

MEDIATING BUDDHISM



The Investigation of Buddha Brands in London: Resetting Realism in Religious Studies

Inauguraldissertation

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Abstract

Mediating Buddhism wants to “simply” study what the entity named “Buddhism” *is* and how to approach it. This leads to the following research questions:

- (1) What could be the starting point for studying Buddhism without focusing on religion alone, and what role could Buddhist mediators — images, concepts, or events — play in this?
- (2) Could the understanding of Buddhism be improved by comprehending it not as religion or secularism alone but also through other perspectives like science, art, technology, or ethics?
- (3) What impact does the study of mediational Buddhism have on religious studies as a discipline?
- (4) What are the implications of this study for the material religion approach, and how could these be improved?
- (5) Is Buddhism an object somewhere “out there,” and how can we better understand what Buddhism is, if it is anything?
- (6) How are actors like scientists, things, and events, gathered by Buddhist mediators, and vice versa?
- (7) Why was Bruno Latour (1947–2022) chosen as the theoretical background, not anyone else?
- (8) When studying Buddha brands, what is the relationship between religious studies and realism: representative, critical, or agnostic?

The importance of *Mediating Buddhism* lies in its irrealist approach to studying Buddhism, which challenges traditional scientific realism in religious studies and explores the role of Buddhist mediators beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, ultimately shedding new light on understanding what Buddhism *is*. *Mediating Buddhism* aims to challenge traditional views of Buddhism by exploring its empty nature and how to approach it, with the support of Bruno Latour’s theoretical framework, which offers new perspectives and insights into this exciting field of study.

Notes

I have tried to use gender-neutral language; however, I have not modified quotes that were gendered in the original. Sometimes “their” is used as an alternative to “his” or “her”; sometimes, the singular masculine and feminine pronouns are used alternately. In chapter 6, “Articulative Buddhism-as-Mediators,” the geographical radius of described and illustrated samples increases over-locally beyond London or the UK if there are no or too few related examples. However, these are not included in the respective numbers and are used solely for illustration and better understanding. In the reference list, publishing places are not altered if the city name has changed. If a company’s headquarters is not explicitly stated, it is always London. All translations into English are my own unless otherwise noted. All italics are by the respective author unless explicitly stated otherwise. Buddhist terms are written in the Sanskrit version unless explicitly stated otherwise. Many of the websites I worked on are marked in the reference list with “last modified 2020” and in the main text with “2020,” as this was mainly the period in which I worked on these sources, although these have probably been updated since then. This work is predominantly essayistic in style and thus reflects the snowball or network character of Latour’s benefits for religious studies. The gender citation ratio¹ is 50,87% female (292) to 49,13% male (282).

1. The citation ratio shows the number of authors quoted at least once in the reference list; in brackets is the absolute number.

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Dedication

Think about the strangeness of today's situation. Thirty, forty years ago, we were still debating about what the future will be: communist, fascist, capitalist, whatever. Today, nobody even debates these issues. We all silently accept global capitalism is here to stay. On the other hand, we are obsessed with cosmic catastrophes: the whole life on earth disintegrating, because of some virus, because of an asteroid hitting the earth, and so on. So the paradox is, that it's much easier to imagine the end of all life on earth than a much more modest radical change in capitalism.

—Žižek 2005, 3:22–4:16

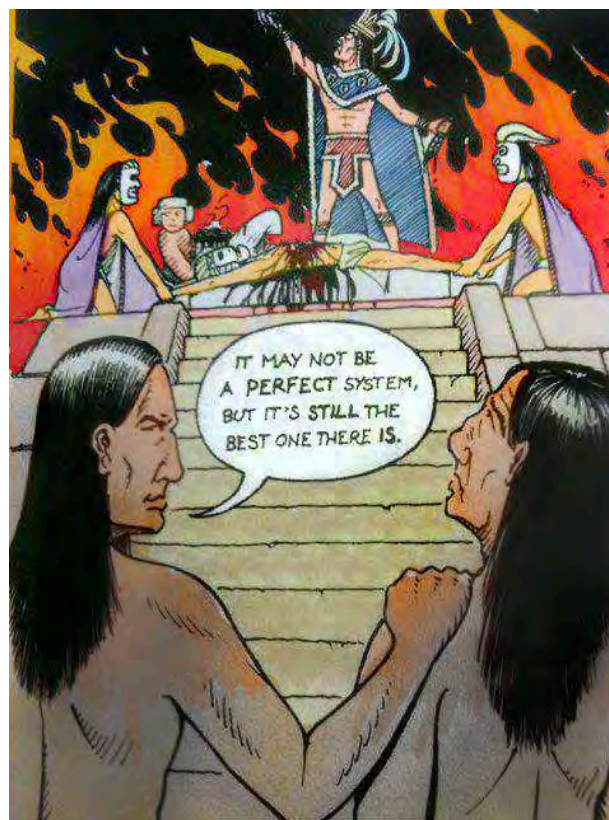


FIGURE 0.1. Indians are discussing the question of whether capitalism is a sound system or not. *Facebook* post by Zlazloj Zlizek, 2016.

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines, and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network.

—Foucault 2002, 25–26

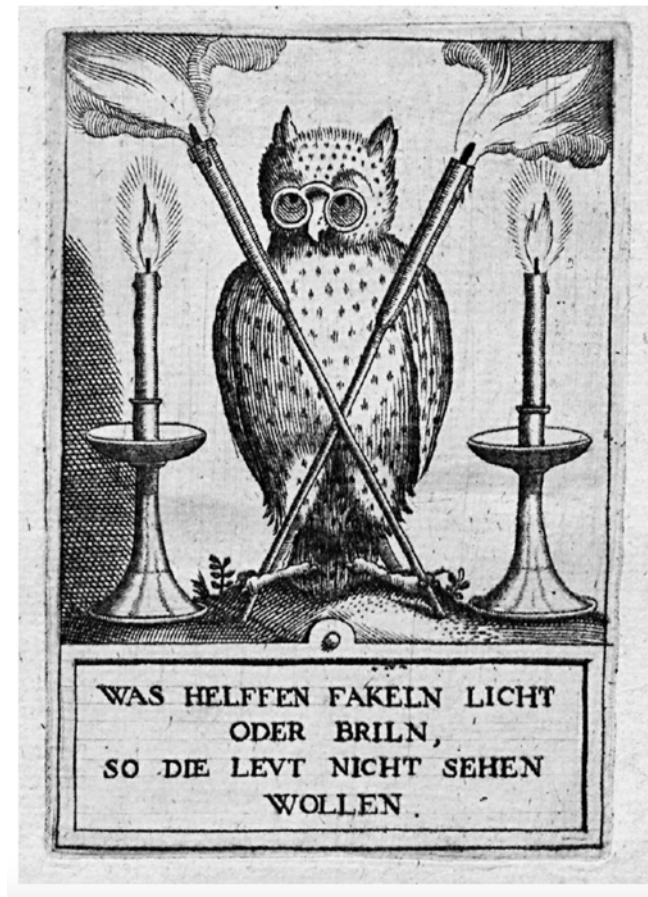


FIGURE 0.2. The owl holds torches and wears glasses while standing next to lighted candles. Copperplate engraving, 6.7*9.6cm. Illustration by Heinrich Khunrath, 1609.

RELIGION:

1. a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe.
3. the life or state of a monk, nun, etc.: to enter religion.
4. the practice of religious beliefs; ritual observance of faith.
5. something one believes in and follows devotedly; a point or matter of ethics or conscience.
6. Archaic, strict faithfulness; devotion: a religion to one's vow — Idiom9. get religion, Informal. [And] acquire a deep conviction of the validity of religious beliefs and practices.

... TO RESOLVE TO MEND ONE'S ERRANT WAYS:

GOD SAVE RELIGION

—T-shirt tag from *Religion* clothing store

For my grandfather Heinz,
to whom I would have loved to present this work

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Introduction

In Shoreditch (a district in London¹ known as a haven for alternative people and lifestyles), there is a clothing store named *Religion* at 154 Brick Lane (fig. 1.1). In its logo, one can see in the letter “o” a cross, perhaps a reference to Christian religious traditions. Under the name in white writing on a black surface, there is a second logo with the naming *Religion*, the address, and two kneeling and praying skeletons to the left and right. In the shop as well as the online store, one can buy — among other things — T-shirts with *Religion* imprints, those kneeling and praying skeletons, and various so-called “karma and nirvana dresses” without needing to explain why they are specifically named “nirvāṇa” or “karma.”



FIGURE 1.1. *Religion* clothing store at 154 Brick Lane, London (UK).

One encounters Buddha — in England and elsewhere — not only in Buddhist monasteries but also when buying a pack of tea or a pair of jeans, signing a contract with an internet service provider, consuming films, books, and music, taking a yoga class, work in the health and beauty industry, eat business lunch, organize events and buy gin and beer, go to the dentist, buy a handbag, or watch advertising. The face of the Buddha smiles at the viewer. One very soon gets the feeling

1. In this study, case studies are from London unless mentioned otherwise.

that Buddhist mediators² and brands are everywhere (for sale!), even an orange-colored and 3D-printed pop Buddha with the face of the former president of the United States, Donald Trump³ (fig. 1.2) or small figures of Homer Simpson as Buddha, with a smiling face, closed eyes, fat belly, meditating on a doughnut, and holding a rosary in his right and a pretzel in his left hand (fig. 1.3).



FIGURE 1.2. *Left*, Donald Trump pop Buddha by 3D Cauldron.

FIGURE 1.3. *Right*, Homer Simpson figure as the Buddha by Kidrobot.

This includes companies like *Nike* and *Google* (Bentley 2015, Levin 2017) advertising with Buddhist mediators, aesthetics⁴ and designs, the so-called “Nike track mafia” promoting “London’s

2. This study defines Buddhist mediators as analogous to everything King Midas touches becoming gold; thus, Buddhism includes everything Buddhist mediators (i.e., images, branding, artifacts, etc.) touch.

3. Besides Donald Trump, *3D Cauldron* prints at least 70 different kinds of Buddhas: for instance, in the shape of pop culture figures like Hulk, Chewbacca, Yoda, Deadpool, Sauron, Donald Duck, Pikachu, Wolverine, prominent historical persons like Albert Einstein and Charles Darwin, as well as various animals like goats, alpacas, cats, hippos or rhinos.

4. In this work, the terms “mediation”, “media” or “mediators” (Morgan 2007a, 2008, Hjarvard 2008, 2016, Meyer 2008, 2011, 2012, 2020, Ragnedda 2009, Campbell 2010, Hjarvard and Lövheim 2012, Mitchell 2012, Brosius and Heidbrink 2013, Gentili 2013, Latour 2013c “Mediation”, Gauthier 2014, Latour and Citton 2014b, Beinhauer-Köhler 2015, Borup 2016, Krüger 2018) is used instead of the terms “materialities” (Rambelli 2007, Morgan 2010, 2016, 2018, Prohl 2010a, 2012a, 2021a, 2021b, Vásquez 2011, Houtman and Meyer 2012, Meyer 2012, Hazard 2013, 2019, Latour 2013c “Materials,” “Matter, Materialism,” Beinhauer-Köhler 2015, Jones and Matthews-Jones 2015, Plate 2015, Bräunlein 2016, 2017, Hutchings and McKenzie 2016, Jones 2016, Borup and Rambelli 2019, Brox 2019, Stock 2021) or “aesthetics.” (Cancik and Mohr 1988, Prohl 2004a, 2010a, A. Koch 2007, 2013, 2015a, 2017, Meyer 2008, Graf and Prohl 2013, Latour 2013c “Aesthetic, Aestheticization,” Prohl 2015b, 2015e, Grieser and Johnston 2017, A. Koch and Wilkens 2019).

On the one hand, “materialism” is problematic for many reasons, but most of all, its inherent idealism in describing material things (Latour 2007); on the other hand, others like Inken Prohl have replaced “aesthetics” with “materialities,” for instance, because of it being judgemental and dichotomizing. The terms “mediation” or “mediator” can be viewed as more descriptive and not constricted to materialism, aesthetics, or “things.” For a definition of this term, see the introductory chapter 2.1.5. “Medium, Mediation, Mediator, Immutable Mobiles, and Play.”

Best Mindful Running Routes” (Purcell 2018), the appearance of Keanu Reeves as Buddha Siddhartha Gautama in Bernardo Bertolucci’s famous movie *Little Buddha* — an Italian, French and British co-production — from 1993, and, as Lomas, Cartwright, Edginton, and Ridge 2014 have found out, Buddhism became a religion of wellbeing, especially appealing to men in London. Why is the domain “BuddhaBranding.com” still for sale (BuddhaBranding 2020)?⁵

In 2018, Hana Yeung Pui Wan — a *taz* journalist — noted that in significant parts of Asia, the placement of a Buddha was well thought out. In contrast, in Europe, it could be found on the toilet (fig. 1.4). Nonetheless, there may be some sites in Asia where, like in Japan, Buddha figures can also be found on toilets. According to her European observations, Buddha could be placed anywhere because he represents “peace and tranquility.” Nevertheless, this could irritate non-European Buddhists from Asia when they meet Buddha while visiting the toilet. Instead, she recommends: “Carry Buddha in your heart, you don’t need one in your home” (Hana Yeung Pui Wan 2018; translated by author). Other uses of Buddhas in Germany include Buddha figures in shop windows (fig. 1.5) or the combination of garden gnomes (German: “Gartenzwerg”) with Buddhas — the so-called *Zwuddha* — which was designed by Sascha Rimasch, a German meditation teacher, and is even available in a pop art edition in neon pink, green and blue colors (fig. 1.6). Since 2011, in Paris there is the *ZZZen - Bar À Sieste*, where clients can sleep during their lunch break.

In 2017, Tim Graf argued in his PhD thesis, *Brands of Zen: Kitō jūin in Contemporary Japanese Sōtō Zen Buddhism*, that Buddhism has become the most known non-European religion of the modern world, standing for peace, smile, and happiness (6). The last decade has seen a massive uprising in global images of entanglements of Buddhism with “modernity”⁶: fusions with popular culture, consumerism, and neoliberalism.

5. There is much literature on the relationship between Buddhism and capitalism (Irizarry 2015, Brox and Williams-Oerberg 2017). Some seem derogatory, like the philosopher Thomas Metzinger’s argument that Buddha or Buddhist lounges appear with specific music, which he calls “completely ridiculous esoteric” forms of Buddhism that would serve to deny mortality as being products in an esoteric supermarket. Similarly, the religious studies scholar Michael von Brück even argues that Buddhism is chic, en vogue, and a “Hollywood phenomenon” and, therefore, only a temporary entity. In his own words: “We can all laugh at this. Symbols are flattened, kitsched, sold off” (Reinsch 2018; translated by author).

6. Thousands of academics have written thousands of books on this complicated term. Still, in this thesis, Bruno Latour’s understanding is used, about which he has been writing for more than four decades with a pretty innovative perspective. See the introductory chapter 2.1.1. “Towards Some Working Definitions: Modernity, Modern, Modernization Front, and the Moderns.”

Especially in the so-called “West,” these images, aesthetics, and mediations become predominantly fueled with positivity, happiness, and enlightenment. On the other hand, when these same images of a smiling, colorful Buddha with DJ headphones on a flyer advertising a bar (Lesley 2014) came to Myanmar⁷ in December 2014, there was massive outrage and charges of this commercial breaching the so-called “Religion Act” (AFP 2014). In March 2015, the three actors that were involved in the *VGastro.bar* — the general manager Philip Blackwood, the owner U Tun Thurein and the manager U Htut Ko Ko Lwin — were sentenced to two years for “insulting religion” and “hurting religious feelings.” Eventually, Blackwood was released after eight months and flew back to New Zealand (Aquino 2014). While Buddhist mediators and branding work well in the so-called “West,” this is not true in Asian countries like Myanmar. What does this say about secularization and the supposed relation between the *secular*⁸ and *religious* when the same Buddhist mediators flying around the world work in some places but not others?



FIGURE 1.4. *Top*, Various Buddha figures in the bathroom. 2018.

FIGURE 1.5. *Bottom left*, A Buddha figure in a shop window in *Karstadt* (Germany). 2018.

FIGURE 1.6. *Bottom right*, Colorful pop art *Zwuddha* figures by Sascha Rimasch.

7. On Buddhism, violence, and activism in Myanmar, see Jerryson (2017, 2018), Jerryson and Juergensmeyer (2010), and Walton and Jerryson (2016).

8. A more detailed discussion on secularism follows in chapter 1 “The Historical Relations Between the *Secular and Religious*.”

1. Research Questions and Aims

With Jørn Borup, this thesis asks who “owns” Buddhism (2020) and how politics are entangled in the study of Buddhism (2021). When is Buddhism used for identity politics, and when is it culturally appropriated? Inken Prohl (2022a) has researched “woke” religious studies and reminds one not to forget the lived social realities of religions like Buddhism.

It can be observed that European actors are socially entangled with Buddhist mediators and brands in many ways. Numerous historical situations and discourses like trade, travel, art, science, spirituality, colonialism, politics, or the invention of wor(l)ds can be named as reasons for this. Can these encounters, products, and markets of Buddhist mediators be considered secular, postsecular, or even religious (again)? How do scholars of religion study these encounters, and do they have to define themselves and their discipline as quite the opposite of these three labels? Alternatively, is science a secular project, regardless of the object it is supposed to investigate?

On the one hand, this thesis’ argument is, therefore, twofold. First, these Buddhist mediators, products, and markets have never been secular or religious alone; instead, they have been both, the dividing line is not as evident as it may seem, and these mediators are much more hybrid than purified. Second, when the object studied by religious studies is secular and religious simultaneously, and it is not that purified but somewhat hybrid from the beginning, how could this specific science be “purified” and not hybrid? Neither the supposed object — religious or secular beings — nor the supposed subject of religious studies — scholars, journals, and conferences — are purified secular nor purified religious, but rather both, which makes the object and subject more equal than different. The supposed difference between religious studies as a discipline and its objects (for instance, Prohl 2014c) has been an abstraction, a thing that scholars of religion repeatedly *say*. Still, at the same time, they often *act* in quite the other way.

On the other hand, the basic premise of this dissertation is similar to Tim Graf’s (2017, 18) finding that it is no longer possible to distinguish qualitatively between religious and non-religious products and market spaces. The research question of this thesis adds a Latourian — named after the French sociologist as well as anthropologist and philosopher, who in 1975 completed his PhD thesis in theology, Bruno Latour (1947—2022) — twist to this observation by repeating his claim: “[a]nd they claim to be secularized! How poorly they know themselves” (Latour 2013a, 157). This is not the same as arguing that “secular vs. religious” is only a “construction” — and that one wins anything by “constructivism” — since constructivism could not capture the characteristics of a “good construction” (Latour 2018, 235–236). Latour calls European secularism a kind of

“antifetishism” and “piety,” which, as a European religion, would be essentially “impossible to secularize” (Latour 2013a, 168).

