Japanese monsters and erotic manga serving as a backdrop, in which a young girl's body is consumed by a ghastly vampire-like figure, and enlarged sexual organs and splashed blood can be spotted. In the second segment we move to the year 1937, which marked the beginning of Japan's war on China and the proliferation of production in Manchukuo as the end and no longer the means; this is accompanied in the animation by the full revelation of the interconnected spaces—the industrial structures, brothels and drug dens form but one monster body with an ominous skeleton in the centre. In the third segment, the narrative fast-forwards to 1987 and finds Nobusuke Kishi on his deathbed while East Asia's political future is being shaped. Here, a skeleton figure dances to a backdrop of what looks like a pan-Asian conference room, with national flags of post-war Asian countries in the background and fleeting images of Nobusuke Kishi's grandson Shinzo Abe, as well as Park Chung-Hee, anticipating their impact on the Asian political arena. It is narrated that the legal heir of Kishi's economic policy is post-war South Korea, as Park steered the country into industrialisation following the model Kishi set forth.

In *Kishi the Vampire*, Ng appears on stage with an original Japanese propaganda kimono³ produced in the late 1930s, featuring on its back the map of

FIGURE 1: The kimono Ng wears showing Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Korea. Photograph courtesy of Sun Siwei

FIGURE 2: The kimono Ng wears showing Japanese-occupied Manchuria and Korea (in the after-performance talk). Photograph courtesy of Sun Siwei

Japanese-ruled Manchuria and Korea, with a newspaper clipping portraying the Mukden Incident. The sheer historical weight of such a rare historical artefact amounts to the unique performativity of *Kishi the Vampire* as a “performative museum”. This is in part because of the museological nature—explicitly pertaining to ethnographic museums—of the kimono piece. At the same time, an affective history is embodied in and enacted by the museological object—the kimono used in *Kishi the Vampire*. If displaying such a kimono in a museum setting affords a critical distance with which questions of history and modernity could be reflected upon, then the immediacy of wearing the kimono in this piece conjures up the militarist and nationalist frenzy that still haunts post-war East Asia today. This is where the affect of a museological artefact transgresses historical timeframes and lends itself to new syntheses—syntheses that point to new forms of domination and violence.

Moreover, embodying the museological object brings into focus the materiality of the body and the biopolitics and necropolitics it is implicated in, pertinent to the piece. This works in synergy with the grotesque animation in the backdrop as Ng pieces together a compelling narrative with historical facts, told through real and fictive personal accounts. The animation illustrates with arresting details a series of architectural assemblage, where

FIGURE 3: The erotic-grotesque animation accompanying the performance. Photograph courtesy of Sun Siwei

FIGURES 4, 5: The erotic-grotesque animation accompanying the performance. Photographs courtesy of Sun Siwei

FIGURES 6, 7: The assemblage of offices, private spaces and industrial structures. Photographs courtesy of Sun Siwei

the spaces of brothels, cabins, offices and industrial structures flow into each other, and where Kishi the protagonist moves through. At the same time, bodies of human labour, bodies exploited in sex and acted upon with violence make up part of the assemblage and momentary stations visited in the animation, suggesting the connection between slave labour and death, and the perversion of desire under the capitalistic machine, which will be analysed later.

Thinking along the notion of a “performative museum” and how a historical, or perhaps transhistorical, museum could be enacted differently, the artist writes:

This is done to avoid the inherent problems of the museum, namely the power inscribing practices of collecting, labeling, teleological narrativising, embalming and encasing of objects as well as eschew the colonial history of the modern European museum by positing an unstable, immaterial place whose architecture is ephemeral and its living exhibits speak of a disordered history of ghostly objects, spaces and subaltern voices which is a history of the modern Asian state without the corrupted ideological underpinnings of the traditional museum.⁴

In *Kishi the Vampire* and in other works, Ng actively engages with historical research and skilfully transforms objects of anthropological interest into quasi objects—at once material and immaterial, blurring the lines between historical research, critical ethnography, artistic production and presentation, thereby questioning the politics of representation.

Manchukuo in the Context of Nationalism and Pan-Asianism

East Asia, in the first couples of decades in the 20th century, was brimming with discourses of modernisation, various strands of nationalism, anti-imperialism and republicanism. The case of Manchukuo affords a lens for understanding the East Asian modern, as Prasenjit Duara’s seminal study on Manchukuo reveals. The state-building project of Manchukuo and its quest for national identity was born of the post-World War I international order, as the institutional consequences of imperial nationalism in an emergent postcolonial time of mobilisation and identity politics.⁵ It was the time when nationalism and national identity served not exclusively the will of the people under the principle of self-determination, but was more used as a leverage of imperialist enterprises of the developed states, mostly European nation-states and, in this case, Japan.