Consumable, popular culture and lifestyle versions of the Buddha reflect some hitherto non-observed side of Buddhism and its pragmatic and performative aspects as a lived religion. Buddhism became the most widely known non-European religion in the modern world as Buddha stands for peace, smiling, happiness, and contentment (Graf 2017, 6). This dissertation thesis offers suggestions to understand better the recent transformations, references, knowledge, sciences, traditions and repetitions, passions, and networks of bricoleuring Buddhism and neoliberalism in the shape of mediators, brands, and branding. The argument is that secularism, branding, and mediators are always a way of speaking religiously in the Latourian sense (Herrnstein-Smith 2016, Müller 2016) of converting people.

In this thesis, Buddhism and secularization are understood as a *bricolage*, in the sense of how Véronique Altglas has defined the overlapping fields of “bricolage” (borrowing from Claude Lévi Strauss (1966)), “exoticism,” “syncretism,” and “hybridity” (Altglas 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2020a, 2020b) and Bruno Latour’s (2010c)⁹ notion of “composition” — which is kind of a patchwork entity, something new that is made up of various other parts. This “making up of new things” is a creative, innovative, and generative process whose effects, markets, mediators, customers, etc., can be long-lasting. The question is not whether the practice of bricolage or bricoleuring is good or bad or whether it is working. However, as Kathryn Lofton (2017) has argued, “[t]he question is whether we have done as much as we can to resist the smooth surfaces handed to us by each of them. Humanistic thinking has been a place for such resistance, a place where surfaces are exposed as such. It should still be” (244).

In her book *From Yoga to Kabbalah* (2014a), Altglas named one chapter “Religious Exoticism, Belonging, and Identities: The Discomfort of Bricolage” (63—118), which is precisely how, in this thesis, the concepts of bricolage and Buddhism are understood: *discomforting*. However, what happens precisely through the bricolage of Buddhism and secularization, and why does it appear discomfortingly? Secularizing narratives aim for progress, individuality, and happiness. These narratives even replaced religion’s functions of collective identities and an

9. In his *Compositionist Manifesto* (2010), Latour highlighted several meanings of “composition,” like putting things together, the proximity to “compromise,” and “compost.” Most importantly, they all share the notion that composition can fail. For Latour, it is irrelevant whether something is composed (or, in other words: “constructed”) or not, but instead, it is crucial whether it is “*well* or *badly* composed.” Anything composed may be decomposed at any time (473—474).

assumed “beyond.” One could say that neoliberal and consumptionist narratives “liberated” Buddhism from Buddhist religious traditions and turned religion mainstream. Buddha and Buddhism seem highly attractive for neoliberal consumption — i.e., secularization — habits, so there is no place in contemporary “Western”¹⁰ and “non-Western” societies where Buddhist mediators do not appear. To this day, “Buddhified” neoliberal identities seem to be the most energizing, attractive, and positive products on the market. Still, they might be a luxury that is temporary and unstable. They may become unaffordable when secular neoliberalism gives up a “collective sense” since it will hardly be capable of finding collective solutions to huge generation-spanning questions like the widening gap between rich and poor, the impending natural collapse — or Gaia — global pandemics like COVID-19 and the co-development of information and biotechnology. Without answers to these game-changing processes, secularizing, neoliberal and consumerist utopias are fragile. However, when jobs, purchasing power, and life, in general, become endangered, maybe more is needed than fragile utopias, but rather a collective sensitivity that includes religious traditions for negotiating these issues.

To sum it up, *Mediating Buddhism* wants to “simply” study what the entity named “Buddhism” *is* and how to approach it. This leads to the following research questions:

- (1) What could be the starting point for studying Buddhism without focusing on religion alone, and what role could Buddhist mediators — images, concepts, or events — play in this?
- (2) Could the understanding of Buddhism be improved by comprehending it not as religion or secularism alone but also through other perspectives like science, art, technology, or ethics?
- (3) What impact does the study of mediational Buddhism have on religious studies as a discipline?
- (4) What are the implications of this study for the material religion approach, and how could these be improved?

10. In this thesis, the terms “the West” and “the East” are either used with the prefix “so-called” or placed in quotation marks. These terms refer to societies where the transformation of Buddhist mediators works or not. Of course, there are exceptions, the “East” is not uniform, and Myanmar and Japan are not alike in their treatment of Buddha figures; however, it can be said that the majority of “Eastern” societies differ from the majority of “Western” societies in consent to change traditional uses of Buddha mediations, e.g., Buddha tattoos, Buddha bars, Buddha bowls, etc. For Latour’s view on the term “West,” see the introductory chapter 2.1.7. “Culture(s), the West, and Occidentalism.”

- (5) Is Buddhism an object somewhere “out there,” and how can we better understand what Buddhism is, if it is anything?
- (6) How are actors like scientists, things, and events, gathered by Buddhist mediators, and vice versa?
- (7) Why was Bruno Latour (1947–2022) chosen as the theoretical background, not anyone else?
- (8) When studying Buddha brands, what is the relationship between religious studies and realism: representative, critical, or agnostic?

The importance of *Mediating Buddhism* lies in its irrealist approach to studying Buddhism, which challenges traditional scientific realism in religious studies and explores the role of Buddhist mediators beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, ultimately shedding new light on understanding what Buddhism *is*. *Mediating Buddhism* aims to challenge traditional views of Buddhism by exploring its empty nature and how to approach it, with the support of Bruno Latour’s theoretical framework, which offers new perspectives and insights into this exciting field of study.

2. *Mediating Buddhism*: Defining the Object of Study

2.1. Towards Some Working Definitions

To formulate the argument of *Mediating Buddhism*, it is first necessary to define some terms that will be dealt with in this study. The terms “religion” and “secularism” will be briefly discussed as they are explained in more detail in chapter 1, “The Historical Relations Between the *Secular and Religious*.” The terms presented in this chapter are (i) modernity, modern, modernization front and the moderns, (ii) religion and secularism, (iii) Buddha and Buddhism, (iv) capitalism, consumerism, and neoliberalism, (v) brands and branding, as well as (vi) culture(s), the West and occidentalism.

2.1.1. Modernity, Modern, Modernization Front, and the Moderns

The primary input on all terms connected with “modernity” comes from one of the pioneers of the so-called actor-network theory (in the following: ANT) — and science studies in general — Bruno Latour (Gertenbach and Laux 2019), once called “the Hegel of our times” by the French newspaper *Le Monde* (Maniglier 2012, 6). Latour has famously stated that “[n]o one has ever been modern. Modernity has never begun. There has never been a modern world” (Latour 1993, 47).

According to — his famous international and interdisciplinary, both well-read and well-criticized book — *We have never been Modern* (1993), modernity refers to a kind of master narrative that tells the story of emancipation based on the distinction between reason/knowledge and illusion/belief, and which — through a so-called “modernization front” — is universally found everywhere in space and time and distinguishes an archaic past from an emancipated future in all collectives. Latour argues that the moderns have a different history than the one they insist on (36). Latour defines “modernity” as referring to the “passage of time,” thus a rupture between the past and the future (Latour 1993, 10). This “passage of time” is so crucial for modern actors, which means that everything in the past is “eliminated forever,” and time becomes “an irreversible arrow,” “capitalization,” and “progress.” That sense of time produces the symptoms of archaism and the fear of a “fall back into the Dark Ages” (69). However, this movement in time might have never happened, and while moderns sorted elements to make times, they kept arguing the opposite (76). Potentially, the modern world is a total and irreversible invention that breaks with the past right into the future, or — as Latour has put it — “[t]he moderns’ flight into the future” (73). Fundamental to “modernity” is the myth of radical change (48) and the need for “purity” (66).

This thesis follows Bruno Latour’s argument as he describes “being modern” as feeling the “dual power” between “rationality and obscurantism, between false ideology and true science” (36). Exactly twenty years later than *We have never been Modern* (1993) — when shifting from networks to modes of existence (Leclercq 2011, Laux 2016) — in *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns* (Latour 2013a), Latour defined the “modernization front” as something “[l]ike the American frontier, or frontiers in the Amazon rainforest,” which is “seemingly unstoppable progress of a line that clearly distinguishes the past from the future,” the irrational and the rational (Latour 2013c; “Modernization Front”).

Latour (2013a, 2020) uses the term “modes of existence”¹¹ — a term coined by philosopher Étienne Souriau (1943) — as an alternative to the classical “what is?” question, whereby he presents fifteen modes to define modernity: tradition, transformation, practice, technology, art, science, politics, law, religion, passion, organization, ethics, network, multiplicity, and simplification.¹²

What is modern for Latour is the contradiction between nature and society and purification and mediation (62).¹³ This “modern constitution” has used four kinds of so-called “acids” to maintain these repertoires: “naturalization, sociologization, discursivization, and finally, the forgetting of Being” (67). This does not mean that modernity is simply a construction or illusion but is also not an essence. Modernity has long had the power to represent, accelerate, and summarize

11. Latour has explained “modes of existence” in the following way: “Thus, the concept of a “mode of existence” allows us to give an answer to the classic “what is?” question (“what is technology, art, economics, etc?”) that is different to the typical essence-based answer. The answer becomes something like: what are the beings we are likely to encounter if we ask ourselves the question of their existence? What are their ways of being? What is their ontology? And, in particular, how does one detect their own requirements? On the basis of what hesitation, what category mistake, what crossing? And, finally, what do they leave in their wake when we follow their particular trajectory through the numerous networks ([NET]) in which we are able to detect them? [...] Whereas ontology has often based itself on the being-as-being, AIME seeks to define the being-as-other. [...] This concept allows us to revisit all the classic questions of philosophy in a different key to that of the “what is it?” question (this, more often than not, is a “knowledge” key, uniquely); the modes become variants, declensions and differentiations in terms of the type of access to beings - it is not a question of knowledge-type access only. This ontological pluralism allows for an opening up into anthropology via the localizing of modes. [...] The use of the term “existence” should not be understood to mean that the only question about these beings is: “Do they exist or not?” On the contrary, it allows us to ask further questions than those of their presence and to be interested in their “ways of being” or their “modes of extension.”” (Latour 2013c; “Modes of Existence”).

12. Latour allows anyone to add another mode, but he predetermines in a rather complicated way how one should prove that this possible new mode truly *is* a new mode: it has to have all fifteen modes in it, as well as all possible crossings, which makes at least 120 combinations (Latour 2013c). For instance, the inclusion of “media” [MED] (Latour and Citton 2014b) or “raising hell” [RAI]/[HELL] (Kyriakides 2014) has been discussed.

This thesis uses these fifteen modes under different but similar names and will not use his mostly three-letter abbreviations. Nonetheless, their original names and abbreviations are reproduction [REP], metamorphosis [MET], habit [REP], technology [TEC], fiction [FIC], reference [REF], politics [POL], law [LAW], religion [REL], attachment [ATT], organization [ORG], morality [MOR], network [NET], preposition [PRE] and double-click [DC].

13. Latour’s modern “Internal Great Divide” (nature vs. culture) accounts for the “External Great Divide” (“we vs. the Other”) (99). The so-called “modern constitution” has created four repertoires that have to be true at the same time but to be observed separately: (1) Nature is *transcendent* through the separation of society; (2) society is *immanent* through the consideration of citizens as wholly free to create society artificially; (3) there is a separation of power between nature and society, namely nature without society and society without nature, which produces a multitude of tabooed quasi-objects — or hybrids like Donna Haraway’s “cyborgs” (1991) — and the hiding of translation networks as a counterpart to “purification;” and (4) the “crossed-out God” stabilizes this dualistic and asymmetrical mechanism through “arbitration,” albeit without presence or power (139).

This infamous Latourian “crossed-out God, relegated to the sidelines” (13) will be dealt with in detail in chapter 1.3.5.3. “The “Crossed-Out” God, or: Modernity as a Theological Project of Transcendence.”

others. It still exists in the present and history, “but it no longer defines what has happened to us” (40). Thus, modernity was effective as “an active performing” (144–145).

2.1.2. Religion and Secularism

This work is not the first to suggest that Buddhist mediators are very much bound to what Kathryn Lofton (2011) has defined as a religious “troika” and Inken Prohl as “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112): this includes (i) “religious traditions,” (ii) popular culture with religious aesthetics or mediators, and (iii) popular culture as religion. Lofton argues that “[t]his neat troika perpetuates the sense that religion and culture are categories that can be untangled from one another, that “religion” and “popular culture” are separable components of a recipe for “culture””. Therefore, for many people, *religion in popular culture* is seen as profane (like in Madonna videos), and *popular culture in religion* is seen as blatant commercialization (like malls in megachurches). However, for Lofton, “to study modern religion [...] requires thinking of these categories as conjoined, and not distinct” (Lofton 2011, 10; emphasis added). (10).

On the one hand, this Prohlian “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112) seems to work in the United States, continental Europe, and the UK. On the other hand, in some Asian countries, the “religious tradition” branch still dominates. In the so-called “West,” these effects of combining religion and popular culture are often negatively interpreted. However, even the critiques of these contemporary developments agree that “Buddha branding is everywhere” (Ferrier 2017) and has substantial positive or negative consequences. The negative ones rise around a discourse of “inauthenticity” and how these “secular” transformations of Buddhism might “ruin” a so-called “Buddhist real” (Wallis 2018). The positive ones detect some “liberation” from religious traditions and the possibility of using Buddhist mediators as tripartite religious and, therefore, too religious or possibly simply neoliberal and losing all religious functions. Nonetheless, according to Inken Prohl (2016), this would lead to a growth of neoliberalism and consumerism.

This study also follows Latour’s understanding of religion, which is about a rupture or change in time, the generation of actors with a mission to save people, and the search for achieving the “end times” (2013a, 488–489).

2.1.3. *Buddha and Buddhism*

What is “Buddhism”?¹⁴ After several hundred years of the term “Buddhism” in Europe and more than 2,500 years since the supposed appearance of Siddhartha Buddha Gautama, any quick answer becomes complicated. Where does the knowledge of this phenomenon called Buddhism come from, and how is this information generated? This question is answered in a fraction of a second in popular journals, talk shows, and within the public discourse. It is often connected with labels like “peace,” “religion,” “laughing Buddha,” or “meditation,” but where do these attributions to something named “Buddhism” come from (Borup 2016)? What is so fascinating about Buddhism (Prohl 2020b)? Scott Mitchell (2012) stated that media representations of Buddhism are “generally favorable toward Buddhism,” and they “can reveal much about how Buddhism is transmitted into traditionally non-Buddhist culture” (62). As Donald S. Lopez Jr. has argued, the modern, Western attributions to Buddhism are manifold (Lopez Jr. 2005, 1). According to Tim Graf (2017), there is a wide range of ascriptions to Buddhism understood as “an atheistic religion,” “a rational religion compatible with the natural sciences,” “a peaceful world religion,” or even “not a religion at all” (11).

Until recently, questions on the origins of these attributions within the sciences were largely ignored. Eurocentric and Christian-centric presuppositions (Ahn 1997) still work as a lens through which Buddhism is discussed. Conceptions of Buddhism as an a-historian and monolithic block mirror the need for more focus on context- and actor-specific approaches within religious studies (Prohl 2006a, Graf 2017, 11). The answers to the question of what Buddhism *is* — at least in Europe — have a prehistory that dates back to the 16th century and the project of “modernity” itself. Is there even a singular Buddhism, or should one — due to the multiplicity of different “schools” — speak about “Buddhisms” in the plural at least — like Lopez Jr. (1995a) and Karen Derris and

14. Of course, there is a multitude of literature on Buddhism in general, including introductions to Buddhism (Faure 1998, Lopez Jr. 2001, Keown 2013, Harris 2021) and Zen Buddhism (Prohl 2010b), Buddhism in Europe (Prohl 2014b) and the West (Borup 2013b), the Buddha (Lopez Jr. 2012, 2016a and 2016b, Faure 2022), Buddhism and women (Starkey 2020, Flynn 2022), how to study Buddhism (Lopez Jr. 2005), the secularization of Buddhism (Borup 2013a, Payne 2021), studies on the relation between Buddhism and science (Lopez Jr. 2008 and 2012), the transformation of Buddhisms (Prohl and Rakow 2008–2011), Buddhism and capitalism (Priest 2022, Payne and Rambelli 2023), Buddhism and globalization (Prohl 2015d, Prohl 2022b), transnational religious circulations between East and West (Borup 2017), the materiality of Buddhism and religion (Rambelli 2007, Borup and Rambelli 2019), Japanese and Zen Buddhism in Germany (Prohl 2004a, Brandt and Prohl 2022) and the translation of Buddhism (Collett 2021). There are many journals (Buddhist Studies Review 2020, The Western Buddhist Review: A Journal for Buddhist Inquiry 2020, Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies 2020, Contemporary Buddhist: An Interdisciplinary Journal 2020, Journal of Global Buddhism 2020) and associations (UK Association for Buddhist Studies 2020, Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies 2020) in the United Kingdom alone.

Natalie Grummer (2007) — to avoid producing an essentialist view on some single entity commonly known “Buddhism”?

The history of Buddhism in Great Britain¹⁵ has a very early example in the British literary tradition on Buddha and Buddhism stemming from the 14th century, namely the Barlaam and Josaphat tradition (Cordoni 2010, Cordoni 2014, Johanterwage 2019). When the British scholar Richard Gombrich suggested that “Buddhism is too rigorous to become a successful mass religion” (Wheeler 1994), he spoke of Buddhist traditions. One might think that Buddhism is restricted to “religious traditions.” However, Buddhism has appeared in many discourses of British society for a very long time, including — for instance — in neoliberal politics in speeches of both houses of the British Parliament (Hansard Corpus — British Parliament 2020)¹⁶ and in British museums.¹⁷

These attributions on “Buddhism” — which may be given in various discursive arenas — commonly also contain the clear note of what this “Buddhism” is explicitly *not*: this is secularism like politics, consumption, science, art, neoliberalism, and not least branding. The attribution of “Buddhism” to the modern category of “religion” obviously not only works by excluding other categories or generating strong dichotomies like *religion versus non-religion*. This complicates the so-called “Western” use of practices, images, designs, and beliefs that refer to the Buddha or Buddhist traditions. The laughing Buddha on the jeans brand *True Religion*, the *Fat Buddha Yoga* company, or a bottle of gin with the face of the Buddha carved into the glass have a somewhat contested standing on (i) being “Buddhism” or not, and (ii) being something positively accepted in the broader public opinion or not. However, what happens when “Buddhism” and Buddhist

15. There are various publications on the history of Buddhism and Buddha in Great Britain, whereby Philip Almond’s *The British Discovery of Buddhism* (1988), Donald S. Lopez Jr.’s *Curators of the Buddha: The Study of Buddhism under Colonialism* (1995), and Caroline Starkey’s *Women in British Buddhism: Commitment, Connection, Community* (2020) are still quite unmatched. Elizabeth J. Harris begins her *Theravada Buddhism and the British Encounter* (2006) on February 16, 1796, the day of the British conquest of Colombo in Ceylon — “Sri Lanka” since 1972 — which was made the capital in 1815. Especially Robert Bluck’s *British Buddhism: Teachings, Practice and Development* (2006) unfortunately misses or marginalizes the British import of translocal Buddhist material objects and the entanglement of Buddhist mediators, ideas, and designs with political, artistic, and scientific discourses in England. Bluck mainly discusses the development of ritual practice and the arrival of certain Buddhist teachings in England. Researchers like Erik Braun (2009) and Thomas A. Tweed (2011) have therefore underlined the translocality of “Buddhism.”