Following the Bolsheviks' "Declaration of the Rights of Peoples", in which peoples of the empire were bestowed the rights to national self-determination and essentially to forming sovereign states, US President Woodrow Wilson embraced the self-determination principle and popularised it as the fundamental way for a post-imperial world. Yet, as Michael A. Reynolds rightly points out, the principle was accommodated when it served the interests of the great powers and bent when it did not. Consequently, backed by the British and the French, Poland was strategically attributed a part which is ethnographically one-third non-Polish so to create a buffer zone between Germany and Russia. In the Middle East, out of interest in connecting with the overseas colonies as well as creating a power balance against Russia, the British and French created "mandate" zones and effectively took control over Iraq and Palestine, and Syria and Lebanon respectively.⁶

Under this light of national self-determination, it is possible to understand the Japanese effort of narrating a continuous history of one nomadic/semi-nomadic people under different names, with a history going back to the second century BCE, to which the Manchurians are attributed to. Duara sharply observes that, by comparison, the Chinese historical account of Manchuria in the 1920s did not appeal to, or not yet conscious enough to appeal to a "deep history" ethnography testifying that Manchuria had always been Chinese. Instead the account emphasised practical facts—that 30 million Chinese immigrants had been living in Manchuria at the time—more than historical claims.⁷

At the same time, Japan profiled Manchukuo as a nation based on the alliance of five ethnic peoples—Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Manchurian and Mongolian. For example, it tolerated different religious practices and, in fact, mobilised religious leaders of the respective peoples. Yet most of the time the polyethnic alliance appeared merely rhetoric, when Japanese privilege could be seen from wage to access to goods, not to mention the wartime fascist mobilisation of non-Japanese forced labour, which we will see later.

The other discursive resource for the polyethnic Manchukuo was pan-Asianism. The Kyoto School has been largely condemned for association with the idea of Pan-Asianism and "Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere", an economic, cultural and political collective entity encompassing parts of Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia guided by Japan. The Kyoto School is a group of 20th-century Japanese thinkers who developed original thinking based on the interlocution of Eastern and Western philosophies. Kyoto School thinkers have drawn on Confucian ideas of *tenmei* (*tianming* in Chinese), or the "mandate of heaven" to characterise a regime whose rule is legitimised by destiny, moral authority, practical effectiveness and raw power.⁸ Further,

they have illustrated a “regional leadership by consent”, which entails that the elites should “inspire, lead, support and listen if the requisite measure of public cooperation and economic effectiveness, at the level of the individual member of society, was to be attained”.⁹ They saw this “Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere” as both end and means based on the prediction that the permanent solution to Japan’s global vulnerability lay in the sustained improvement of its capacity to wage a protracted defence of its regional base in East Asia and the Western Pacific.¹⁰ The Kyoto School thinkers rejected implementing this idea through force, yet militant Japanese ultranationalists used it to their end and led Japan to wage wars. Recently, however, scholars have called for reading the Kyoto School beyond apologetic positions, in a similar move that rescues Heidegger’s philosophy from his biography tainted by the Nazi chapter.

Meticulously combing through texts of the key figures in the Kyoto School, Christopher S. Goto-Jones attempts to investigate their philosophy as philosophy in itself. Not to take a revisionist approach, he evaluates the validity of the “world-historical standpoint” (*sekaishiteki tachiba*) developed by the Kyoto School as “an attempt (qua intellectuals) to transcend the question of national loyalties”.¹¹ En route, we see the world-historical standpoint as presented by Keiji Nishitani as following the historical movement from the Mediterranean, Atlantic to arrive at the Pacific:

Naturally, this does not mean that the Mediterranean and the Atlantic have lost their meaning, but only that the Pacific, which has not played a world historical role before, has graduated onto the stage of world history—which is to say that these three aforementioned oceans have now reached the point of communicating as though they were a single living creature. In other words, the world’s major oceans have, in political terms, united to form a single ocean.¹²

Carefully weighing the historical context of this writing and reading it without the synthesis to the imperial ambitions, Goto-Jones posits that, “Nishitani does not go so far as to argue that the Japanese nation should impose its will on the world, but his caution revolves around his doubts about whether Japan knows what to do, rather than about the morality of such action per se.”¹³

I will return to the idea of the resonance between major oceans to form a “single ocean” at the end of the article. The way that ideas of Asian alliances translated into military plans, however, was utterly another story. The Japanese ultranationalists were motivated by the vision of an inevitable holy war between the East and West and took to their task to rescue and help the East Asian and Southeast Asian neighbours. This was reflected in the gesture

of Japan renouncing its extraterritorial rights in Manchuria and elsewhere, while in daily practice, in the labour market and governmental structures, it is clear that the Japanese superiority was the norm and hierarchy was cutthroat. Still, Duara argues that it is impossible to fully understand why the military encouraged the rapid modernisation and industrial buildup in Manchuria without grasping its framing within Pan-Asianism and without working closely with alliances.¹⁴ The following section examines the rapid industrialisation of Manchuria and its post-war resonance.

Kishi and the Industrialisation of East Asia

In the backdrop animation, office spaces, factories and brothels are abstracted and assembled around a giant skeleton to form one machine. They are rendered in splashy colours and infused in a mysterious, sickly haze. Royce Ng narrates the Japanese plan of industrialisation in Manchuria. Nobusuke Kishi served at prominent positions as the vice minister of industry and deputy chief of the Office of Administrative Affairs in Manchukuo from 1936 to 1939. A strong believer in state-led industrial capitalism, he used Manchukuo as his test ground and organised its economy with guided investment plans, utilising forced labour and funds from the drug trade that largely provided for the Japanese war engine later. Big conglomerates such as Nissan made profits by following the governmental guidance to invest in key sectors. Having observed industrial organisations in western countries, Kishi admired American Taylorist labour management, economic planning, and industrial rationalisation and Germany's adaptation of technologist-engineers together with business management and planning. Combining these methods with the Soviet-style five-year plan, Kishi's "industrial rationalisation" kick started the Manchurian industrialisation. This came down well with Japanese ultranationalists in the army, who had legalised the possibility of overtaking Japan's economy in the case of war, and were on way to implement this. For them, "economic planning was explicitly war as a continuation of business by other means".¹⁵ Kishi's plan was so successful that the heavy industry in Manchuria accounted for up to 90 per cent of Chinese GDP in the post-war decades.

Kishi was notorious for his racialisation of the Chinese as inhuman and, in effect, treating them as low-cost or unremunerated labour to the point of dehumanisation, or as "robot slaves".¹⁶ Mark W. Driscoll's study, taking a materialist historical perspective, illustrates the bodies of coolies, tenant farmers and opium addicts under the Kishi regime, which powered the Japanese war-time economic engine. These economically and politically disenfranchised bodies are captured in a machine of necropolitics, and form a shadowy

counterpoint to Kishi the protagonist. I will discuss this necropolitical aspect in detail later.

The historical significance of Manchukuo did not stop when it dissolved. After the war Kishi was imprisoned as a “Class A” war crimes suspect but was never indicted, for he was believed to be capable of steering the country in a pro-American direction. He made his political comeback and became prime minister in 1957. His post-war vision for Japan followed the same logic of state-led capitalistic economy to make the country’s economy strong and, ultimately, to seek rearmament for Japan to achieve true independence from America’s influence, which his grandson, Shinzo Abe, is committed to. The Korean military dictator Park Chung-Hee, father to the impeached Korean president Park Geun-hye, who was trained in Japanese military academy in Manchukuo, befriended Kishi in the post-war period and normalised the relation to Japan, through which Korea received aid, loans and commercial credits from Japan to kickstart the economic rebuild.¹⁷

With a dancing skeleton animation in flashy pink light in the background, Ng reveals the post-war political DNA of East Asia and Southeast Asia as flashbacks to Kishi in his deathbed. The narrative goes:

Kishi lay dying on the tatami mat, his wife, children and grandson surrounded him. Yoko had married well, and he was proud of his grandson, he had already spoken with some of his friends from the wild Manchukuo days and Shinzo’s political career was mapped out.¹⁸ [...] By the 1960’s every Asian government had come grovelling to Japan and asked for expertise and capital to fund their own version of the Japanese developmental state. His crowning achievement had been when the Korean President Park Chung-Hee, who he’d known in Manchukuo, had agreed to turn over reparations for suffering inflicted during colonialism into Japanese foreign direct investment. The wartime plan to create a ‘Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere’ had come to fruition with the rise of the East Asian Tiger Economies who had all learnt from Kishi’s Manchurian experiment.¹⁹

The implication of Kishi’s policy in office during and after Manchukuo attested to the underlying political landscape of East Asia: the death of Manchukuo was the birth of East Asia. Duara puts it in a larger political frame as follows:

While imperialism was certainly preserved in this hegemony, it also dictated relations between center and periphery different from those of the older colonies. The new program involved more alliance,

autonomy, investment, development, identity, and competitiveness. In many ways, Manchukuo prefigured the phenomenon of a junior partner or a client state dominated by hegemonic states such as the United States and the Soviet Union in the post-war period.²⁰

Ultimately—though it was implicit in the performance—Kishi's model is exercised to the maximal scale in today's China, which has become the world's second-largest economy within three decades of economic reform. At a national and global scale, Chinese capitalism has the characteristics of both a fully-fledged market economy and strong state intervention with state-owned enterprises and state-guided public-private investments in strategic sectors. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), announced in 2013 as a platform for regional multilateral cooperation, interlinks China with regions on the ancient Silk Road(s), the trade routes through greater Central Asia and the maritime trade routes connecting East Asia to Africa and Europe. To date, BRI has expanded to around 70 countries in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Oceania, incorporating one-third of global GDP and one quarter of global foreign investment flows. The economic policies and, specifically, the more favourable and less political conditions of investments, lend themselves to an interpretation as alliance and brotherhood, while at the same replicating the structural logic of the hegemonic states.