16. These databases register all uses of the following terms until 2000 or 2005: Buddh*, Budh*, Budd*, Bud*, Buddhist, Buddhism, Buddha, Buddhu, Buddhists, Buddhas, Buddha-like, Buddhistic, Buddh, Buddhist-Managed, Buddhist-Based, Buddh, Budhists, Buddhist, Budh, Bud, Buddhist, Budd’ism, Budda, Buddism, Buddhists, Budd, and Bud (Hansard Corpus — British Parliament 2020).

17. In May 2020, a search for “Buddha” in the *British Museum* digital archives delivered 3,094 results (British Museum 2020f). There is a multitude of (British and non-British) journals (*Journal of the Oxford Centre for Buddhist Studies*, *Buddhist Studies Review*, *The Western Buddhist Review*, *Journal of Global Buddhism*, *Contemporary Buddhism*), associations like the *UK Association for Buddhist Studies* (UKABS), and dictionaries like the *Oxford Dictionary of Buddhism* (Keown 2003) on Buddhism.

mediators are neither reduced to “religion” and “religious traditions” — and religion’s dichotomization with “non-religion” — nor translated into something “secular”?

However, many questions remain unanswered: why is Buddhism attractive to modern Westerners (Mackenzie 2001)?¹⁸ Why is the relationship between Buddhism and the West even challenging modernity itself? Can this be called “Neo-Buddhism” (Faure 2009, 38 and 139–142) or “Buddhism à la carte” (139)? As Berkeley professor Robert Sharf argues, do Buddhists even “lose” their religion (The Editors 2007)? What is a “Buddhist Brexit” (Batchelor 2017a)? Arguably, Buddhism’s teachings, practices, and institutions have historically proven to be easily adaptive and transformative, especially within Western secular contexts (Borup 2016, 52). For these developments, religious studies scholar Jørn Borup uses the terms “mediatization,”¹⁹ “entertainmentization,” “commodification,” and “popularization”²⁰ (41) when investigating the crossings between mediators, popular culture, religion, and Buddhism. However, he does not value them as misinterpretations within a neoliberal consumption market but as cultural phenomena within a broader context. The central motif is not the content (teachings, practices, institutions) but the forms of Buddhism that can be understood as “framing conditions and transmission technologies in the overall transformation and adaptation processes of the religion” (42). On the role of Buddhism in the Western public, Borup argues that “Buddhism in the West has reached beyond the enclosures of monastic buildings and meditation centers, meeting the masses at the market, in films, books, magazines, and ads, often portrayed as anything but religion” (41). The so-called “Hollywood effect” and the general “mediatization” of Buddhism produce predominantly *positive* images of Buddhism and, as a result, preserve a “positive orientalism,” which is focused on either “spiritual meditation Buddhism” or (authentic) non-immigrant Buddhism. Other than Islam and Christianity, Buddhism is “the good and nice religion” that is “being narrated by chains of association with spirituality, individualism, authenticity and harmony,” which means that in the “West” where the ethics of “cool” dominates, Buddha and Buddhism are brands that are “simply to be good to think with” (53). Within the media, an image of Buddhism is dominating that Borup

18. For instance, Hanif Kureishi’s novel *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) — translated into 20 languages — is about Karim, a mixed-race teenager who struggles to make a living in London and whose father — an Indian immigrant — becomes the Buddha-like guru of London’s high society. However, he and Karim do not believe in this role (Salter, n.d.).

19. This term has also been used by Prohl (2016, 2020a, 112) and Hjarvard and Lövheim (2012) in their book *Mediatization and Religion: Nordic Perspectives*.

20. Inken Prohl (2016, 2020a) uses the terms “Buddhist semantics, materialities, and designs” (2020a, 111), “narrations” (112), “symbols”, and “practices” (124).

calls “Buddha cool, Buddhist chic and branding Buddha” (46), whereby he concludes that “Buddha, Buddhism and its representations are simply good brands” (50) and argues that

Buddha is cool and chic in the West, and as a popular brand has moved from temple to market. Buddhism has been transformed from an intellectual capital and practice path for the elite to an easily approachable mindset for the masses in which consumerism, commodification and mediatization are part of the neo-liberal market where spirituality is for sale. (41)

However, are these representations of Buddhism “authentic,” and why is this relevant? Is this “superficial and commodified Buddhism” only an expression of the neoliberal market spirituality for sale? Is popularization the other side of so-called secularization, with its dilution and thinning of content and tradition? Is it a paradoxical sign of secularization that there is a more widespread and highly mediatized attention to religious issues in the public sphere and a slow but apparent loss of interest in organized religion at the individual and personal level (Hjarvard 2012, 22)? According to Borup, the banalization and “entertainmentization” of so-called “feel-good Buddhism” runs parallel to the scientificization and psychologization of Buddhism, whereby parts of ideas and practices — such as “mindfulness”²¹ — are selected, transformed, and instrumentalized, and finally become constitutive by-products. According to Borup, such popular Buddhist narratives are hardly the expression of a post-secular reenchantment but rather represent broader, larger cultural narratives in which narratives about Buddha and Buddhism have significance and influence (Borup 2016, 53).

21. Borup (2015) has researched mindfulness, specifically in Aarhus, as a booming (non) religious phenomenon.

The relationship between Buddhism and the so-called West is a complicated one.²² On the one hand, in 2012, a *Forbes* article entitled “In The UK 2030, It’s Good Bye Jesus, Hello Buddha” suggested that Muslims, Hindus will have overtaken the Christian population of the UK, and especially Buddhists within a generation, according to a report of the House of Commons. In 2006–2012, the number of Buddhists increased the most compared to other religious traditions, with 74% (Rapoza 2012). On the other hand, there are new trends in Buddhist branding every year. Ferrier names the Buddha diet, Buddha bowls — now available in British *Marks & Spencer* stores — and *Buddha-Bars*, founded by Raymond Visan in Paris in 1996, have subsequently started a global success tour. According to Ferrier, Buddha branding is “a logical next step from mindfulness” (Ferrier 2017). Raymond Lam (2014) compares the “mindfulness industry” with Buddhist branding and reminds one that some even call the latter “prostitution.” Lam claims that Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding represent a “non-committal fascination [which] is an innocent, if ultimately unhelpful, manifestation of Orientalism.” For him, the primary purpose behind Buddhist branding is that “you *will* get attention.”

Excluding actors, objects, and practices from “Buddhism” has led to a massive *distortion*, which reduces the “field of Buddhism” enormously. If these excluded arenas — these hybrids or

22. Buddhism in the so-called “West” has been researched by many scholars such as Philip C. Almond (1988), David McMahan (2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2015, 2017), Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2005, 2008, 2012, 2016a, 2016b), Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (2014), Inken Prohl (2006a, 2014, 2016, 2017), Tim Graf (2017), Inken Prohl and Tim Graf (2015c) and many others. There has also been some interest in what has been dubbed as “Buddhist atheism” (Batchelor 2010, Batchelor 2015) or “secular Buddhism” by podcasts (Secular Buddhism 2016), associations (Secular Buddhist Association, n.d.), and individual authors (Batchelor 2017b, Batchelor and Prohl 2017c, Prohl 2017). Academics and writers have written about the relationship between modernity and Buddhism for a long time. One of the earliest was Alexandra David-Néel (1911), followed by *Tricycle* e-books (Heuman, n.d.) and essays (Heuman 2015). Conferences like *Buddhism in the Global Eye: Beyond East and West* at The University of British Columbia in 2016 — hosted by the Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation Program in Buddhism and Contemporary Society and co-sponsored by the Modernization of Buddhism in Global Perspective Project — as well as projects like *Eastspirit* (2017) from Aarhus University, the *Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies* (2020) and the *Centre for Contemporary Buddhist Studies* (2020) at the University of Copenhagen (both Denmark) certainly contribute to the perception of Buddhism as a global entity that has effects in various localities like the “West.”

Buddhism in the West has been identified as creating something new and creative by participants in the Buddhist field like Lama Jampa Thaye in his essay “Buddhism with a Western Face” (2013), asking if the “Western adaption of the dharma [does] challenge contemporary culture or accommodate it?” and who spoke of the “Dangers of Diluted Buddhism” (2018). In *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (2008), *Buddhism in the Modern World* (2012a), and “Buddhism and Multiple Modernities” (2015), religious studies scholar David L. McMahan has worked on the relationship between Buddhism and modernity, and in “Intersections of Buddhism and Secularity” (2012b) and “Buddhism and Global Secularisms” (2017) he has researched the relation between Buddhism and secularity. Donald S. Lopez Jr. has analyzed the relationship between Buddhism and science in *Buddhism and Science: A Guide for the Perplexed* (2008) and *The Scientific Buddha: His Short and Happy Life* (2012). Religious studies scholar Inken Prohl (2014a) has worked on “California Zen” in America and Chris Klassen (2014) on religion and popular culture.

secularized Buddhisms — are taken into the field of Buddhism, the area of research immediately magnifies, which urges one to redefine the definitions of “Buddhism” and the actors involved. Therefore, this thesis understands Buddhism not as being restricted to the cognitive space or only as an abstract entity but as something to be found as a material and mediational “thing.” Based on the work by religious studies scholar Kathryn Lofton (2017), in this thesis, “Buddhism” is understood as two ways of speaking: (i) a metaphysical abstraction, and (ii) a cultural and social item and commodity that stands open for everyone and that structures communities. Both ways can be read together. It is less critical *which* definitions of Buddhism one uses rather than the certainty that Buddhism *can* be defined, used, transformed, and consumed by actors (2—3).²³ Following Lofton (2011) and Prohl (2016), one could speak of “triple Buddhism,” including (i) Buddhist traditions, (ii) secularism with and of Buddhist mediators, and (iii) secularism as Buddhism and vice versa. The first is excluded in this thesis because — although important — I believe that the significant transformations of Buddhism through the encounter of Buddhism in Western societies can be found in the use of Buddhist mediators, Buddhist branding, and the “Buddhization” of secularism like neoliberalism and consumerism itself.

2.1.4. *Capitalism, Consumerism, and Neoliberalism*

On the one hand, historians of capitalism²⁴ — laid out by Max Weber 1904 and 1905 — like Michael J. Sandel (2012) argue that the world today is defined by a new era of one’s relationship with commodities: “we drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society” (10).

In her book *Consuming Religion* (2017), Kathryn Lofton argued that “[l]ate capitalism produces violent disruptions of nation, community, and family, such as downsizing of industries, privatization of public services, and the commodification of every form of social life” (212). The Slovenian philosopher and psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek (2006) has stated that capitalism is systemically drive-based, mainly “the impersonal compulsion to engage in the endless circular movement of expanded self-reproduction” (61). According to Lofton, consumerism is “the theory that a progressively greater consumption of goods is economically beneficial, has become the organizing value of social life” (Lofton 2017, 8). Within this system, so-called *commodification*

23. Lofton (2017, 2—3) underlines that such certainty has become almost impossible within debates in religious studies.

24. Latour has written on the affects of capitalism (2014a) or how to extract from capitalism (2020d), while Martha E. Gimenez (2005) has analyzed the relationship between capitalism and the oppression of women, philosopher Graham Priest has studied capitalism by giving Buddhist and Marxist insights (2022), Richard K. Payne and Fabio Rambelli have recently studied *Buddhism under Capitalism* (2023).

“has become axiomatic to any activity,” meaning one might not share politics, race, gender, or nation. Still, one shares the marketplace as “the only shared term of our existence” (10). She has argued that “[o]ne term for this era of the inescapable logic of markets is *neoliberal*²⁵” (7), which she also analyzed in the context of American religion (Lofton 2015), but which can also be seen in the British politics of Margaret Thatcher (fig. 1.7). Lofton adds that the distinction “between what is the market and what is not” becomes completely impossible to determine, and she also notes that religious studies and market studies have increasingly shown that religion and economics are inextricable because they are producing each other, at least in the United States (Lofton 2017, 7). Lofton adds that “[m]arkets produce poverty, and the illusion that poverty is inevitable. One word for such a proxy consciousness is religion” (11). For Lofton, it is “a form of *religious occupation* of the economy” (9).



FIGURE 1.7. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan at the House of Commons, London (UK) on November 28, 1978.

25. Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1979–1990) and Leader of the Conservative Party (1975–1990) Margaret Thatcher (1925–2013) was known for her public friendship with former president of the United States Ronald Reagan as well as her realignment towards neoliberalism in the UK and her legacy of “Thatcherism” (“What is Thatcherism?” 2013) which persists until today even with Tony Blair, who was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom 1997–2007 and Leader of the Labour Party 1994–2007. Thatcher — who is known for the sentences “it’s the economy, stupid” and “there is no alternative” — once also said in an interview printed in the *Sunday Times* on May 3, 1981: “What’s irritated me about the whole direction of politics in the last 30 years is that it’s always been towards the *collectivist society*. People have forgotten about the *personal society*. And they say: *do I count, do I matter?* To which the short answer is, yes. And therefore, it isn’t that I set out on economic policies; it’s that I set out really to change the approach, and changing the economics is the means of changing that approach. If you change the approach you really are after *the heart and soul of the nation*. *Economics are the method; the object is to change the heart and soul*” (Thatcher 1981; emphasis added).

Some scholars have researched how neoliberalism can be understood as a religion by the *sacralization of the market* (Mavelli 2020). Others have identified the ever-increasing pull of neoliberalism and consumption on every aspect of life (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a). Does the neoliberalization of societies efface the “religious effect” (Prohl 2016)?

In times of lacking alternatives to consumption and neoliberalism²⁶, the high-flying Buddhist mediators and Buddhist brandings could help legitimate and smoothen the neoliberal influence on people’s lives. Since many actors live in societies in which individualist consumerism — and therefore *secularism* — dominates and keeps evolving, Lofton (2017) concludes that it does not seem unimaginable how to exit consumer society, but rather how to conceive of “alternative structures of collectivity” and “new ways to share what we have and care for those who have not” (288).

2.1.5. *Medium, Mediation, Mediator, Immutable Mobiles, and Play*

In 2014, Latour was interviewed on whether media can be considered a mode of existence (Latour and Citton 2014b) and discussed media, mediums, mediations, intermediaries, and

26. It is worth highlighting Timothy Fitzgerald’s remarks that liberalism is protected by the rhetorical topos of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, as well as the fact that the ambiguous term “liberal” clearly has two different meanings and therefore “lends a benign facade”: (i) The older term “liberal” as an adjective or adverb had the meaning of “generous,” flexible and tolerant, which applies to every person in every time and culture; and (ii) a “liberal” believes in possessive individualism, nation states, self-regulating markets and the right to accumulate private money and externalize the costs to the “remainder” without regard to the effects on taxpayers, the poor or the environment. According to Fitzgerald, *liberalism* can be seen as a profoundly *illiberal* doctrine, which has benefited from the “Mr. Nice Guy image” internalized by generations of liberals and can be identified as the masculinized universal subject of liberalism (Fitzgerald 2017a, 179).

mediators.²⁷ While others have worked on media philosophy,²⁸ scholars of religion have repeatedly pointed to the concept of “mediatization” since scholars of communications like Stig Hjarvard and Mia Lövheim (2012) introduced it to the field a decade ago. This approach — mediatization theory — has been criticized by several authors like Oliver Krüger (2018, 1) for its (a) dating and measurement of mediatization, (b) understanding of religion and media, and (c) supposed lack of empirical evidence and theoretical consistency.

27. A famous example of a mediator is the *Ode to Joy* — written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785 and used by Ludwig van Beethoven in his *Ninth Symphony* from 1824 — is Slavoj Žižek’s example of an ideological container or mediator. It was later used in Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971/72), by the Nazis as a national anthem, by the Soviet Union as a communist song, in China during the Cultural Revolution, by the Apartheid right in South Rhodesia, it also was the favorite song by ultra-leftist *Shining Path* leader Abimael Guzman in Peru, and in 1972 it became the unofficial “Anthem of Europe,” which is now the Anthem of the European Union (fig. 1.8). Does this mean that *Ode to Joy* is a Nazi song? Of course not, since this piece of music is generally taken to be as — as Žižek explains — “a kind of an ode to humanity as such, to the brotherhood and freedom of all people” and thus enables a “perverse scene of universal fraternity” of the world’s — left- and right-wing — dictators, terrorists, and war-criminals. *Ode to Joy* shows a “universal adaptability” (Žižek 2013). Thus it is more than its literary (Schiller) or musical (Beethoven) tradition; instead, it becomes a mediator open for any — ideological — project.

28. Media philosopher Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky (2017) mentions the 27 minutes lasting film *Seeing Red* (2005) by American avant-garde filmmaker Su Friedrich depicts a diversity of reddish things: red tulips, red graffiti, a red car, a red cap, a pink dog collar, the neon advertising of a nail studio (fig. 1.9), a crane with a red grid, cherry blossoms, product stickers (fig. 1.11), orange peel on the street, a ceramic chicken head (fig. 1.10), a red chalice, a women’s red boots, the mascot of the Iowa State University’s sports team (fig. 1.12), strawberries and many other things. However, what is the color *red* in this context? Philosopher Astrid Deuber-Mankowsky has argued that the notion of “seeing red” is a metaphor, a figure of speech, and a pun. The title refers to (i) the affect of anger and rage, (ii) the showing of color and the reference to variations in hues and shades, and (iii) red as the color of passion concerning the world. Ultimately, the use of red or any content — including Buddhist mediators — can be understood as a variation of *play*, whereby the different usages of red do not refer to any origin or authenticity. Still, they are modes of playing, connecting, repeating, transforming, habituating, and intensifying (Deuber-Mankowsky 2017).

Deuber-Mankowsky has underlined that the concept of the *ritornello*, developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, has famously studied how — out of repetitions of the same — something new and changing could happen (Deuber-Mankowsky 2017a, 213). According to them, the “falling outwards” of the circle of repetition can be understood as the tendency of the circle to “open itself to a future.” Like a children’s *ritornello*, “[o]ne breaks out and dares to improvise” (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 311-312, Deuber-Mankowsky 2017a, 214–215, 235). This *ritornello* is a small melody, a refrain, a “tralala,” and according to Deleuze, it would be hummed in three contexts: (i) at home, (ii) on the way home, or (iii) when leaving home. Hence, the *ritornello* is about “territory” and “deterritorialization,” and Deleuze and Guattari describe it as a “movement of intensification,” a “landing,” “immersion,” or “flying away” (Deuber-Mankowsky 2017a, 213; translated by author). For Deuber-Mankowsky (2015, 2017a, 2017b), the media-philosophical aspects of play are (a) the *ritornello* and the reference to a “home,” (b) desire or constructing a structure, (c) moving back and forth, jumping, especially with joy, (d) habit or doing again and again, (e) minor variations, (f) technique and cosmopolitics, as well as (g) intensifications, reproductions and movements of the masses (2017a).