Transhistorical Movements: Desiring Production

This part takes a historical-materialism-inspired Deleuzian perspective to unpack the operation of capitalism and the organisation of desire and power in the rapid development of Manchukuo and beyond. The meta-level theoretical lens here focuses on the materialist arrangements of labour, goods and desire to analyse the operational logic of capitalism and its consequences on the human bodies in relation to desire. It offers a theoretical reflection that takes a tangential line of flight from the concrete historical, political-economic studies on Manchukuo undertaken above, and moves into a field where movements of materialities account for the emergence of social phenomena like *hentai*. This is, in turn, is made tangible by the erotic grotesque aesthetics employed in the artistic work.

In Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy of history,²¹ there is a primary flow of desire that submerges everything and gets mitigated through the historical stages of development. Whereas pre-capitalistic societies code desire through inscription, the capitalistic machine frees the decoded flow of desire. Inscription entails marking bodies (human and non-human bodies as well as abstract bodies) so to create representations of things and to attribute

meanings, and this in turn represses the flux of desire. This process lies underneath the development of the social formation; in other words, desire is socialised by coding. There is only desire and the social, for social production is molar and consolidated, and desiring-production is molecular, dispersed and unruly.²²

In the next stage of Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy of history, the despot comes in and imposes a new alliance system, and places himself in direct filiation with the deity. This can be observed when there arises a spiritual empire or when a new empire replaces the old one. What comes with it is an absolute structure of hierarchy that the blocks of debt become "an infinite relation in the form of the tribute".²³ The despotic state dreads the flow of production and exchange and tries to rule by tightening control. Sometimes this takes the form of creating an absolutist national identity in order to tame the people, as seen earlier in the creation of a multiethnic Manchukuo with the Japanese taking up the *tenmei*. Yet what will overcome the despot state is the capitalistic machine, which decodes these flows of desire. The decoded flows must encounter and form conjunctions: flows of decoded soil sold as private property, flows of decoded money that circulates as capital, flows of workers who are now deterritorialised to be mere labour in the service of work itself or the capitalistic machine.²⁴ Capital always needs new territories, be it new overseas markets or the once solid entities now liquidated, decoded, like the human body in the service of a necropolitical machine. Ultimately, capital begets capital, bypassing the production of commodities.

Working by conjunction to the decoded flow of desire and to deterritorialised labour as it does, how does the capitalist machine still need the state? The role of the state is not to be underestimated because the state widens the limits of the capitalistic economy, especially within an order of military expenditures.

The role of a politico-military-economic complex is the more manifest in that it guarantees the extraction of human surplus value on the periphery and in the appropriated zones of the centre, but also because it engenders for its own part an enormous machinic surplus value by mobilising the resources of knowledge and information capital, and finally because it absorbs the greater part of the surplus value produced.²⁵

As a capitalist machine, Manchukuo was able to absorb forces that may seem to otherwise undermine it. Normally, what amounts to subversion of the central power is a form of nomadic, decentralised organisation. In history,

the appropriation of maritime tributary routes proves this theory. Out of the official historical tributary system that tied China and its neighbouring countries symbolically, and to varying degree politically, emerged what Japanese economic historian Takeshi Hamashita calls the “inner organicity of Asia”. He highlights the offshoot network that thwarts the official tributary system which, after a long process, had transformed into a private trade system at the beginning of the 19th century.²⁶ Furthermore, studies suggest that the form of trade activities in Southeast Asia at that time included smuggling and arms trafficking. This development signals a “breaking out” of the tributary system. Here, the historical development of networks is precisely the result of shifts in the existing relations between centre and periphery.²⁷ A century later, Manchukuo’s governors utilised for their own benefit the connection to the Japanese hustlers and traffickers, who had established a local network of intelligence and trade.²⁸ The network of traffickers signals the nomadic mode of operation, breaking out of the pyramidal power structure and following its own decoded flow of desire with “an alternate current that disrupts signifying projects”.²⁹ Exactly this decoded flow was deftly appropriated by the Manchukuo state, showing a new stage of power structure that Galloway and Thacker call empire: “like a network, empire is not reducible to any single state power, nor does it follow an architecture of pyramidal hierarchy. Empire is fluid, flexible, dynamic, and far-reaching.”³⁰

Manchukuo’s ideology-ridden nation-building project was characteristic of a despotic state that installs and subjugates its people to an absolute power, yet the economic policy of extracting infinite surplus through perpetuating production, and the production itself becoming an end and no longer the means, fell closely in line with the capitalistic machine. The primitive, despotic and capitalist societies do not follow any teleological or linear, development and the “earlier” orders may well live in symbiotic relation to a “later” order. Hence Manchukuo conflates the despotic and the capitalist machines, making it on the one hand totalising and immanent, and on the other conjunctive and expansive, as seen in the unprecedented efficiency of post-war Tiger economies and, later, in Chinese state capitalism.

Necropolitics: Desire, Death and Erotic-Grotesque Aesthetics

While *Kishi the Vampire* makes a compelling revisit to a particular chapter in history, the aesthetics that Royce Ng adopts, inspired by the erotic-grotesque culture of Japan and especially its visual manifestations from the early 20th century, marks an equally important pathway to unpacking the Manchukuo complex in the context of capitalism.

The figure of the schizo emerges out of the capitalistic stage of decoded desire. Deleuze and Guattari's compelling study on schizophrenia as materialist consequence on the subconscious level of the subject suggests a philosophical parallel to understanding the erotic grotesque culture in the modern period in Japan.

Inspired by Mark Driscoll's study on the connection of capitalism and the erotic-grotesque in Japan, the marriage of which erodes the nerves and infiltrates into the human sensorium, a grim-faced, bloodsucking Kishi, bodies of exhausted young girls showered in blood, and bony opiumnated bodies of Chinese workers loom in the animation in *Kishi the Vampire*. Fetishism around female bodies coupled with *hentai*—perverted—desires, exemplified by the novels of Endogawa Rampo filled with psychotics, perverts and vampires, prevailed in the urban life of interwar Tokyo.

Sociologist Akagami Yoshitsuge (1892–1953) theorised this phenomenon in his *The Face of Erotic-Grotesque Society* (*Ryōki no shakaisō*), published in 1931 as the new “immediate society” (*chokusetsu shakai*).³¹ This is when “[h]uman desiring production in its neuro-political mode of fascination and enthralled stupefaction is sold to the worker-consumer for the wage substitutes of pleasure, pleasure which now comes with ideological instructions on how to be an obedient purchaser in this new regime”.³² The fetishism around bodies and sex goes beyond the original stage of Marxist commodity fetishisation, which is defined by commodities severed from its production process, thereby appearing to have a life of its own. The lure of pleasure coincides with the furthering of capitalism where bodies are mined for value under the condition of the new mediated “immediate” that substitutes more authentic, unalienated modes of desire. This heralds what would come to be known decades later as affect economy. For what makes these fetish images and the actions they provoke desirable goes almost unnoticed in the flow of affect effectuated by media, which captivates and invokes emotions before our cognitive registration. This continuous modulation, variation and intensification of affective response in real time attests to the fact that “bodily affect is mined for value”,³³ forming the ever-pervasive intimacy between economy and our daily lives. Patricia Clough's comment on the affect economy rings true almost 90 years after Akagami's diagnosis on the production of desire:

the circuit from affect to emotion is attached to a circulation of images meant to simulate desire-already-satisfied, demand-already-met, as capital extracts value from affect—around consumer confidence, political fears, etc., such that the difference between commodification and labour, production and reproduction, are collapsed in the modulation of the capacity to circulate affect.³⁴

Further studies in the field of sex and fetish culture point to deeper connections between the body, desire and the social. Drawing on medical studies, spearhead of Japanese sexology Tanaka Kogai suggested that the erotic drives expressed in *hentai*, including sadism, masochism and fetishism, are but products of modern civilisation and capitalistic material culture, so much so that he “called it the height of hypocrisy for modern states to attempt to repress that which their advanced capitalism constantly stimulates: new affects and new pleasures”.³⁵ Similarly, the figures around the Japanese Psychiatric Association held the view that humans expressed aspects of *hentai* because Japanese and global capitalist society were themselves fundamentally *hentai*. Consequently, they recast crime as multicausal, relative to the metropolitan environment that it is embedded in. They even normalised and de-pathologised “split-personality disorder” as simply “multiple personality”.³⁶

This line of argument brilliantly anticipated Deleuze and Guattari’s study of the close relation between capitalism and schizophrenia in their *Anti-Oedipus*. Here, as we have seen above, different stages of history are interwoven through the materialistic analysis of desire and desiring production, to arrive at the current world order in which capitalism most effectively rides on the flow of decoded desire and appropriates production for the production of capital. Deleuze and Guattari identify that the social and political repression permeated by desiring production results in schizophrenic, neurotic or perverted behaviours, effectively expanding the configuration of the subject beyond the Freudian libidinal drive and linking psychic repression with social repression. Deleuze puts it thus in an interview, “we have never seen a schizophrenic delirium that is not firstly about race, racism, politics, that does not begin in all directions from history, that does not involve culture, that does not speak of continents, kingdoms, and so forth”.³⁷ The cure then, in a strange resonance with Tanaka decades earlier, is “rather an affair of desiring-production, of getting it going and giving it somewhere to go other than into the void”.³⁸ This is not to diverge into a study on pathology and psychoanalysis, but to suggest that there is a material assemblage in capitalism conditioning the individual’s behaviours, and that the schizophrenia serves as a conceptual figuration for the organisation of self-reproducing desire.