FIGURE 1.8. Top, Orchestra playing *Ode to Joy* as the unofficial “Anthem of Europe.”

FIGURE 1.9. Bottom left, Advertising for a nail studio in Su Friedrich’s *Seeing Red*, 2005.

FIGURE 1.10. Bottom second left, Ceramic chicken head in Su Friedrich’s *Seeing Red*, 2005.

FIGURE 1.11. Bottom second right, Product stickers in Su Friedrich’s *Seeing Red*, 2005.

FIGURE 1.12. Bottom right, Cy the Cardinal, Mascot of the Iowa State University’s sports team in Su Friedrich’s *Seeing Red*, 2005.

Quite different from these approaches — and also as Krüger’s critique — this thesis does not want to examine “media” or “mediatization” but rather “mediator(s)” and “mediation(s).” In doing so, this thesis falls back on Bruno Latour, who proves to be extremely helpful in terms of (i) dating and measuring mediators based on countless case studies; (ii) identifying in the concept of secularism forms of religion as Prohlian “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112) wherever actors *act*; and (iii) abandoning the concept of “media” in favor of the concept of “mediation” and “mediator.” Krüger (2018) claims that the mediatization concept in religious studies would have few benefits and “lacks coherence, clarity and conclusiveness while claiming far-reaching insight about religion, secularization and modernity” (26).

On the contrary, following Bruno Latour, the classical modern approach perceives hybrids and mediators as “a mixture of two pure forms” (1993, 78), which corresponds to the usual attitude in terms of how Buddhist mediators are categorized and (de)valued, i.e., they are a mixture of Buddhism and capitalism. Usually, there were three aspects of analysis and synthesis: “a preliminary purification, a divided separation, and a progressive reblending,” which multiplies

hybrids between nature-culture — Buddhist mediators — “to reconstruct the lost unity” and synchronously recognizes and denies, specifies and silences them (78). Modern actors usually use two practices (95): mediation — making religion and secularism immanent — and purification, making them transcendent. Latour has defined “mediation” not as a “bridge” between substances²⁹ but rather as a “gap,” a movement between several mediations, or a thing that is synchronously itself and its opposite (Latour 2013c; “Mediation”).³⁰

Due to this ambiguity, the terms “mediation” and “mediator” are difficult to define or use for Latour. However, they are “synonymous with a hiatus, pass or stage on a trajectory always to be taken up again.” *ANT* has worked a lot with the dichotomy of mediator-intermediary. Still, in later years, in his new theory, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence (AIME)*, Latour has defined “mediator” as something that “does not last but enables something to last; conversely, the intermediary is that which lasts without explaining that it lasts, i.e., in the case of the intermediary that lasts, mediators that do not are always “consumed””. It is crucial that the terms “mediation” and “mediator” do not mean something “which passes to something else from something,” because then it becomes a medium, an intermediary, i.e., a bridge between two banks. In this case, it would lose being “its own end” and start being synonymous with “entelechy.” Still, when a medium is its own end, it could be

29. This touches on the ontological and philosophical problem of what *being* is, which is why Latour discusses it through the twofold scope of “Being-as-Being [BAB] vs. Being-as-Other [BAO],” in which the preposition “as” is more important than the term “being,” since “the multiplicity of ways in which this “as” can be followed” is critical: substance is abandoned in favor of subsistence, which emphasizes the “as” more than the “is.” *Being-as-being* and *being-as-other* depend on each other, i.e., “BAB and BAO are twins, even Siamese twins, born and raised together.” While for *being-as-being* “other” means “substance necessary for being” — which identifies with God — for *being-as-other* “other” “focuses attention on “others,” that which is an extension of the provisional existence of an entity, which is always its own end.” Latour, therefore, wants to add alterity “by qualifying alterities as fully-fledged beings, instead of always acting as though they were additional and detrimental to the authentic being?”. Latour argues that “being is the copula that marks alteration, the alienation, the jump, gap, passage, the exploration of the other beings necessary for the temporary and partial maintenance of the identical.” Therefore, the “being-as-being is ultimately the artifact of a particular use of philosophical language, which believes that it can mimic the displacement of necessity in demonstration even though it never uses demonstration except metaphorically.” Following Alfred North Whitehead, Latour argues that “[i]n other words, in the B-A-B, there is an opposition between being *causa sui* = *substance on the one hand and beings* = *alterities on the other*. In the B-A-O, however, *the two series can be synonymous*, since duration is acquired only by reprise, which makes this event a (provisional) end” (Latour 2013c; “Being-as-Being, Being-as-Other”; emphasis added). Alternatively, in Whitehead’s words: “In other words, it belongs to the nature of a ‘being’ that is a potential for every ‘becoming’. This is the ‘principle of relativity’” (Whitehead 1978, 22).

30. Accordingly, Latour explains what mediation is for him in the following way: “[I]nvariably, as soon as we trace its etymology it means what bridge [*sic*] a gap, *it becomes an intermediary between two banks that are, themselves, well established*. Whereas, mediation is of interest, ontologically, only when *instead of meaning a bridge, it means a gap, or a[t] least the movement that goes from one mediation to the next*. [...] Mediation is precisely that which is, at once, and in the same respect, *a thing and its opposite*” (Latour 2013c; “Mediation”; emphasis added).

understood to be identical with itself, which loses the other beings necessary for itself to exist (Latour 2013c; “Mediation”).

According to Latour, the question of mediators and mediations is about the image war that has defined the “dynamism and weaknesses of the West,” wherein actors initially have two choices: (i) things are themselves, which makes mediators and mediations superfluous because they become characteristics of — or even parasites or veils hiding — essences; and (ii) things are other things, which makes mediations and mediators the only way “to lead us to objects of value” (2013c; “Mediation”). Latour aims to redirect “attention to the weakness and fragility of the mediators that allow us to pray, to know, to vote, to enjoy living together” (2002, 38).

When supposing — following Latour — that time is not ordered in a linear but rather a spiral way, there is a future and a past. However, “the past is not surpassed but revisited, repeated, surrounded, protected, recombined, reinterpreted and reshuffled.” Elements that appear remote appear near when followed in the spiral and reappear in loops. In such an understanding, the terms “archaic” or “advanced” become obsolete since contemporary elements bring together elements from all times, which is why Latour calls actions “polytemporal” (1993, 75). The same might be true for space since one does not only live *with* things that are close neighbors, but one moves spatially remote things and thus creates *immutable mobiles*, so these remote beings can be made accessible here: this happens through mediators like maps, plans, photographs, advertising, and branding, etc.

Latour developed the term “immutable mobiles”³¹ in *Science in Action* (1987) to explain two contradictory operations: (i) the lack of similarity between two “states” — which is mobility — and (ii) maintaining a constant through this dissimilarity, which is immutability. This results in “information,” something that is put “in” a “form.” Therefore, speaking truthfully means — not resemblance but — speaking about a remote location through a “chain of reference” for as long as this chain is maintained (Latour 2013c; “Immutable Mobiles”).

31. In 1665, by describing the circulation of information through the different faculties, polymath Robert Hooke already formulated an early version of “circulation of reference,” as Frédérique Ait-Touati (2011, 157–158) has reminded one: “[T]he whole chain is in danger being dissolv’d; it is to begin with the Hands and Eyes, and to proceed on through the Memory, to be continued by the Reason; nor is it to stop there, but to come about to the Hands and Eyes again, and so, by a continual passage round from one Faculty to another, it is to be maintained in life and strength, as much as the body of man is by the circulation of the blood through the several parts of the body, the Arms, the Fat, the Lungs, the Heart, and the Head” (Hooke 1665, preface unnumbered page 7).

The concept of “immutable mobiles” is less about how something can be displayed through something else but which technical presuppositions must be fulfilled to achieve a particular spatiotemporal abstraction from the concrete object; for instance, maps, graphics, charts (Gertenbach and Laux 2019, 78). Latour couples constancy and mobility within the transformability of information beyond spatiotemporal borders, like a map of Mont Aiguille. This technique can be found everywhere, but it is especially interesting for Latour when these “things” cannot be seen with the naked eye, like chromosomes, the gross national product (GNP), or classes (79–80). Almost all of Latour’s writings deal with mediatization processes. Still, he is not interested in limiting himself to the term “media” or certain classical types of media, such as mass media, social media, TV, internet, or radio (84–85).

Various actors — companies, consumers, museums, etc. — have been interested in diverse Buddhist mediators for multiple reasons: Buddhist brands create a chargeable mediator like Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* — for any imaginable ideology.

2.1.6. Brands and Branding

There are even branding³² agencies containing the term “Buddha,” such as the *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency*, which defines *branding* as “a tool for design, communication and marketing,” which for an outsider “consists of colours, lettering, slogan and a logo. Sometimes even music” (2020b, 4). It summarizes the key characteristics of product branding as its naming, logo/branding, style, technology, and essentially “the positioning of a product in the best way possible.” The *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* underlines the importance of brand naming since it would rarely change, even though the company identity or product design has altered (2020a). One can distinguish between *invented brands* — coming from scratch — and *reinvented brands*, which need

32. Of course, there is much literature on advertising, like Mara Einstein’s *Advertising* (2017), and on branding in general, like John Grant’s *The New Marketing Manifesto* (2000) and his *Brand Innovation Manifesto* (2006) and many more (Chiaravalle and Findlay 2006, Fiorini and Titterton 2009, Aronczyk and Powers 2010), as well as studies on specific topics like the relationship between branding and religion (Einstein 2008, Pallini 2017, InSitesConsulting 2017, InSitesConsulting 2018, Prohl 2020a). There are also many journals on branding (Journal of Product & Brand Management 2020), thousands of branding companies — mostly with rather clever names — like that of the UK’s top 10 agencies *BrandMe* (2020) or *BrandTuitive* (2020), branding schools (School of the Visual Arts 2020) or branding tools (School of the Visual Arts Tool 2020).

Following *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* (2020b, 5), companies must ask themselves whether they have a “clear core idea,” whether the people in their company share that core idea, and whether they can convey to an outsider what the company stands for and how it differs from others. In the following step, companies should understand that “[c]ommunications have complexified themselves and have become the manifestation of the brand.”

refreshing. According to this, Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding seem to fit in the “reinvented brands” category because the world around them has changed, and companies tend to rebrand themselves with Buddhist mediators (2020b, 6).

The San Diego-based branding agency *BLVR* — being the world’s most awarded one (World Brand Design Society 2020) — names five guidelines for great brands: (i) guided by beliefs since “[b]elief-led brands inspire deeper emotional engagement among customers and more impassioned commitment among employees”; (ii) the customer is the hero since customers “are your reason for existence and the people you live to serve. We put our hero’s needs, behaviors, and insights into the core of your brand story”; (iii) the knowledge of the consumers and the solving of their critical problems and “biggest frustrations and pain points”; (iv) disrupting the market “[b]y challenging the conventions that shape the standard approach to business, we can identify new white space that allows your brand to disrupt the market”; and (v) appealing to the heart since “[p]eople buy based on feelings, not facts [...] to deliver *deeper emotional engagement*” (BLVR 2020; emphasis added).

In conclusion, neoliberal consumerist societies generate branded mediators by certain practices of making and re-making logos and names from given Buddhist resources. This involves highly creative and innovative practices in producing, buying, and selling Buddhified products. This specific branding demands specific semiotic terminology. Without the making of particular terms — as this thesis has tried to illustrate in the introductory chapter 2.1.3. “Buddha and Buddhism” — it is impossible to “speak” of products, objects, discourses, and many other characteristics of a specific branding. Brands are repeated, transformed, politicized, religionized, and generally embedded in networks of human and non-human actors rather than God-given or “neutral.” As Ian Hodder (2012) has argued, actors are connected to things — in this case, brands — and thus, they become repeatedly entangled with these and each other.

2.1.7. *Culture(s), the West, and Occidentalism*

From a Latourian perspective, the term “culture” must be used with caution since it has been contrasted — for several hundreds of years — with “nature,” following the “one nature/many cultures schematic.” Aiming to make collectives comparable, it is hardly satisfying that “[t]he danger of the concept of culture stems, of course, from the fact that Europeans absorbed the diversity of “other” collectives under its auspices. [...] Culture is the appearance that a collective assumes when it is broached via the *sole schematic of Object and Subject*”. Nature and culture include the risk of being taken for ““symbolic representations” of a reality that eludes them.” The distinction between what is “reality” and “representation” cannot be instantly established (Latour 2013c; “Culture”; emphasis added).³³

According to Latour, the “West” — like the term “modern” — has “no spatio-temporal limits.” To know what is the “West” is not a question like the “museumifying” of other cultures. Still, instead, it is a question “of knowing if *collective negotiations* can preserve essential requirements,” which makes cultures rendered comparable, or if one has to choose between a “malfunctioning universal” on the one hand and “authentic, autonomized cultures” on the other. In this sense, it is not about studying or judging, but rather “[negotiating] with “multiplicity and unity in order to learn whether it is possible to *compose a common world*.” As Latour argues: “We hope to conserve that which gives the West its unique anthropological flavor: the desire to include all others, under the auspices of universality.” Due to the dangers of this universality being obtained by violence, but also by shared values, this universality “*maintains the possibility [...] of a common world*”. Universality cannot be followed in a modernist sense, because others will then be reduced to mere “representations” of nature. Thus, the universalist project has to be maintained through relativism — after having successfully decentered and provincialized oneself — by rethinking “nature.” Latour calls this position “*compositionist*,” which is opposed to cultural relativism, domination, progressivism, culturalism and authenticity, and anti-occidentalism (2013c; “West”).

33. Latour problematizes using the term “culture” since *We have never been Modern*: “Here lies the entire modern paradox. If we consider hybrids, we are dealing only with mixtures of nature and culture; if we consider the work of purification, we confront a total separation between nature and culture (1993, 30). [...] *The asymmetry between nature and culture then becomes an asymmetry between past and future. The past was the confusion of things and men; the future is what will no longer confuse them* (71). [...] But *the very notion of culture is an artifact created by bracketing Nature off*. Cultures - different or universal - do not exist, any more than Nature does. There are only natures-cultures, and these offer the only possible basis for comparison” (104).

Occidentalism takes the “official version” of the moderns — for either praise or critique — but “the Moderns’ problem is precisely that of having formed their *understanding of themselves separately from their experience*. There is, therefore, a serious risk of giving an *exotic version of the Moderns*”. While Edward Said’s model of orientalism³⁴ was about Westerners’ misunderstanding of the “East,” Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit (2004) turn the tables by analyzing “Easterners’” misunderstandings of Western values. Latour, therefore, adds the third perspective of avoiding “*errors made about oneself (i.e., errors made by the Moderns about the Moderns)*” (Latour 2013c; “Occidentalism”; emphasis added).

2.2. Theory

According to Inken Prohl (2012a), the approach of material religion³⁵ pursues the question of how religion is “materialized.” In doing so, not only “objects” — like architecture, statues, and amulets — are examined, but in general, “how religion takes place on a material level,” i.e., it follows the “embodiment of religion through actions and rituals as an event.” This results from specific social and cognitive arrangements *mediated* through the interplay between bodies, spaces, and the material world. For Prohl (379), religion is where cognitive, material, social interpersonal, and Pierre Bourdieu’s “habitus” come together. Material religion usually proceeds in a “double-tracked” manner, whereby religion is understood as something that (i) is presented by actors as “sacred” or “beyond,” and (ii) can be experienced cognitively and sensually, and thereby the assumed inaccessible “beyond” materializes and can be made accessible through *mediation*. Prohl defines religion as an enterprise of *mediation*, which consistently discursively denies the process of its own *mediation* (381—382). Material religion is thereby about the event of *mediation* without accepting religious essences, spheres, or entities, but accepting that rhetoric about the sacred and its mediation is central to religion (382).

34. Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is perhaps the most widely read foundational text for postcolonial culture studies (Codell and Sachko Macleod 1998, Hart 2000, Macfie 2000). However, many synchronously criticized it (Al-Azm 1981, Clifford 1988, Buruma 2008) or have written on the phenomenon of occidentalism (Buruma and Margalit 2004). In the following, many works in religious and cultural studies have been built on this, for example, Richard King’s *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and “the Mystic East”* (1999), Inken Prohl on the “revenge” of orientalism in religious discourses within Japan (2003c), Jørn Borup on Zen and the art of inverting orientalism (2004), July Sund’s *Exotic: A Fetish for the Foreign* (2019), Sophia Rose Arjani’s *Buying Buddha, Selling Rumi: Orientalism and the Mystical Marketplace* (2020) and Jessica Patterson’s *Religion, Enlightenment and Empire: British Interpretations of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century* (2022).

35. Material religion or materiality in general (Hutchings and McKenzie 2016, Meyer 2008, Morgan 2008, 2010, 2016, Plate 2015, Material Religion 2020) are an essential area within cultural studies — and as one of their most popular proponents — David Morgan (2016) argues that it offers an alternative to social constructivism (285).

Despite the importance of the material religion approach, this thesis uses a multi-theoretical approach, integrating socio-historical developments and actor-centered perspectives (Graf 2017, 11). It follows Anne Koch's (2006) understanding of religious studies as "Theorienschmiede" — or "theory forge" — of "cultural studies" aiming to bring together several theories as well as academic disciplines which were not previously combined. Based on ethnographic work in urban sites as well as in digital media, my argument rests on general theoretical concepts of material religion (Morgan 1998, 2005, 2012, 2018, Prohl 2012a, Plate 2015), religious aesthetics (Prohl 2006, 2010a, Graf and Prohl 2013, Prohl 2015b, Grieser and Johnston 2017), media studies (Brosius and Heidbrink 2013) and religious marketing (Einstein 2007).

Another critical and similar strand of methodology comes from the *Institute for Religious Studies* at Heidelberg, which views religious studies as cultural studies by grappling with "religion" in at least two ways (Prohl and Okropiridze 2015a): (i) *discursively* (Nehring 2006, Bergunder 2012) and (ii) *pragmatically* by suggesting heuristic definitions of "religion." This two-way approach is also enriched by focusing on the materialization processes of "religion," which were initiated — at least in the German-speaking realm — by Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr with their essay on "religious aesthetics" (1988), while Manuel Vásquez (2011) and David Morgan (2010) tried to relate belief and material culture, and Prohl (2012a) summarized the debate in great detail.