In the latest stage of the omnipresent capitalist machine, “[d]eath is felt rising from within and desire itself becomes the death instinct, latency, but it also passes over into these flows that carry the seeds of a new life”.³⁹ In the streets of Asakusa, where *hentai* pleasure was consumed in the interwar period, sociologist and ethnographer Gonda Yasunosuke questioned how the purchase price of pleasure in this new stage of capitalism seemed to be

human life itself.⁴⁰ This force of capitalism operates not just in tandem with biopolitics that discipline bodies in particular production settings or social relations such as the factory or school, but it further incorporates life itself as the abstracted site for production. This new necropolitical domination of the racialised, and economically and politically disenfranchised bodies keeps them in a form of the living dead.⁴¹

It is on the level of necropolitics that bodies of the coolies, workers, opium addicts and the young girls, whether in Japan or in Manchuria, are implicated. The theorisation of erotics and normalisation of borderline fetish behaviours were coextensive to the wars and violence (both sexual and general) in the time of Japanese imperial expansion, which returned to the metropolis capital of Tokyo in the form of the erotic grotesque visual culture. For Ng, this invokes the parallel in the argument made by the German sociologist Iris Darman that “the practice of sadomasochism that emerged in 19th-century Europe is a transference of the master/slave dialectic and the mediating disciplinary tool of the whip lashing the bodies of slaves from the colonial periphery back to the hegemonic centre”.⁴²

Ng’s own appropriation of the erotic-grotesque aesthetics is productive for it renders the perverted desire effectuated by necropolitics tangible. If, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the schizophrenic process manifests how decoded desire works, then such stark visual and aggressively sensual presentation following the *hentai* aesthetics becomes a potent enactment of the flow desire that transpired the urban areas of Tokyo and Hsinking (capital of Manchukuo), the bodies of factory workers, sex slaves and opium addicts, as well as the seemingly endless stream of capital. Ng aligns his motivation behind exploring the erotic grotesque to the larger colonial social-economical context and asks “whether opium produced an aesthetic of ‘erotic-grotesque’ culture based on subjective indigenous responses to the un-natural economic relations of modernity into which Asian peoples were suddenly implicated”.⁴³ Ng further draws on the research of Michael Taussig in *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, which analyses the production of magical concepts as a reaction to capitalist development in Third World countries.⁴⁴ Reading the style of Latin American “magical realism” as one which expresses “the seemingly opposed perspectives of a pragmatic, practical and tangible approach to reality and an acceptance of magic and superstition”,⁴⁵ Ng speculates on an analogous model for the subversive culture of the “erotic-grotesque” in Asian art and popular culture.

In the last scene of *Kishi the Vampire*, a ghastly skeleton dances to the backdrop of a pan-Asian conference room, with national flags of post-war Asian countries in the background. Ng voices the last line in the performance:

Kishi began coughing and savoured the taste of blood on his tongue and remembered the stories by Rampo that he read as a young man in the 1920s, they weren't tigers, they were monsters, vampires that would suck the life from workers, the attention of consumers and even the pleasure from sex to drink of that flowing red blood.⁴⁶

From the perspective of necropolitics, Ng's depiction of Kishi as a vampire is a logical extension to what he is known as, “昭和の妖怪”, or “the Shōwa era monster”. It is no coincidence that Deleuze and Guattari render the capital in capitalism as vampire: “Capital is dead labour, that vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks.”⁴⁷ Kishi embodies the bloodsucker who tirelessly extracts surplus value from industrial production on the one hand and fulfils his excessive sexual appetite on the other. Death or, more precisely, death-in-life is produced in Kishi's necropolitical machine. The vampire is hence the perfect variation of the schizo, both producing and produced by decoded flows of desire set loose by capitalism, looking to form new conjunctions and no longer obeying the law of subordination and filiation. In Deleuze and Guattari, a pathological schizo wanders through fields of intensities and “identifies” with different names in history. In fact, the names do not signify real people, rather states of intensities, and are “effects”, for example, “God is *the feeling* of omnipotence, divine fury, judgement, and so on, while Napoleon might be the *feeling* of triumph, persecution, victory, defeat and so on”.⁴⁸ In the last moment of Kishi's life rendered as a state of delirium by the artist, Kishi passes the states of intensities and “identifies” with the flow of conjunctive capitalism, a force set in place by him in Manchuria later influencing the Four East Asian Tiger economies.