2.3. Selection and Introduction to the Case Study

Based on *snowball procedures*, any Buddhist actors or mediators were added to the data of this work, including human (corporations and customers) and non-human actors (brands, mediators, artifacts, and products). However, this dissertation is based on six years of fieldwork in the United Kingdom, most notably in London, but also in Cambridge and Oxford — and some places in Germany like Speyer, Heidelberg, Baden-Baden, and Traben-Trarbach.³⁶ The selection of the locations was made based on *snowball procedures*, with the beginning in London and the fact that I live as a researcher in Germany. The archives that dominate my thesis are mainly from websites, social media — *Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube*, etc. — and physical spaces like bars, yoga studios, restaurants, and shops. Actor-centered approaches allow researching how translocal Buddhist mediators work within one locality like London and analyzing how local practices are embedded into specific cultural, geographic, political, religious, and social networks. I used the so-

36. Because the author of this thesis has lived in Speyer and Baden-Baden, this meant traveling to London and back to Heidelberg, Speyer, and Baden-Baden five times in seven years. These stays lasted from a few days up to two months.

called “distanced participating observance” (Prohl 2006) to follow the everyday practices within the locations I visited; for instance, this meant having dinner at the *Buddha-Bar*. Some have been experienced more than once on-site, some I have photographed, and a considerable part was investigated online.

Neoliberal and consumer cultures build vast parts of the archives of this work since I want to investigate how collective practices and products create “contact zones” (Pratt 1991, Falser and Juneja 2013b) of interaction and valuation of Buddhism-as-mediators, religion, and secularism. As Lofton has argued, popular things are constructed for the public rather than specialists. Many people use and consume these objects, meaning that in so-called “popular culture,” actors come together, participate, encourage, or criticize objects, principles, and topics. According to Lofton, “liking something is a serious act of distinction” (Lofton 2017, 4).

This thesis is based on research in London and more broadly in the UK as well as translocal flows (Juneja and Kravagna 2013, Grasskamp and Juneja 2018) coming in and going out from there, which is why this work aims to deepen the understanding of translocal networks of movement like trade, power, knowledge or war mediated through Buddhist branding, religion, secularism, consumerism, and neoliberalism.³⁷ These movements make Buddhist mediators a phenomenon that cannot be understood solely as a local or global phenomenon but is formed by local, national, and global processes at once. The actors using Buddhist mediators investigated in this thesis that I found in my research comprise companies, entrepreneurs, customers, products, and services. These can be local London-based corporations, UK-wide labels, or global companies with a shop or two in London. Either way, each actor is embedded in much larger translocal networks of entanglement. Buddhist mediators are not the same everywhere: (i) London does it differently than Oxford or Speyer, and (ii) “Western” societies do it differently than non-“Western” collectives. The first complicates the supposed union of the “West,” and the second connects it with the supposed cohesiveness of the “rest.”

3. Methods

One crucial methodological strand for this thesis is philosopher Melanie Sehgal’s (2016) work — following William James and Alfred North Whitehead — defining “situated metaphysics”

37. Tim Graf (2017) has discussed this issue regarding Japan (7—8).

as a *diffraction*³⁸ and a search for *alternatives* (Whitehead 1978). For this thesis, this means that studying Buddhism starts with “situated Buddhist mediators,” thus, the known forms of Buddhist materialities. The study hopes to return to them in new and “speculative” ways (Sehgal 2016, 396), changing the way one thinks about them. Whitehead’s concept of *propositions* can be described as diffraction since they bring in something new, a variation: they rely on historicity and difference, they take up a specific history, from which they result, but they attempt — speculatively — to give it a different direction (Sehgal 2016, 395), and thus for Whitehead they are “a lure for feeling” (Whitehead 1978, 25). As an expression of radical empiricism and immanent thinking, it starts from *this* world and hopes to return to it in a new way (Sehgal 2016, 396). Propositions have their own specific, contagious effectiveness, and they do not have to be true or false but entertaining, taken up, interesting, remarkable, and important (393–394). They are pretty similar to diffractions that use the difference(s) in specific historical narratives, which made them themselves exist, but they try to give them another “speculative” direction (395).

Read as a proposition, mediational Buddhism as a secular thing is not the only true story, but only one possible story, which does not mean that it is merely a story since its primary hope is to be relevant, to act as Whitehead’s “lure for feeling” (398). However, as a proposition, its relevance cannot be answered from it alone but rather only be judged by whether it is taken up and used as a “bait for a new feeling,” which is why its relevance is decided again and again (399). This means that Buddhist mediators, situated in a neoliberal and capitalist world, transform the understandings of secularism, mediation, branding, Buddhism, and religion by taking heteronomy and differences seriously and considering neoliberal and consumerist historicity and situatedness (25—26).

38. The term “diffraction” was invented by the Dutch physicist Christiaan Huygens — contemporary of and opponent to Sir Isaac Newton — to describe variations within (light) wave motion caused not by reflection, refraction, or dispersion but instead by obstacles. “He described light as a wave and attributed the phenomenon of diffraction to the law that every wave, when it encounters an obstacle, forms a new wave at its vertex.” These obstacles must be passages, apertures, or edges, and light interaction would occur at the edges. Huygens explained the diffraction pattern that occurs when light is sent through a slit or a hole because the interference of light waves causes it. Unlike “reflection,” the term diffraction does not refer to the metaphor of the mirror or the image. The latter phenomenon occurs with wave motions when encountering obstacles diverting them from their regular motions. It also occurs as a “yard” when a certain amount of moisture forms around the moon, then the yard appears as an image but does not represent anything. This phenomenon has been used to develop the “X-ray diffraction apparatus,” a technical recording method that works like a photographic image and is used in X-ray and crystal structure analysis. This method obtains “X-ray diffraction images,” which — with the help of complicated calculation methods — provide clues to the spatial arrangement of atoms in a molecule. These images look like pictures, but they are not images. They point to something there, but how that prevented the X-rays from reaching it remains unknown (Deuber-Mankowsky 2011, 90; translated by author).

Similarly, philosophers from the University of California St. Cruz, Karen Barad (2007), and Donna J. Haraway³⁹ (1992, 2000) also use the optical metaphor of “diffraction.” This makes it possible to extend beyond the end products of the designed phenomena (Haraway 1988, 589) and makes it clear that the conceptualization of the world as the sum of fixed and distanced things, i.e., “Buddhism,” “secularism,” “capitalism,” is an optical illusion or the effect of a specific point of view (Deuber-Mankowsky 2011, 84). The idea of an infinite vision is blind to its specific context: by contrast, Haraway presents a “partial perspective” (Haraway 1988, 581, Deuber-Mankowsky 2011, 84). This is why Haraway argues that metaphysics is the form of knowledge par excellence that uses the “god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere [...], to represent while escaping representation” (Haraway 1988, 581). Haraway’s situated metaphysics — which she advocated in her essay “Situated Knowledges” (1988), written as a commentary on a lecture by the point of view theorist Sandra Harding (Deuber-Mankowsky 2011, 83–84) — does not want to reproduce the “sacred image of the same” (Sehgal 2016, 27), or the “Buddhism as world religion” narrative, by reiterating key terms like identity, presence, substance, and transcendence. Still, she embodies a new empiricism that combines its historicity and situatedness and thus is radically immanent since everything is allowed as long as “the god-trick is forbidden” (Haraway 1988, 589, Sehgal 2016, 27). Haraway’s approach switches to other concepts: process instead of substance and difference instead of identity. Thus, situated metaphysics becomes a method and practice (Sehgal 2016, 389–390), and it is less about *what* Buddhism is but *how* it is and *how many*.

This is why Sehgal argues that diffraction does not form an image but records the effects and consequences of an event, a meeting in the historicity, and the differences it introduces. Difference and historicity are, therefore, the central features of the method of diffraction (2016, 26). According to Haraway, “reflection” and “reflexivity” comes with the identity thinking of metaphysics and the metaphysics of representation, which is overcome by diffraction (Haraway 2000, 102). It deals with a heterogeneous history and does not provide images or forms of representation. Diffraction is also not based on the difference between original and copy. Still, it deals with the retrospective-ness and post-hoc-ness of events already occurring elsewhere. The concept records the history of interactions, overlappings, amplifications, and differences and is, therefore, suitable as a metaphor for “situated knowledge.” It is not about reflecting reality but rather “bending” reality (Deuber-

39. Donna Haraway defined diffraction: “Diffraction patterns record the history of interaction, interference, reinforcement, difference. *Diffraction is about heterogeneous history, not about originals.* Unlike reflections, *diffractions do not displace the same elsewhere*, in more or less distorted form, thereby giving rise to the *industries of metaphysics*. [...] Diffraction is a narrative, graphic, psychological, spiritual, and political technology for making consequential meanings” (Haraway 1997, 273; quoted after Sehgal 2016, 26; emphasis added).

Mankowsky 2011, 89–91; translated by author) or secularism. Therefore, diffraction is an apt metaphor for the *situatedness* of Buddha, Buddhism, Buddhist mediators and branding, secularism, and religion.

Methodologically speaking, the concept of diffraction allows reading together and confronting heterogeneous fields that do not come from the same epochs, traditions, or areas that do not refer to each other (Sehgal 2016, 26—27), i.e., Buddhist traditions and Buddha brands and advertising. This thesis wants to take up the title of a talk by Elizabeth J. Harris in 2019, “But I didn’t think Buddhism was like this!” in a Latourian and diffraction-like way, so that ultimately this sentence is also true for secularism, religion, branding, and mediators in general, extending beyond reflecting that Buddhism *is* a religion and mediators *are* not, but reading both together as religion *and* secularism by connecting them through relationships within vast networks of actors, mediations, and events. Similarly, Donna Haraway (2000) has described her thinking as a redescription, “to redescribe something so that it becomes thicker than it first seems” (108). Thus, like everything King Midas touches becomes gold, Buddhism includes everything Buddhist mediators touch.

4. Risks and Relevance: Why Employ Bruno Latour in Religious Studies?

Inken Prohl (2012a) has defined religion as an enterprise of *mediation*, which consistently discursively denies the process of its own *mediation* (381—382). Although there are dozens of meditation theorists, Bruno Latour⁴⁰ was chosen for this thesis because he offers innovative insights into mediation processes.⁴¹ Applying Latour may provide a guideline for how to study Buddha brands. Of course, Buddhist brands and mediators have already been historically researched. However, Latour has underlined the idea of an investigation — not criticism — of modern (consumerist) actors from the perspective of these actors (people and objects). Although he did not grapple with Buddhism, he worked on mediations or mediators, defined as the gap between substances (i.e., religion and non-religion or religion A and religion B) and the movement between

40. No other author has added such concepts, theories, and questions for more than four decades, i.e., networks, actors, modes of existence, and — as chapter 7 “Reset Realism in Religious Studies!” will try to show, his innovative view of — realism.

41. For more on Latour’s meditation theory, see the introductory chapter 2.1.5. “Medium, Mediation, Mediator, Immutable Mobiles, and Play.”

one mediation and the next. Thus, mediation is considered simultaneously a thing and its opposite (Latour 2013c; “Mediation”).

The term “Buddhism-as-mediators,” central to this thesis, is a Latourian one. It is based on Latour’s twin concepts of *being-as-being* and *being-as-other*. While *Being-as-being* focuses more on the word “is,” *being-as-other* focuses more on the word “as” and thus on the plurality of perspectives (Latour 2013c; “Being-as-being, Being-as-Other”). Therefore, Buddhism seems less to *be* something, but it often *acts* as (a network of) mediators. In this work, the term “mediator” is used as the agent of the “mediation” process. To study mediators, this thesis follows Latour’s publication on modes of existence (2013a) and, therefore, first studies Buddhist mediators in five modes that extend beyond the religious-secular dichotomy⁴²: consumers are gathering, assembling, and mediating, and they are themselves gathered, assembled, and mediated (i) *naturally*, (ii) *materially and objectively*, (iii) *subjectively*, (iv) *economically* as well as (v) *articulately* by consumerist products, brands, and markets. For this purpose, this thesis explores Buddhist mediators within pluralistic and multiplying networks of meaning and truth, which transcend the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm.

This thesis’ transdisciplinary approach — which connects material and cultural studies — finally tries to connect to a Latourian theory of gathering, assembling, and mediating Buddhist materialities — and other “things” — to better understand the contemporary neoliberal and consumerist societies in which actors live. Despite the transdisciplinary claim, the following further specific characteristics of this work should be mentioned. Since its inception, this work has been understood as an attempt to offer an irrealist approach, present different perspectives and theories, and generate reflection on Buddhism. This objective has meant reflections on various concepts and theories, which is why, for clarity, much of the work comprises many historical and contemporary images, applications, and practices. All essential terms and concepts used here have been briefly defined in the introductory chapter 2.1. “Towards Some Working Definitions” to avoid potential problems.

42. Should Buddhist mediators in consumerist neoliberal societies be considered secular, religious, or postsecular? In discussing this question, religious studies scholars should be aware of refraining from reiterating modern assumptions of religion and politics that have been prevalent since the 17th century, i.e., the well-known dichotomy between irrational belief on the one hand and rational knowledge on the other.

In the spirit of Latour 2020h, the most pragmatic risk, and strength of studying Buddhism with Latour⁴³ lies in the possible failure of this project. The fundamental notion underlying the discussion about this work's risks, limitations, and relevance is that there is not much previous literature exploring Buddhism through a mediational, multi-methodological, and actor-centered approach with or without a Latourian theoretical background. This certainly makes this work risky and necessarily preliminary. The most significant risk is that this work could not follow an explicit model of previous work, so new arguments, theories, and structures had to be created accordingly. Due to the empirical — historical, and contemporary — data, studying Buddhist mediators has many difficulties and risks since they are highly complex and vary in themes and meanings, volatile and contradictory in their respective networks, while also being extremely familiar to most actors.

5. Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into three parts and seven chapters.

Part I — including one chapter — investigates how the *secular and religious* are related, whereby the secular is understood *as* a religious project, which acts as religion's opposite.

Chapter 1 tells some of the histories of the “secular” in three subchapters. It begins by asking what religion is by exploring a variety of definitions and approaches, historical perspectives, the protestant and spiritualist versions of the “crossed-out God,” and diverse forms of religion. The second subchapter relates “religion” and “the secular” by reading some key authors and some of their concepts relevant to this question, like Martin Luther (division), Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (contradiction), Jean Bodin, William Penn and John Locke (separation), Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber. (unsurmountable tension). The final subchapter deals with critiques of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm concepts. The “critique” begins by reading key authors like (i) Carl Schmitt's “Political Theology,” Karl Polanyi's “capitalism as religion” and Jan Assmann's concept of “counter-religions,” (ii) Eric Voegelin's “political religion” and the idea of the secular as a form of religious fundamentalism — illustrated in the context of the Islamist attacks on the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on January 7, 2015, and its effects — proceeding to (iii) Timothy Fitzgerald's remarks on religion and the secular as one single entity. Subsequently, it then investigates (iv) the work by Markus Dressler and Arvind-

43. To place the work in the context of others, most notably in the context of realism Josephson-Storm (2021; Martin 2022), and thus emphasize Latour's innovation, authors who are thematically related to Latour but also dissimilar in essential aspects — such as its theoretical, methodological, and empirical approach — are discussed in chapter 7 “Reset Realism in Religious Studies!”

Pal S. Mandair regarding the role of the secular in — what they have coined — the “religion-making machine” as well as its relation to the post-secular, and (v) finally contextualizing Bruno Latour’s work on the relation between secularism and religion by (a) discussing his “critique” on Émile Durkheim’s conception of society and its relation to religion, (b) investigating the question of religious fundamentalism concerning the 2015 attacks on Charlie Hebdo, (c) studying the concept of the modern God as “crossed-out” and appearing with other terms like “society,” “market”, “science” or “the economy”, revisiting (d) the so-called *secularization thesis* in particular relation to science, and (e) the relationship between secularism and the “terrestrial” regarding the intrusion of the global climate catastrophe — labelled by Latour as “Gaia” — which he has called the “the *most secular entity* ever produced by Western science” (2015d, 58—59), famously created as a theoretical entity by James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis in the 1970s.

Part II analyzes Buddha brands in London, or the (re/de)composing and (re/de)composting of Buddhism through the lens of Buddhist mediators/brands in five chapters, which extends beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, and instead studies the gathering, assembling, and mediating⁴⁴ of Buddhism in various forms of nature, materiality, and objectification, subjectivity, economics, and articulation.

Chapter 2 investigates the gathering of Buddhism-as-mediators in three subchapters: (i) tradition/repetition/reproduction, (ii) transformation, and (iii) practice. This chapter explores how these three modes can be understood as translations and chains of reference within translational and transforming processes that primarily *naturalize* things into natural Buddhism-as-mediators. The first subchapter analyzes how Buddhist mediators are naturalized and reproduced as a tradition through human lives, experiences, and emotions like fear, happiness, and hope, as well as human senses of seeing, touching, smelling, tasting, and hearing. The second discusses how knowledge is transformed when Buddhist mediators are translated into art and exhibitions, like the colonial *British Empire Exhibition* (1924—1925). The final subchapter discusses how Buddhist mediators are practiced or habitualized by investigating materialized embodied, gendered, and sexed formations and collectives.

Chapter 3 studies the assembling of Buddhism-as-mediators in three sub-modes: (i) technology, (ii) innovation, and (iii) science. This chapter investigates how *materialized* and

44. These three terms come from Latour’s essay “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern” (2004c), in which gathering, assembling, and mediating are used to — inspired by Martin Heidegger 1951 — define a thing as an arena, a matter of fact and a matter of concern.

objectified — former “religious” — artifacts and things are assembled, combined, and hybridized to create so-called “secular” products, which in this thesis will be called material and objective Buddhism-as-mediators. This chapter situates Buddhist mediators within scientific and referential networks by following the relations between scholars, experts, and lay(wo)men. The first subchapter investigates the technological side of apps, digitalization, the Internet of Things, the ever-increasing artificial intelligence (in the following: AI), and the self-driving sector. The second studies how innovative and artistic formations create fun, coolness, popularity, and entertainment. This is why Buddhist mediators can be found in pop art and TV series like the *Vikings*. The third subchapter investigates how scientific and referential knowledge is performed, illustrated by studying the pagoda⁴⁵ in Kew Gardens, which shows the — colonial — “taste” for China, the referential Other. This referential, scientific, “neutral,” and objective interest in “pagodas” hides political — i.e., collective — functions, but it creates groups and spreads religious messages and feelings of belonging to various actors.

Chapter 4 analyzes three modes of “mediating” Buddha and Buddhism: (i) politics, (ii) law, and (iii) religion. This chapter explores how these modes are creating *subjectivities* as subjective Buddhism-as-mediators. It investigates how Buddhist branding mediates between being *itself* and being something *other*, thereby jumping between *being* Buddhism, capitalism, and neoliberalism and thus being secular and religious synchronously. The first subchapter studies how Buddhist mediators are political in governance, control, security issues, segmentational and subdivisional tribalism, and new forms of orientalism. The second one investigates how juridical questions are relevant within museums. The acquiring of their collections and artifacts regarding Buddhist mediators, tracking the networks of actors where Buddha figures are connecting “nodes” between geographical regions (Asia and Europe), actors (collectors, visitors, and Buddhists), and abstractions (Buddhism, museums, and capitalism). This is specifically studied in three case studies: the first is the case of German pseudo-archaeologist Theodor Heinrich Thomann and his relations to the *Museums of Ethnology* Hamburg and Berlin; the second follows the biography of John Tradescant’s Buddha figures in the first half of the 17th century, which originated in today’s Myanmar and finally became part of Oxford *Ashmolean Museum’s Founding Collections*; and the third investigates Engelbert Kaempfer’s travels to Japan in the second half of the 17th century, where he acquired two Kannon figures that became part of the *British Museum’s* original collection,

45. A pagoda or stupa, like the Shwedagon Pagoda in Yangon, Myanmar, is primarily a multistoried tower found in Buddhist monasteries in East Asia. It is supposed to house relics of the Buddha or a Buddhist “saint” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 611). Early archaeologists like British Burma’s former *Government Archaeologist* Taw Sein Ko did, already in 1913, write on the evolution of this type of architecture.

the so-called *Sloane Collections*. The subchapter on law ends by discussing how Buddhist mediators appear on human bodies — Buddha tattoos — and advertising are received as cool and chic in the so-called West. Still, when they globalize, political and juridical trouble comes in. The final subchapter explores how mediations and mediators can be understood as religion — and vice versa —and thus discusses how organizational structures like branding, marketing, and markets have religious functions and characteristics. This thesis is illustrated by investigating three types of branding — influencing, mass, and relationship branding. This subchapter ends by analyzing how neoliberalism is religious by contributing to optimizing actors, companies, jobs, and identities.

Chapter 5 studies how Buddhism-as-mediators have economized in the modes of (i) passion, (ii) organization, and (iii) ethics in the form of economic Buddhism-as-mediators. This chapter follows how Buddhist mediators are translated into the “West,” English terms, and namings of consumerist companies and products. The first subchapter studies the attached sphere of things, where people are passionate about commodities, fashion, art in products and packaging, and interior and exterior architecture. The second one investigates how Buddhist mediators are organized in neoliberal corporate structures, which includes power sharing between companies and the state, the effects of the growing financial sector, the franchise industry, the lack of entrepreneurial and small business development, and the need for changing company names. This subchapter also researches how Buddhist mediators are marketized, which leads to the fact that they appear thinkable in any market. The final subchapter considers ethical issues of Buddhist mediators like the ethic of “feeling good” and the ethics of living “green” and ecological lives. This subchapter ends by investigating Buddhist mediators concerning stress reduction in living in a cosmopolis, the question of what urbanity feels like, and how locality is experienced in and through forms of a neighborhood.

Chapter 6 investigates how Buddhism-as-mediators is *articulated* as semiotic, rhetorical, and articulative Buddhism-as-mediators. The first subchapter investigates the networks and associations that led to the creation of over 300 names for the Buddha in a nearly-2,000-year-old relationship and how, finally, “Western” intellectuals in the 19th century like Eugène Burnouf *made* the — human and humane — Buddha, who is that well-known today (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 2). This subchapter also researches how actors since the 17th century have translated Buddhist terms and concepts into English and how museums like the *Buddha Museum* in German Traben-Trarbach lead to translocal processes of iconoclasm, iconoclash, and iconomash. The second subchapter discusses Buddhist mediators’ multiple and interpretive sides and how Buddhist brands are practiced between modes of visibility and invisibility, like the brand behind the brand. It also investigates how Buddhist mediators and branding are strongly related to simulating new and artificial worlds in

which to “live” and how this is related to creating a *homo mediaticus*. This subchapter ends by studying icons and images that hold religious meanings in the context of the logoization and sloganization of Buddhist mediators. The final subchapter discusses how Buddhist mediators use simplification or formalization — i.e., instant information and transfers without transformations — in the namings of neoliberal and consumerist products and companies and inclusive hyper-positive exoticism. This subchapter investigates how secularizing translations have transformed, translated, formalized, and simplified Buddha figures, practices, and histories for a European “receiving culture.”

Part III — including one chapter — studies how one should widen Buddhism beyond a realist material religion approach — which in this thesis will be pursued vaguely in the first two parts — in such a way that with an irrealist quantum religion approach, this thesis breaks away from Buddhism as a fundamentally fixed entity towards instead a thing made only of relations and mediations.

Chapter 7 explores in four subchapters how quantum religion is inherently mediational and empty and why scholars of religion do not have to decide within the realism vs. antirealism debate but, in a Latourian way, reset realism altogether, similar to Josephson-Storm’s (2021; Martin 2022) proposal of a modal metarealism. First, there is the affiliation of entities (like religion) to other entities (like Buddhism), which is usually assumed to be a relation of wholes to its parts. These parts, in turn, always have other parts (like actors, atoms, etc.), and these wholes themselves belong to other wholes (like culture, society, materiality, language, etc.). In the second part, the argument proceeds that things like Buddhism do not have intrinsic or inherent properties but are solely relational entities. Third, there is no ultimate truth about what an entity like Buddhism is authentically or correctly. In other words, what Buddhism means is not fixed to a single truth but comprises infinite, mutually contradictory truths. Finally, in the chapter’s conclusion, an attempt is made to correlate Bruno Latour with the ancient Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna⁴⁶ (c. 150–250 CE) to instantiate the former as a Buddhist philosopher of “empty realism” or “irrealism.” Accordingly, all entities that scholars of religion study (as well as Buddhism) are empty, namely they have no “selfhood” (or, in Buddhist terms, they have no “*sūnyatā*”), which means that they lack something specific that only they possess and that distinguishes them in particular; instead, they are empty in the sense that any specificity that they have has been born out of relationships

46. For an overview of Nāgārjuna, see Westerhoff 2018.

with other entities. However, it is essential to note that emptiness does not mean meaninglessness, nothingness, or nihilism. Things (like Buddhism) are empty, but they are not nothing: they are certainly something, e.g., relations or structures of emptiness. All that religious scholars then study are appearances or phenomena, but — and this is very important — without noumena, as there is no more true, more authentic, or more Buddhist appearance than any other: a Buddha figure displayed on a package of cannabis seeds is as much a Buddhist appearance as those figures appearing in Buddhist pagodas or a *Rituals* store. This “phenomenon only”-orientedness is quite contrary to the so-called “phenomenology of religion,” which is rather like a noumenology of religion given that this only instrumentalizes religious phenomena to get through them to much more fundamental matters, such as religious experience itself, religious essence, etc.

The conclusion will analyze all of the objectives, findings, and implications, not least the consequences for the discipline of religious studies, i.e., whether, how, and why it is — and will remain — a necessary academic field or not, discussed in the three parts and seven chapters of this thesis. It will also discuss the study’s limitations and offer further research suggestions.

The addendum is a response to the dissertation feedback from both supervisors. It aims to clarify misunderstandings, answer open questions, and strengthen weak arguments. The chapter is attached after the conclusion to avoid disrupting the structure of the main text. It provides quick access and an overview of Frequently Asked Questions in ten thematic areas.

PART I

The “Religion vs. Secularism” Paradigm

Chapter 1

The Historical Relations Between the *Secular and Religious*

Introduction

What is the relationship between religion and secularism?¹ What would a state beyond both look like? This chapter will discuss in three parts (i) what religion actually is, by studying a multitude of approaches of how to study “religion”, offering a historical perspective to the creation of the modern concept of religion, as well as the Protestant and spiritualist version of it, before (ii) discussing the relation between religion and the secular, via reading classical authors (and their specific key concepts) from the 16th to the 20th centuries like Martin Luther (division), Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (contradiction), Jean Bodin, William Penn and John Locke (separation), Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber (unsurmountable tension), and (iii) finally investigating critiques of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, by studying 20th and 21st century authors like Carl Schmitt, Karl Polanyi and Jan Assmann (alternative religions), Eric Voegelin (secularism as fundamentalism), Timothy Fitzgerald (secularism and religion as one category), Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (the religion-making machine and the secular) and Bruno Latour’s multiple participations in this discussion. Finally, religious studies can learn from Latour’s ideas on networked constructions of all social (and even religious) entities, which is why his work on (i) Émile Durkheim, (ii) Charlie Hebdo, (iii) the so-called “crossed-out God,” (iv) the secularization thesis concerning science, and (v) the only “real secular” — Gaia, or the global climate crisis — will be discussed in greater detail.

1. Religious studies scholar Talal Asad famously researched the “formations of the secular” (2003), while others have argued for moving “beyond the religious-secular dichotomy” (Franke 2020), criticized secularism, calling it a myth (Ward 2014) or a “dead debate” (Ward 2016), declaring “R.I.P.” (Stark 1999), trying to “break open” the religious—non-religious dichotomy (Knott 2010), or historicizing (Fitzgerald 2007a, 2007b, 2017a) secularism. Literature on secularism is vast and appears in the form of introductions (Jakobsen and Pellegrini 2008), handbooks (Beaumont 2019), books on postsecularity/postsecularism (Duttweiler 2017), or the relation to the discipline of theology (Latour 2014c). There are also general investigations on the “secularization theory” (Stark 1999). Moreover, studies have repeatedly analyzed discourses of enchantment, re-enchantment, and dis-enchantment (Josephson-Storm 2017). Particularly famous are Mark C. Taylor’s *After God* (2007) and Charles Taylor’s work on living in a secular age (2007, 2009), as well as Saba Mahmood on the religious difference in a secular age (2016).

To begin with, it is crucial to keep in mind the Christian historical background of secularism, which Latour (2019) calls the “immanentisation of transcendence” (12). Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (2017) has shown that secularism is closely related to the particular religion of Christianity and the universal concept of “religion,” whereby the “West” would produce secularism at home and religion in non-Western sites (66).

1.1. What Is Religion?

1.1.1. *A Multitude of Approaches to Studying Religion*

Welche Religion ich bekenne? Keine von allen, Die du mir nennst! „Und warum keine“?
Aus Religion.

—Schiller 1797, 163

Fundamental to the most relevant approaches to studying religion² is the insight — which Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (2011) have convincingly shown — that religious epistemes can be found discursively and historically (19). The problem of defining “religion” has been discussed in religious studies for a long time without consensus. However, some (Prohl and Okropiridze 2012b) have outlined limits and possibilities of general definitions of religions. A decade ago, Michael Bergunder (2012) — like Kocku von Stuckrad — highlighted that one should understand “religion” as a discourse of historical communications about something called or named “religion.” This approach can integrate academic, non-academic, and institutionalized discourses and concepts of “religion” with all possible content like gods, spirits, etc. However, five approaches that extend beyond those mentioned above are most important for this thesis:

2. The debate and the literature on the discourse and materiality of religion and religions are tremendous and span from the groundbreaking *Genealogy of Religion* (1993) by Talal Asad, which applies Foucauldian research on power to the study of Islam and Christianity. There is literature on a multitude of issues like the critique of religion as a discourse on civility vs. barbarity (Fitzgerald 2007b), religion, politics, and governments (Fitzgerald 2011), religion and orientalism (King 1999), religion and consumerism (Gauthier 2014, Gauthier 2017), religion and aesthetics (Cancik and Mohr 1988, A. Koch 2013, Prohl 2010a, 2015b, 2015e, Grieser and Johnston 2017), religion and violence (Prohl 2003a, 2003b, Kollmar-Paulenz and Prohl 2003, Cavanaugh 2009, Cavanaugh 2017), (neo)liberalism and religion (Fitzgerald 2015), implicit religion (Implicit Religion 2019), lived religion (Durkheim 1981, Piegeler, Prohl and Rademacher 2004, McGuire 2008, Harvey 2013), religious exoticism (Altglas 2014a, 2014c, 2014d, 2020b), the relationship between religion and media (Meyer 2008, 2011, 2012, 2020) and science as religion (Feyerabend 1975).

(i) Many authors, for instance, Fitzgerald 2000, have critically³ studied the relationship between religion and religious studies.

(ii) From the perspective of material religion⁴, studying religion is not only interested in the materialization of religion through the study of individual objects and practices, but it also asks how interactions with assumed supernatural powers, gods, or the Buddha include the body and senses. Materialization processes require access to cognitive, sensory, habitual, and social arrangements that enable religious experience. This includes the embodiment of religious ideas in ritual practices and interactions between the body, the setting, and the senses — like touching, seeing, hearing, smelling, and tasting — of religion.

(iii) Regarding the relationship between religion and so-called “popular culture.”⁵

(iv) Similarly, Stig Hjarvard (2008) has developed a tripartite division of mediatized religion and thereby coined the concept of the so-called “banal religion” for objects, discourses, and practices that are not meant pejoratively but are subsequently often criticized for having no intentional religious meaning, while being reminiscent of specific religious images. Understood as fundamental, this form of religion appears in almost all societies and is the mediatized parallel to “folk religion” or “culture religion,” i.e., the non-doctrinal ideas and practices about unconscious cultural narratives (Borup 2016, 42).

(v) There is a multitude of literature on the relationship between *branding and religion* (Kriaučiūnaitė-Lazauskienė 2019a, Kriaučiūnaitė-Lazauskienė, and Rima Žitkienė 2019c), but also *branding as religion* (Atkin 2004a, Atkin 2004b, Sheffield 2006) and research on *religion as branding* (Carrette 2005, Kriaučiūnaitė-Lazauskienė 2018).

3. Russell T. McCutcheon’s *Manufacturing Religion* (1997) has studied the influence of religious studies scholars — of the religious phenomenological tradition — like Mircea Eliade on their research object of “religion,” Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) has worked on the invention of the concept of “world religions,” Inken Prohl has summarized the world religion concept (2006c), and Thomas A. Tweed’s work (2006) has focused on the “fluid” and translocal conceptualization of religion.

4. Therefore, approaches of material religion are comparable to approaches of the so-called *Aesthetics of Religion*, which was introduced in Germany by Hubert Cancik and Hubert Mohr in 1988 (Graf 2017, 16). This branch is interested in interweaving cognitive and sensual triggers and aspects in the reception of religious beliefs and practices (Graf 2017, 17). It has been used by several authors (Morgan 2010, 2016, Vásquez 2011, Prohl 2012a, Whitehead 2013, Plate 2014, 2015, Jones and Matthews-Jones 2015, Hutchings and McKenzie 2016).

5. Jane Naomi Iwamura has published her popular *Virtual Orientalism* (2011), Ellen Frances King (2014) has even connected material religion with popular culture, Chris Klassen (2014) has contributed a cultural studies approach, and Lynn Schofield Clark has researched how to write a thesis on popular culture in a religious studies or theology department (2007) as did David Morgan (2007b). Many others have investigated the relationship between religion and popular culture (Badaracco 2005, Campbell 2010, Schlehe and Sandkühler 2014).

Therefore, one can conclude — following Timothy Fitzgerald (2017b, 452)— that the “religion” category is complex, unstable, and includes conflicting meanings, which makes its supposedly neutral and disinterested use for analytical and descriptive purposes illusory and dangerous. The discourse and materiality of religion are deeply ideological, especially when veiled as neutral, purely descriptive, or intellectually satisfying.

Another — quite refreshing and completely different — perspective comes from beyond religious studies, namely Latour again. He takes inspiration from French philosopher Michel Serres, who has argued that “[w]hoever has no religion should not be called an atheist or unbeliever, but negligent” (Serres 2011, 48). Therefore, “being religious” means caring about specific elements, which leads Latour to conclude that “*there is no such thing as an irreligious collective*. But there are collectives that *neglect* many elements that *other collectives* consider extremely important and that they need to care for constantly” (Latour 2017, 152, Simons 2019, 946). Latour is very strict in distinguishing the adverb “religiously” from “instituted religions” or “heterogeneous networks that the idea of religion unifies all too quickly” since “religiously” is more about “the very particular mode of transition, of transit or of translation” (Latour 2013c; “[REL]”).⁶

This thesis defines religious behavior as being “converted” by a specific message. In the sense that Latour has determined in his *Rejoicing: Or the Torments of Religious Speech* (2013b), talking and acting religiously means creating people in the present by changing them. Therefore, the empirical basis of religion is not whether actors claim that there is an assumed “beyond” but whether they are converted or not. This three-part function of religious behavior involves actors, the contemporary, and an alteration.

6. Latour defines religion in the following way: “a) a certain kind of continuity, a trajectory, obtained by a certain type of discontinuity, the hiatus: *The amazing work of stabilizing and renewing a message that is constantly transformed and yet remains faithful to its origin when it converts those to whom the message is addressed*; b) particular kinds of felicity and infelicity conditions: *A type of original truth which gives meaning to the predication only if it creates anew the person to which it is addressed*; c) the specifications of the type of beings that the mode leaves in its wake: Beings capable of resuscitating those to whom the message is addressed because of the action of highly specific beings over which, however, we have no control and which depend on the conditions of enunciation; and finally d) a mode of alteration of the being-as-other: Grasping the alteration as the completion of time, even though time goes on, thus resulting in a novelty in the historical regime: a flow of time that is synonymous with the end of time” (Latour 2013c; “[REL]”; emphasis added).

1.1.2. A Historical Perspective

William T. Cavanaugh applied a “constructivist perspective” to religion, i.e., it was not supposed to be a transhistorical and translocal characteristic of society. In his reading, religion has a history interwoven with the modern “West” and carries specific policies. For instance, the religious-secular dichotomy was created as an ideological accompaniment to the triumph of the modern state over the medieval ecclesiastical order (Cavanaugh 2017, 589).