It is important to note here that the comparison of the Japanese war machine to the conjunctive operations of desire of a capitalist machine is not a way to play down the horror of militancy, nor is this likening Kishi to vampire, the latter itself a creature gone awry in the schizo capitalistic order, to exonerate Kishi from his wilful decisions. Rather, the vampire is a figuration of capitalistic desire, used in a personal and impersonal sense. Similarly, analysing living networks, Thacker and Galloway hold that the contemporary capitalistic system we live in contains “an anonymity, a nonhuman component, which consistently questions common notions of action, causality, and control”.⁴⁹

Kishi the Vampire has come to an end. Yet the “aftertaste” of what the artist calls an “economic horror story” can be profound. For one thing, is there an outside to the entanglement of capitalism, desire, violence and perversion?

To grapple with the desire of the time and shifts in power is exactly what the Kyoto School thinkers set out to do. Kitaro Nishida theorised an idea of

absolute nothingness inspired both by the Buddhism concept of *Śūnyatā* (emptiness) and western philosophy. The fundamental emptiness lies underneath everything and, as such, it is a primary concept and not secondary to being. Nishida models the world in such a way that there is not an individual that has the experience, but that there is an experience that has the individual. Methodologically, instead of establishing a continuum beyond subject and object from the inside-out, Nishida recasts his method: moving from the outside in, he hence adopts terms like “pure experience” to talk about the anonymous, impersonal quality of experience.⁵⁰

In his book *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics*, philosopher Yuk Hui traces various modernisation attempts in philosophy by East Asian thinkers. He seems to read that total war serves as an accelerationist strategy and, as such, provides an answer to the philosophy of negation in the Kyoto School.⁵¹ A philosophical-historical account should use caution when reading history through ideas to qualify each other, as in this parallel reading between the Kyoto School and Japan’s war engagements. Even though some discourses may have indirectly led to grave consequences, following a materialist standpoint, total war is less the cause than the effect of expansive capitalism. Eugene Thacker has also worked through the absolute nothingness in the Kyoto School, and sees that therein lies the potential of a “post-national, global philosophy”.⁵² The “single ocean” rhetoric mentioned earlier may ring true here. This connection to a global axis reminds me of Confucian scholars in 19th-century Nanjing who believed that ritual and self-cultivation can achieve moral betterment that ultimately radiates to the whole empire. They hence promoted virtuous conducts by repairing shrines commemorating historical persons and engaged vigorously in compiling local gazetteers. The idea of *ganying*, resonance, was crucial, for all the work done in the self-nurturing could influence the cosmic harmony of *qi*, energy, and hence had a direct relation to enhancing state power. In this sense “local actors could engage in attempts at state building”.⁵³

These practices all but attempt to recuperate what is beyond the immediate, at times resorting to a cosmological order, at times to absolute negation, at times from inside out, and at times from outside in. As such, they provide a counter-image to the schizo in the wish to rectify the decoded desire. The crucial question here is whether this pure experience rather pertains to an order of the man-heaven alignment in the despotic regime than is able to effectuate any change in conjunctive capitalism, where “capital (or the liberation of matters from formed bodies) is the tendency of matter itself”.⁵⁴ One has to be aware of the differential scales between the sway of capitalism and the more local ones on which one can reground resonance.

Conclusion

Thinking along with Royce Ng's *Kishi the Vampire*, the article has interwoven a history of Manchukuo with key agents in its politics and economy and beyond, as well as a conceptual history surrounding Manchukuo and East Asia. The figuration of Kishi and/as vampire in the performance marks a departure of the piece from merely a historical/documentarian account. Rather, the performance grounds the history in the body by shedding light on bodies under necropolitical capture and enacting the erotic-grotesque. Manchukuo provides a case in point, reflecting the operation of desiring machine from the desire kept at bay in a Confucian order to the desire of self-perpetuating capitalism: on the cultural-discursive level, its making of nationalism and multi-ethnic alliance services the semi-colonial rule; on the economic level, it heralds the advanced capitalistic stage where production is for the sake of production and war serves as the expanded means of production, and where the "nomadic" opium trade is absorbed to reinforce the state; and on the necropolitical level of the body, desire embodied by the schizo manifests itself as perversion, resulting in the erotic-grotesque visual and material culture. While not exonerating economic and military horror, locating desire in war, violence and crime is admittedly against the grain of moralist historiography. Yet as the intellectual history coextensive to Manchukuo evinces, there are philosophical discussions on being and negation, desire and the individual, governance and coexistence that are worthy of revisiting, not least because some of the topics are regaining traction in the long aftermath of 20th-century history.