(i) The primary use of the term “religion” in the Middle Ages was to distinguish between religious and secular “clergy,” i.e., “clergy that belonged to orders from diocesan clergy.” This was the meaning of “religion” when incorporated into English. Around 1400, England’s “religions” were the various orders like Benedictines, Franciscans, etc. (ii) A second use of “religion” in the Middle Ages was the reference — as in Thomas Aquinas — to one of the nine “subvirtues” of the cardinal virtue of justice, where “religio” meant something like “piety,” albeit exclusively as a physical practice within a set of practices within the Christian social order. This “religio” was not a universal genus, of which Christianity was a species, nor a belief system or something inwardly in a human being, and it certainly was not separable from politics, economics, and other — since “modern” times defined as — “secular” areas. (iii) The concept of religion as a universal and interiorized human impulse, expressed in beliefs based on a non-rational basis — and essentially different from secular areas such as politics — is a creation of Europe between the 15th and 17th centuries, which is also the time of the rise of the modern state. The creation of the religious-secular dichotomy — into which all human actions were to be divided — was the work of many authors, policies, and extensive networks. (iv) The creation of “religion” is a product of the early modern struggle between civil and church authorities for power in Europe. The assignment of church authority led it to an inner human impulse called “religion,” which essentially became separate from politics, i.e., from the state (590).⁷

According to John Bossy (1985), religion did not evolve as a separate concept until around 1700 (170–171). This does not mean that the concept of religion was absent in the 16th-17th centuries, but rather that the separation of religion from social or political factors was in the development process, precisely those new forms of power that became known as the “state.” There

7. John Locke defined this separation in 1689 by arguing that “*the church itself is a thing absolutely separate and distinct from the commonwealth*. The boundaries on both sides are fixed and immovable. He jumbles heaven and earth together, the things most remote and opposite, who mixes these two societies, which are in their original, end, business, and in *everything perfectly distinct and infinitely different from each other*” (Locke 1689, 15; emphasis added).

was a gigantic shift in the transfer of power from the church to a new sovereign state, which meant that “secularization” — when it first appeared in France in the late 16th century — meant transferring church goods into worldly goods. The new concept of religion helped to develop the shift towards state dominance over the church by separating internal religion from the state’s corrupt practices. According to it, the new modern subject could be both the church and state — without conflict — in bondage and service (Cavanaugh 2017, 592–593). Thus, religious violence would not arise from religion being removed from the public sphere by the modern state but through the sacralization — not secularization — of the state in the 16th and 17th centuries. De facto, the state’s religion superseded the church’s religion. This transfer of power from the church to the state led to the making of religion and was accompanied by the “migration of the holy” from the church to the state (594).

In the 20th century, the decline of public Christianity and the rise of the modern state left a vacuum for a “religious sense” filled with the sacralization of supposedly secular formations like the nation. For instance, Robert Bellah (1967, 1975, and 1990) and others have identified a civil religion in America. According to Bellah, the separation of the church and state in the United States did not lead to the separation of religion and the state.⁸

1.1.3. A Protestant and Spiritualist Version of Religion

Richard King and Jeremy Carrette have shown in *Selling Spirituality* (2005) how religion as an essentially private inner experience or separate psychological status stems from certain forms of Protestant Christianity, even if it is now a consumer good (Carrette 2007, Carrette and King 2005). The essentialization and separation of religious and secular practices can be explained by the dialectical relationship with new powerful interests in banking, trade, and manufacturing/production with the transformation of land use rights into private property and the “commodification” of people into forms of slavery or wage labor. The crucial link is the disguise of belief in capital with an aura of the factual — in contrast to religion — so that capital and commodity markets appear as part of *rational knowledge* and not as an *irrational belief in superstition*. According to Fitzgerald (2017b,

8. Some consider nationalism (Cavanaugh 2017, 595) or even capitalism (King and Carrette 2005) a religion. Heike Bungert and Jana Weiß have analyzed the debate on civil religion from a transnational perspective (2010) as well as in the 20th century United States (2017); Sebastian Emling (2013) investigated the transformations and reconceptions of religion and politics in the US within the electoral campaign of Barack Obama, and Anne Koch (2017) has worked on the connection between civil religion and an aesthetic perspective.

451–452), whoever deals with “religion” today unconsciously supports the — male — myth of the discourse of the inevitability of capitalist operations (452).⁹

1.2. The Opposite Relationship Between Secularism and Religion

In her study on *Oprah*, Kathryn Lofton (2011) defined the religious “troika”¹⁰ — similar to what Inken Prohl has called “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112). For Lofton, this “neat troika” suggests that religion and so-called popular culture could be untangled from each other, but instead, Lofton identifies their “collaboration” and entanglement (10). Prohl (2016) has coined the term “religious super effect” to identify within contemporary modern society’s forms of religion that can be found in (i) religious traditions, (ii) popular culture with religious images and designs, and (iii) popular culture as religion. Lofton and Prohl ask what happens to religion when this “troika” or “triple religion” does not stop at the religious-secular divide.

According to Cavanaugh (2017, 589), the religious-secular dichotomy emerged as an ideological “accompaniment” to the triumph of the modern state over the medieval ecclesiastical order. Discussions on the dichotomy between “holy” and “profane” are very old.¹¹

9. This ideology of interiority has led (i) to the individualism of consumer capitalism and the exploitation of people as a machine for extracting “surplus value” and (ii) less powerful human actors — such as women and minorities — being able to occupy significant spaces to be treated with respect and dignity as human beings, offering some protection against the quantitative exploitation of their material productive power. The slogans of “greed is good,” “wage labor is an objective fact,” and “loan money is natural and rational and has nothing to do with moral values” were naturalized by the creation of the secular state, so Fitzgerald argues: “[I]n short, that the secular state and politics were invented to “other” (render marginal) a range of powerful moral discourses in order to more effectively represent and protect the interests and privileges of male private property” (452).

10. Lofton (2011) has defined this “troika” in the following way: “That we scholars in cultural studies and religious studies have for so long resisted this impression says a lot more about what we think is sacred and what we think is profane than about what believers (and consumers) consider sacred and profane. What is revealing from a scholarly vantage is that most studies of religion and popular culture establish three basic relationships between those two terms: *religion appearing in popular culture* (like a crucifix in a pop music video); *popular culture appearing in religion* (the use of blogs by believers); and *popular culture as religion* (fandom as religion)” (10; emphasis added).

11. One of the first was Lenin, who wrote an essay on “Socialism and Religion” in 1905, followed by Max Weber in a public speech in 1917 (1919, 35–36) up to Timothy Fitzgerald (2007a, 2017a, 2017b), who aims to deconstruct the so-called “secular-religious binary” in his “critical religion” project, which he began a decade before with his book *Religion and the Secular: Historical and Colonial Formations* (2007a). Charles Taylor has significantly contributed to the field of secularism with his prominent *A Secular Age* (2007), and various articles (2009), Inken Prohl (2006b) has written an exciting overview of “quasi-religions,” and Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair (2011) have contributed the anthology *Secularism and Religion-Making*. There is also a multitude of literature on secularism about dividing religion and politics, for instance, academic blogs named “secular age” (Säkulares Zeitalter 2020) — edited by Adrian Gillmann — as well as secular politics (Säkulare Sozialdemokrat_Innen 2020) headed by Lale Akgün and Adrian Gillmann.

1.2.1. Martin Luther: Division

Martin Luther (1483—1546) can be considered the precursor and one of the earliest examples of the religious-secular divide. Luther discovered the divided self, i.e., a consciousness that separates itself from itself (Mandair 2017, 59). Mark C. Taylor (2007) has argued that Luther's Protestant Reformations were not only a modern key event, but while he reformulated Christian doctrines of salvation, he "discovered or, more precisely, invented the modern subject" (55) and "[b]y privatizing, deregulating and decentering the relationship between a believer and God, Luther initiated a revolution that was not confined to religion but extended to politics and economics" (xv—xvi). Luther's subject was fundamentally divided insofar as the "Christian man is both righteous and sinner, holy and profane, an enemy of God and yet a child of God" (Luther 1961, 130, M. Taylor 2007, 62).

1.2.2. Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: Contradiction

(i) Immanuel Kant's (1724—1804) construction of the transcendental mind — whose mechanism he called "schematization of categories" — unified human experience into three ideas of reason: God, self, and world. With this, Kant laid the foundations of the self-reflective structure of self-awareness. According to Mark C. Taylor (2007), a self-conscious subject is also a self as an object. Thus, his *self-as-subject* and *self-as-object* are reciprocally connected, so neither can exist without the other (111). Therefore, the self-conscious subject is not equal and separates itself from itself. This paradoxical structure of self-relationship — to be selfsame means to separate oneself from oneself — is called *self-representation*. According to Kant, every object must already be separated from itself due to its representation concerning the self-conscious subject, i.e., when religion becomes an object, the imperative of separating the self from itself constitutes its secularization. Through secularization, the "holiness" of religion is replaced by the holiness of criticism, which becomes inviolable (Mandair 2017, 59).

(ii) One of the critical factors that enabled the narrative movement from religion to secularity to post-secularity — connecting the world in space and time — is the concept of religion as something universal. The precursors to this idea can be found in Enlightenment thinkers like David Hume (1711—1776) and even more so in philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770—1831) (Mandair 2017, 62), while the latter is perhaps the most influential scholar writing on the relation between secularism and religion (59).

The three critical mechanisms of religion-making — historical difference and consciousness, the assumed secularity of critique, the belief in religion as a cultural universal, and the belief in Western civilizational identity — can be specifically attributed to Hegel (63–66). The historical co-development and co-dependence of religion and secularity are directly interwoven with the development of modern Western thought, which in turn privileges a specific form of critical thinking as universal and places a particular religion — Christianity — as the fundamental axis upon which world history revolves. Hegel’s “turning of the world” implies two things (Malabou 2005, 115–117): (i) the potential of one culture to move from the lowest to the highest levels of religious development, i.e., from paganism to Christianity and from religion through secularity to post-secularity; and (ii) the potential to change the world — the “world turning” — inspired by the reform logic of Luther’s Protestant Revolution. In this logic, Christianity could overcome itself: from state practices to inwardness, disenchantment, and secularity. The historical meaning of Christianity is therefore inheriting Christianity, which is built into the co-dependence of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm (Mandair 2017, 61).

Hegel incorporated the mode of “self-relation” into organizing the ever-growing knowledge of other cultures in the historical transition between religions, secularity, and the post-secular. With Hegel, the concept of “historical difference” became fundamental to the definition of the Other. He aimed to integrate the possibility and meaning of critical thought with a concept of “historical difference,” which enabled religion or tradition to be defined as essential if it could question its origins from the outset. The ability to distance itself from its origins — to distance itself from religion or tradition — was defined as a measure of secularity. According to Hegel, the degree to which a culture or religion can carry out this self-representation at its origins not only defines its history and secularity but also determines the degree to which it differs from other traditions and cultures (Mandair 2009, Mandair 2017, 60).

If the “secular” represents the dynamics of religion’s self-overcoming — its ability to change the world — then (i) changing means the movement of history — temporality — and (ii) the secular is incipient in religion, at the moment when human consciousness emerges as a shared subjectivity. The relationship of religion and secularity remains preserved by a specific understanding of history or a moment of the emergence of a particular form of self-awareness as a critique that not only *made* modern “Westerners” the relational center of the world but also as universally constituted, as long as the twin categories of *religion—secular* and *time—consciousness* were inscribed onto every other culture in the context of imperialism (Mandair 2017, 61–62).

Hegel's comparative scheme — built on the development from religion to the secular and post-secular — can be seen as part of a larger *fear* among European intellectuals about an identity crisis at the heart of the intertwined concepts of “Europe,” “modernity,” and “Christianity.” Hegel's answer to this fear is thus not only an epistemological but also a profoundly political one, which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have famously addressed in their work *Empire* (2000, 74–77, Mandair 2017, 64). They believe intellectual projects like Hegel's could only be possible through European expansion, conquest, and colonialism. Therefore, Hegel's ontotheological schema is a power diagram that simultaneously offered control over European subversive forces and negated non-European desire (Mandair 2017, 64).

The results of Hegel's “transcendental apparatus” — the new comparative scheme — were far-reaching: terms such as pantheism, monotheism, and polytheism could be used as global-historical or comparative categories, and each culture could be intuitively understood as “meaning-value” (Liu 1999) and arranged on an axis. This scheme not only represents diversity, plurality, difference, and time through a configuration of the world, but it virtually constitutes and sustains the constellations of Europe, West, Christianity, and the secular through the category of universal religion (Masuzawa 2005, Mandair 2009, 147–160). This move allowed Hegel — and after him, endless orientalists, missionaries, philosophers, anthropologists, historians, economists, and religious (studies) scholars — to apply models that understood the diversity of world cultures regarding equality and difference (Mandair 2017, 65).

By arranging cultures narratively on a global grid, Christianity could show itself intellectually responsible for everything. The Hegelian narrative recognized other cultures as religions and located them in their “proper place.” In the course of the temporal or historic movement, it ensured the Christian claim to the secular *now*, the *past* — the history of world religions, or the religious history of the world — and especially the *post-secular future*, which is a renewal of the secular about its religious origins (Mandair 2017, 62).

Non-Western “cultures” could be recognized as religions similar to Christianity and part of a larger human totality. At the same time, they served to distinguish between people and cultures based on their different religions and their incompatibility with secular European cultures. This ambivalent scheme produced “world religions” as a measure of their historical difference from the so-called “West” — as they were denied the ability to overcome or reform themselves — except through a process of “progress” along Western patterns, which was implemented intellectually and practically during the colonial and post-colonial period (65). Variations of this Eurocentric scheme appeared in the broader imperial policies of modernization, especially as “civilizing missions”

about the “rest.” Intellectually, aspects of it have been woven into explanations of the essential nature of non-Western “cultures.” With an evolving world religion discourse, the scheme has been able to *make* the “meaning-value” (Liu 1999) of cultures intuitively understandable through the principle of “general translation” as a mechanism that brings different cultures together into a taxonomic system of equivalence, where the relative “meaning-values” of each culture can be attributed to making them interchangeable or comparable. The principle of “generalized translation” — which combined the acceptance of secular criticism (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood 2009) and universal religion — almost invisibly shifted from philosophical texts to the work of orientalists and missionaries as privileged interpreters and translators of indigenous texts and cultural practices. From there, it was passed on to laws, policies, and teachers during the colonial period and then to the reformist and nationalist — religionizing and secularizing — projects of local elites in various global colonies (Mandair 2017, 65).

Hegel implemented a circularity between history, critique, and secularism by identifying tangible others — Asia, Africa, etc. — as “religious,” followed by their inclusion or exclusion within the order of knowledge and existence. With the help of the concepts of “history” — as well as “criticism” and “secularity” — Hegel was able to constitute a relationship between European Christianity and “others.” However, through this relationship, the “other” is excluded through his inclusion in orders of knowledge and existence. This exclusion or inclusion makes it possible to understand the contact with non-Western cultures as politically harmless since he placed these cultures at the lower end of a horizontal axis of development — the “self-elevation” — of all cultures, from religion to secularity to post-secularity. This positioning enables (i) giving cultures a comparable and recognizable identity and (ii) at the same time denying them their potential to contribute to modernity in any way (Hardt and Negri 2000, 74–77, Mandair 2017, 63–64).¹² The Hegelian scheme states that the degree to which a “culture” can think coherently and clearly about the transcendental corresponds to its ability to enter history. This is a measure of the power of any “culture” to think critically, measured by its ability to separate itself from itself and its degree of secularity. The concept of “religion-in-general” only becomes audible through the simulated inclusion and exclusion of other “cultures” within history — i.e., the inclusion in the realm of religion — which is simultaneously the exclusion from the realm of history and secularity (Spivak

12. Mandair explains why Christianity was central for mapping and describing other world cultures: “In this way, prior to their actual colonization, all other cultures of the world (indeed the very possibility of pluralism) were mapped within a framework of historical development in such a way that Christianity provided the essential blueprint for the map and the historical evolution of world cultures inscribed within it” (Mandair 2017, 62).

2000). Moreover, the assumption of a universal concept of religion is created in a process in which critical thinking becomes inseparable from “generalized translation” as the ability to translate infinitely and independently between the universal and the particular. Finally, Hegel incorporated religion and secularity into comparing other cultures (Mandair 2017, 63).

Hegel seems to be the one who most clearly brings together all the fundamental concepts of civilized Western identity: Christianity, criticism, historicism, secularism, liberalism, democracy, freedom, etc. Although his scheme has been heavily criticized over the last 200 years, it has been remembered. Still, it has become part of social memory, especially by later authors like Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Ernst Troeltsch, up to contemporary postmodern and post-secular representatives like Slavoj Žižek, Mark C. Taylor and Charles Taylor (Mandair 2017, 65). The schema of “generalized translation” did not end with the colonial period but stands at the center of historicism and secular critique, which continue to shape contemporary humanities. Thus it also continues to exclude non-Western cultures theoretically (Mandair 2009, Mandair 2017, 66).

1.2.3. Jean Bodin, William Penn, and John Locke: Separation

The separation of the church and government was not the modern church-state or the modern religion-politics divide because both the church and state were encompassed by religion. The first conception of the modern state was formulated by Jean Bodin (1530—1596) around 1570 (Fitzgerald 2007b, 149–150). For Bodin, the state was an abstraction in and of itself and distinguishable from the king and the idea of the Commonwealth as the king’s body. However, this could not be the end of history since, at that time, “religion” as a thing sui generis and distinctly different from something non-religious had not yet existed. As long as “religion” was not separated as a separate, distinct, and essentialized realm, the modern idea of a secular, non-religious state could not exist (Fitzgerald 2017b, 449). Around 1700, William Penn (1644—1718)¹³ — also the

13. Penn argued that “[r]eligion and Policy, or Christianity and Magistracy, are two distinct things, have two different ends, and may be fully prosecuted without respect one to the other; the one is for purifying, and cleaning the soul, and fitting it for a future state; the other is for Maintenance and Preserving of Civil Society, in order to the outward conveniency and accommodation of men in this World. A Magistrate is a true and real Magistrate, though not a Christian; as well as a man is a true and real Christian, without being a Magistrate” (Penn 1679, 4; emphasis added).

founder of Pennsylvania — and John Locke (1632—1704)¹⁴ made “religion” and modern “politics” separated areas (Fitzgerald 2017b, 450) since (i) religion is private and individual, perhaps necessary for the next life, and (ii) policy is a separate public area within civil society.

According to Locke, the church is free and voluntary; it is individual and relates to inner conviction and salvation. One could change churches at any time and enter another. Religion and politics are essentially different regarding their aims and purposes, organization, and functions: one is private, the other public. Thus, Penn and Locke influenced the development of state charters and constitutions (Fitzgerald 2017b, 451). As a result, the understanding of religion as a private and personal enterprise — which is practiced entirely voluntarily — only developed at the end of the 17th and beginning of the 18th century by thinkers like John Locke, William Penn, and some others and thereby replaced the then-dominant idea of religion as Christian truth. This controversial discourse established itself over time as a natural truth, which seems counter-intuitive to refute today. In this process, the idea was developed by politics, civil society, and the state as essentially non-religious or secular. Instead of “Christian truth vs. [pagan] falsehood and irrationality,” the focus was now on an essential distinction between “religious and [scientifically rational] non-religious.” To reinforce this rhetorical act of persuasion, several “backup dichotomies” were developed, such as private-public, internal-external, this world-the other world, natural-supernatural, faith-science, metaphysics-empiricism, where each binary could stand in for the others in a chain of substitution, so that each could be used circularly to define the others and thus replace them (Fitzgerald 2017b, 442-443):

1.2.4. Vladimir Lenin, Émile Durkheim, and Max Weber: Unsurmountable Tension

Marxist-informed theories like Vladimir Ilyich Lenin’s (1870—1927) “Socialism and Religion” (1905) were — in a similar way as liberalism — also affected by secular reason. Lenin criticized liberal political economy and thereby “othered” religion as a supernatural belief, utterly different from the real world of socialist and secular science (Fitzgerald 2017a, 171).