BIOGRAPHY

Mi You is a curator, researcher and academic staff at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne. Her long-term research and curatorial project takes the Silk Road as a figuration for deep-time, decentralised and nomadic imagery. Under this rubric she has curated a series of performative programs at Asian Culture Center Theater in Gwangju, South Korea and the inaugural Ulaanbaatar International Media Art Festival, Mongolia (2016).

Her academic interests are in performance philosophy, science and technology studies, and political philosophy. Her writings appear in *Performance Research*, *PARSE*, *MaHKUscript*, *Yishu* and *LEAP*, among others.

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NOTES

- ¹ Premiered as part of the *Transgression, Syncretism* programme curated by You Mi, commissioned and produced by Asia Culture Center Theater (Gwangju: South Korea, 11–13 Mar. 2016).
- ² The recent debates around “New Qing History” are interesting to follow yet beyond the scope of this article, especially in comparison to the constructed “deep history” of Manchuria for the purpose of installing Manchukuo.
- ³ The kimono was kindly provided by Johan Jacobs Museum, Zurich, which acquired it from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
- ⁴ Royce Ng, unpublished research statement (2017).
- ⁵ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 77.
- ⁶ Michael A. Reynolds, *Shattering Empires: The Clash and Collapse of the Ottoman and Russian Empires, 1908–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 254.
- ⁷ Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, p. 54.
- ⁸ David Williams, *The Philosophy of Japanese Wartime Resistance: A Reading, with Commentary, of the Complete Texts of the Kyoto School Discussions of “The Standpoint of World History and Japan”*, pp. 24–5.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 54–5.
- ¹⁰ Williams, *The Philosophy of Japanese Wartime Resistance* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), pp. 55–6.
- ¹¹ Christopher S. Goto-Jones, *Political Philosophy in Japan: Nishida, The Kyoto School, And Co-Prosperity* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), p. 13.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 107.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.
- ¹⁴ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, p. 62.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 267–8.
- ¹⁶ Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan’s Imperialism, 1895–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 266.
- ¹⁷ See John Delury, “The Kishi Effect: A Political Genealogy of Japan-ROK Relations”, *Asian Perspective* 39, 3 (2015): 441–60.
- ¹⁸ Yoko Kishi was the daughter of Nobusuke Kishi and mother of Shinzo Abe.
- ¹⁹ Royce Ng, *Kishi the Vampire* (script), 2016.
- ²⁰ Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern*, p. 78.
- ²¹ See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

- 22 Ian Buchanan, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: A Reader's Guide* (London and New York, NY: Continuum, 2008), pp. 89, 96.
- 23 Ibid., p. 194.
- 24 Ibid., pp. 223–5.
- 25 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 235.
- 26 See Takeshi Hamashita, *Early Modern China's International Moment: The Tributary Trade System and the Early Modern Asian Economic Sphere*, tr. Zhu Yingui and Ouyang Fei (Beijing: CASS, 1999).
- 27 Wang Hui, “The politics of imagining Asia: a genealogical analysis”, tr. Matthew A. Hale, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 8, 1 (2007), pp. 22.
- 28 Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945*, pp. 232–3.
- 29 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 257.
- 30 Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker, *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), p. 27.
- 31 Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945*, p. 140.
- 32 Ibid., p. 141.
- 33 Patricia Clough, “The Affective Turn: Political Economy, Biomedicine and Bodies”, *Theory Culture Society* 25, 1 (2008): 16.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, p. 150.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 157–9.
- 37 Félix Guattari, *Chaosophy: Texts and Interviews 1972–1977* (Cambridge: Semiotext(e)/MIT Press, 2009), p. 80.
- 38 Buchanan, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, p. 30.
- 39 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 223.
- 40 Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque*, p. 143.
- 41 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics”, *Public Culture* 15, 1 (2003): 21.
- 42 Ng, unpublished research statement.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). Quoted in Ng, unpublished research statement.
- 45 Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994), p. 24. Quoted in Ng, unpublished research statement.
- 46 Ng, *Kishi the Vampire* (script).
- 47 Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 228.
- 48 Buchanan, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus*, p. 80.

- ⁴⁹ Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit*, p. 81.
- ⁵⁰ Eugene Thacker, *Starry Speculative Corpse: Horror of Philosophy (Vol 2)* (Washington, WA: Zero Books, 2015), p. 51.
- ⁵¹ Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Falmouth: Urbanomics, 2016), p. 257.
- ⁵² Thacker, *Starry Speculative Corpse*, p. 49.
- ⁵³ See Chuck Wooldridge, *City of Virtues: Nanjing in an Age of Utopian Visions* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2015).
- ⁵⁴ Claire Colebrook, "Introduction", in *Deleuze and History*, ed. Jeffery A. Bell and Claire Colebrook (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 8.

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