14. Locke’s exact argument is the following: “I esteem it above all things necessary to *distinguish exactly the business of civil government from that of religion, and to settle the just bounds that lie between the one and the other*. If this be not done, there can be no end put to the controversies that will be always arising, between those that have, or at least pretend to have, on the one side, *a concernment for the interest of men’s souls*, and on the other side, *a care of the commonwealth*” (Locke 1689, 6; emphasis added); “[a]ll the power of civil government relates only to men’s civil interests, is confined to the care of the things of this world; and hath nothing to do with the world to come. [...] *A Church, then, I take to be a voluntary society of men, joining themselves together of their own accord, in order to the public worshipping of God, in such a manner as they judge acceptable to Him, and effectual to the salvation of their souls*” (Locke 1689, 9; emphasis added).

French sociologist Émile Durkheim's (1858—1917) canonical book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* — with around 600 pages — was published in 1912 and became famous for drawing the primary distinction between the division of the world into “profane” and “sacred” (Durkheim 1981). According to Durkheim, sacred things are “prohibitions [that] would protect and isolate,” and profane things would refer to “these prohibitions” and “must be kept away from the sacred things” (67; translated by author). Durkheim furthermore argued for “the division of things into sacred and profane; the concept of soul, spirit, mythical personalities, national and even supranational divinity” (556; translated by author).

The term “disenchantment” — or “Entzauberung” in German — was widely popularized by Max Weber (1864–1920) but was coined by Friedrich Schiller (Berghahn 1980, 149). In his 1917 lecture on “Science as a profession,” Weber (1919) argued that religious people were “sacrificing the intellect” and that “the tension between the value sphere of “science” and that of religious salvation is unbridgeable” (35; translated by author). Weber, therefore, connected the “disenchantment of the world” with modernity’s “rationalization” and “intellectualization.”¹⁵

1.3. Critiques of the “Religion vs. Secularism” Paradigm

In 1944, Thomas Mann famously stated that dividing religion and politics would be a mistake.¹⁶ Graham Ward (2005, 2014) has identified secularism’s distinctive feature, the proposition of itself as “being neutral with regard to human ideology and belief systems,” since it claims to be emancipated from any religion. In a second step, secularism would offer — a neutral — space for any human ideology to flourish (Howles 2018, 167). According to Ward (2014, 179), secularism becomes the norm and “default position,” which is connected to Roland Barthes’ concept of “the naturalism of secularism” (Howles 2018, 166). Ward has challenged this claim and proposed that the secular has to be understood as an ideology and social practice (2005, Howles 2018, 168).

15. Weber’s argument is: “It is the destiny of our time, with its own *rationalization and intellectualization, above all: disenchantment of the world*, that precisely the last and most sublime values have withdrawn from the public sphere, either into the secular realm of mystical life or into the fraternity of direct relations between individuals” (Weber 1919, 36; translated by author; emphasis added).

16. Thomas Mann’s argument is as follows: “*We fail to recognize the indivisibility of the world when we think of religion and politics as fundamentally separate fields, which neither have nor should have anything to do with each other*; to the extent even that the one would be devalued and exposed as false if any trace of the other were to be found in it” (Mann 1944, 77; emphasis added).

To make this thesis' argument of mediating Buddhism through the lens of Buddha brands — which is *gathering* beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm¹⁷ — this chapter began with visiting the theoretical history of the religious-secular divide before it now hints at its difficulties and critiques. After (i) introducing critical¹⁸ topics in the history of secularism (chapter 1), this study will, from chapter 2 onwards, (ii) investigate the fundamental modes — i.e., natural, material and objective, subjective, economical, and articulative Buddhism-as-mediators — in terms of how the secular is *made* and lived (chapters 2 to 6). The main problems arise in the division into two poles: religion and secularism. At the same time, the latter can be subdivided into science, facts, nature, neoliberalism, markets, etc. (i) On the one hand, classical and conservative thinkers have mainly *purified* this division in a multitude of forms: from identifying a division (Luther), separation (Hobbes and Locke) or contradiction (Kant and Hegel), to an unsurmountable tension (Weber and Durkheim) and incommensurability (Foucault, Said, and Assad) or even hyper-incommensurability (Taylor, Rawls, Habermas, and Žižek). (ii) On the other hand, there has always been a proliferation of mediated and translated “hybrids” between these two poles (Latour 1993, 37).

This is what in this thesis will be called the “secular paradox”¹⁹ or the “cult of the secular gods,” visualized in the following diagram (fig. 2.1).

17. The exciting case study of Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak — who has argued that “[w]e have never been secular because being secular by Western definition means separation of the Islamic principles in the way we govern a country” and that “the country has never been a secular state [which may] have upset many non-Muslims” — illustrates that although Malaysia's constitution states that Islam is the official religion, it does not claim that it is a secular state. Razak says that “[t]here is no way the government can come out and say it is a secular state because Muslims in this country and many other parts of the world feel the term ‘secular state’ means that religion has no place in public life.” He added that non-Muslims would be unhappy to live in an “Islamic state” (Fernandez 2007).

18. In an excellent dissertation thesis on socialism, Catholicism, and occultism in 19th-century France, theologian Julian Strube writes that already “in the 19th century a much more complex picture emerges than that of a teleologically advancing secularization and an accompanying loss of religious significance” (Strube 2015, xiii; translated by author).

19. Some authors have written on critique as a secular “thing” (Asad, Brown, Butler, and Mahmood 2009). For instance, William D. Hart (2000) proved that Said understood his work as a secular critique since, according to Said (1983, 26), critique is a “truly secular enterprise.” He has placed religion in opposition to politics, which reinforces the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm. Hart (2000, 143) worked out three themes of Said's work as (i) “the religious effects of culture” — by distinguishing religion from culture — (ii) “the religious seduction of the secular critic,” and (iii) “the return of repressed religiosity.”

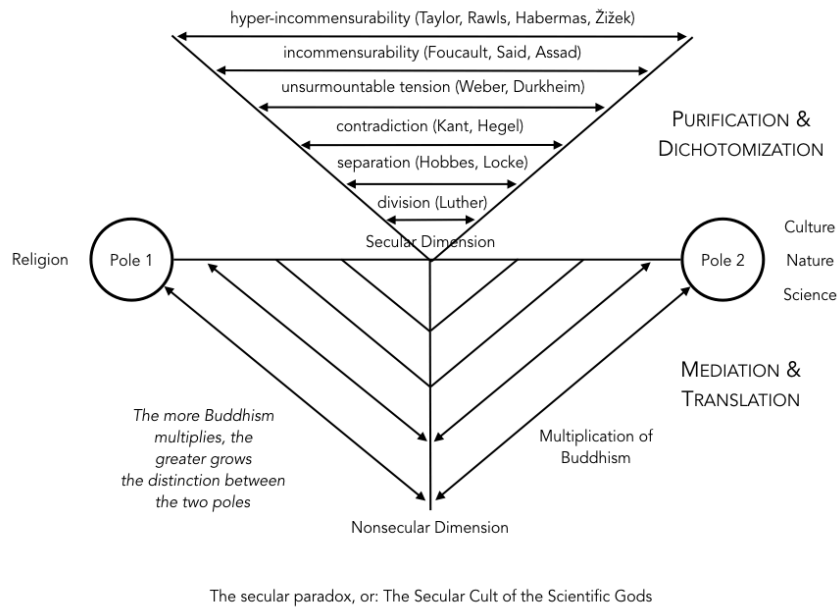


FIGURE 2.1. Diagram showing the work of purification and mediation in making the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm.

This thesis will focus on hybrids, i.e., the middle part between purified and mediated poles (of what Buddhism or Buddhist mediators might be), which is why this thesis tries to make the middle thinkable (Latour 1993, 122–123). No new things are allowed to exist in the modern world, as they are reduced to either nature or society, religion or secularism (80). Talal Asad (2003) has famously formulated the difficulties of defining religion and the secular by asking who defines those categories and what assumptions are presupposed in that very act of definition (201).

Fitzgerald has argued that “critical religion” marks a critical approach to broader “critical studies of religion.” Still, one could also talk about “critical politics,” “critical modern categories” (Fitzgerald 2017a, 169), or “Critical Approaches to the Study of Religion” (The Critical Religion Association 2020). Although Fitzgerald’s claims and observations are beneficial, his “belief” in

critique is — at least — problematic since he is — according to Latour (2004c, 225) simply adding ruins to other ruins, deconstruction to further deconstruction, and critique to other critiques²⁰.

1.3.1. Carl Schmitt, Karl Polanyi and Jan Assmann: Alternative Religions

Several authors have hybridized religion and secularism in various scientific disciplines.

(i) In his *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* in 1922, Carl Schmitt (1888—1985) identified specific political — mostly liberal — concepts as following theological — Christian — schemas by having “a secularized theological concept” (Schmitt 2005, 36—37, Latour 2017, 199—200). He, therefore, introduced the term “political theology” when analyzing these structures (Schmitt 2008, 108, Schmitt 2009, Howles 2018, 192).

20. Latour describes the “critical gesture” in two moves (fig. 1.7), which are the results of his anthropological research into the “iconoclastic gesture” (Latour 1993, 1999a, 2002). The object is fixated on two positions: the *fact* and the *fairy* position. (i) The “very objects of belief” — “gods, fashion, poetry, sport, desire, you name it” — become a fetish, “mere empty white screens on which is projected the power of society, domination, whatever”; while the critic acts as an antifetishist (Latour 2004c, 237–238); (ii) the believer’s behavior is *explained* by “matters of fact” — the economy, discourse, race, genes, drives, class, gender, neurobiology, etc. (238). Ultimately, the critic is always right, making it “such a potent euphoric drug” (238—239). Thus the “critical trick” or “critical barbarity” involves two objects and two subjects, but the “critical barbarian” appears so powerful only because these two moves are never put together. Critics can be without any contradiction at once (i) an antifetishist for things one does not believe in (religion, politics or popular culture), (ii) a positivist for things one believes in (semiotics, economics, science or conspiracy theory), and (iii) a realist for things one cherishes (criticism, soccer, chess, etc.) (240–241). Latour then proposes to add a third position, which goes beyond (cultural, societal, or symbolic) “explanations,” attacks, critiques, exposures, and historicizations — the *fair* position (243). This realist new critical attitude can be described by the term “gathering” — introduced by Heidegger (1951) to describe “the thingness of the thing” (Latour 2004c, 245): using the tools of a multitude of disciplines — anthropology, philosophy, history or sociology — “to detect *how many participants* are gathered in a *thing* to make it exist and to maintain its existence” (245—246). Therefore the critic is not lifting the rug from under the feet of naïve believers. However, the one (i) offering actors arenas where they can gather and (ii) recognizing that things constructed are fragile and need care and caution (246). Latour proposes associating with critique *more* and *multiplication*, not *less* and *subtraction* (248). Always associated with critique is the notion of “construction” (Latour 2003) — as a tool for critique — which “jinxes everything it touches” (Latour 2013a, 154).

(ii) Karl Polanyi (1886—1964) introduced the term “secular religion”²¹ about “economic liberalism” — i.e., capitalism²². For Polanyi (1944), this “secular religion” evolved into a “veritable faith in man’s secular salvation through a self-regulating market” (135). This market belief would produce the greatest happiness for the most significant number of people.

(iii) Egyptologist and religious studies scholar Jan Assmann (2001) has distinguished so-called “original religions” and “contra-religions.” The latter can be summarized in the invention of Moses’ negligence towards the gods of the other collectives and the statement: “For there is only one true God” (Simons 2019, 946—947). Latour adds to Assmann that not only world religions are to be considered as “contra-religions,” but also science and nature: “From the true God fulminating against all idols, we have moved to the true nature fulminating against all the false gods” (Latour 2017, 157). Therefore, Simons concludes that real secularization would mean abandoning all — religious and secular — “transcendent arbiters” (Simons 2019, 947).

Of central importance for this thesis’ key arguments — (A) secularism is religious and (B) Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding are something completely different than *secular vs. religion*, i.e., a composition — are the works by (i) Eric Voegelin, (ii) Timothy Fitzgerald, (iii)

21. Polanyi’s argument is as follows: “The global sweep of economic liberalism can now be taken in at a glance. Nothing less than a self-regulating market on a world scale could ensure the functioning of this stupendous mechanism. Unless the price of labor was dependent upon the cheapest grain available, there was no guarantee that the unprotected industries would not succumb in the grip of the voluntary accepted taskmaster, gold. The expansion of the market system in the nineteenth century was synonymous with the simultaneous spreading of international free trade, competitive labor market, and gold standard; they belonged together. *No wonder that economic liberalism turned into a secular religion once the great perils of this venture were evident*” (Polanyi 1944, 138–139; emphasis added).

22. Latour has also contributed to questions of economics and capitalism in his essays on the affects of capitalism (2014a) or by asking: “Are you ready to extract yourself from the Economy?” (2020d). He approaches capitalism by changing the theme “from being something which explains to something that needs explaining.” This is why “capitalism as an agent of history does not exist” for him. He is somewhat interested in (i) repopulating capitalism — and not just historicizing it — by identifying its networks and (ii) illustrating how these expand in various modes, as well as (iii) explaining why capitalism has worked so well — both for proponents and opponents. For Latour, capitalism does not — at any point — become a “God” who acts behind everything like a master puppet player. Following Polanyi (1983), its inhumanity is different if (i) one believes in its inhumanity and inescapability and if (ii) one believes in its inhumanity, since it would itself believe to be inhuman and inescapable. In the latter case, it is not inescapable but rather about society defending itself. The “capitalist horror” derives from the idea that actors are quits and care for others would not be necessary — while politics, religion, and ethics would produce groups of belonging that care for each other. Latour calls capitalism a “terrible cancer” following the motto of “[w]e are quits, we owe you nothing, we are alien to one another.” Ultimately, the anti-capitalist struggle would be impossible (Latour 2013c; “Capitalism”). Latour has also commented on what can be learned from COVID-19, which delivers a kind of “secular and republican Ramadan” (2020b), and how not to go back to the “pre-crisis” production model, namely capitalism (2020f).

Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair, and finally (iv) Bruno Latour, which will be discussed in the following.

1.3.2. Eric Voegelin and Timbuktu: Secularism as Religious Fundamentalism

In 2014, Abderrahmane Sissako directed the film *Timbuktu*, which tells the story of Timbuktu under Jihadi occupation and an old imam attempting to counter an Islamic fundamentalist judge in the process of condemning a young woman. When the imam preaches against jihad, the fundamentalist asks if the imam forbids jihad, but the imam says he could not since he dared jihad against himself for 65 years. The fundamentalist is not trying to understand this as a teaching about Islam but accuses the imam of not understanding Islam. The imam *is in the hands of God*, while the fundamentalist *is the hand of God*. Accordingly, the judge thinks he is simultaneously capable of (i) being religiously correct and (ii) politically efficient, and he can judge, evaluate and kill the people of Timbuktu. The imam offers a different understanding of the Quran and is uncertain about what “God” means. The fundamentalist appears somehow more secular in a modernizing sense. The Islamist fundamentalist combines religion and politics completely (Latour 2015c).



FIGURE 2.2. Left, Video still of *Timbuktu*, 2014. Directed by Abderrahmane Sissako. Video still also used by *Religious Films Are Always Political*, 2016. Directed by Jean-Michel Frodon and Agnès Devictor.

FIGURE 2.3. Right, Scene from *The Adventures of Tintin: Tintin in the Congo*. First published 1930.

In 2016, this movie was used — besides others — for the film installation *Religious Films Are Always Political* with sixteen parts out of thirteen movies by Jean-Michel Frodon and Agnès Devictor (fig. 2.2), which again was installed at Bruno Latour’s *reset Modernity!* exhibition from April 16 to August 21, 2016, in Karlsruhe (Germany) (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a, 55). The destruction of “fetishes” is reminiscent of the long history of the concept, which in 1930 was also humorously used in *Tintin in the Congo*, when one of the

indigenous people shouts out, “Horror! ... Sacrilege! White man split the skull of fetish with axe! ... White man must die!” (fig. 2.3).

The movie *Timbuktu* is a splendid example of “political religion,” first introduced by political scientist Eric Voegelin (1901—1985) in 1938.²³ According to Voegelin, all human experience is structured as an “ordering-towards” — mainly to a “transcendent being” or a form of transcendence (Howles 2016b). Voegelin has argued that “[t]here is no longer any sacral permeation from the highest source; rather, it has become an original sacral substance.” This means that this “ordering-towards” transcendence would have transformed into an inner-worldly phenomenon, meaning that immanent political order became an “original sacral substance” in itself so that power relations now originate from non-transcendental sources (Henningsen and Voegelin 2000, 59). This transposition is the quintessence of “political religion.” According to Voegelin, this is instantiated above all by the modern state, which takes over from religion the “world-transcendent God as the ultimate condition and origin of its own existence” (28). Hence, political collectives derive their authority from religious order (Howles 2016b).

According to Voegelin, political religion maintains hegemony over society to the extent that it can appropriate a discourse of rationality for its purposes, in a process that he dates to the 17th century, starting with Thomas Hobbes. Timothy Howles (2016b) said this was “a quasi-religious gesture, since it consists of the instrumentalization of transcendent authority claims and their subsequent imposition over the collective space of the *polis*.”

Howles (2018, 30) has argued that when modernity “becomes a vehicle for various “political religions””, it is “in contravention of its own foundational claims to be secular.”

Latour has interpreted Voegelin as “that you cannot loosen the tie between politics and religion by separating the two — as the secular State had attempted — because politics is full of religion and religion full of politics.” Westerners should criticize themselves because they “immanentized” something “what should have remained transcendent” when they tried to realize heaven on Earth (Latour 2015b, 172) by mixing politics — supposed anti-religion — with religion (Latour 2015a).

23. Voegelin used the concept of political religion as a diagnosis of the fascist movements of his time, but also of various ideologies like Marxism (Howles 2016b).

1.3.3. Timothy Fitzgerald: *Secularism and Religion as One Category*

The term “religious” is hardly found in texts before the 17th century, and it was mostly only used in the sense of “the religious,” referring to monks, nuns, friars, and “the religious houses” like monasteries, convents, and abbeys. “The religious” was a status within Christianity (Fitzgerald 2017b, 447). For centuries, the “secular” referred to either (i) “secular priests” or (ii) civil power such as courts of law, although these were explicitly not non-religious in the modern sense of secular. Civil courts were not separate from religious courts — but from church courts — since they were part of the Christian truth that defined their possibilities and limits. The “civil” did not have the meaning of the modern “secular” because even for Martin Luther and John Calvin, the civil was only relatively “profane,” and it was part of the Christian truth and served the purposes of God. Civil — but Christian — courts were separate from ecclesiastical courts but not civil from religion (448).

The Peace of Westphalia narrative argues that the general progress of humanity — based on natural secular reason instead of wild faith — leads to peace, secularism, and liberalism, although since the late-1970s and with 9/11, religion suddenly reappeared in various forms and returned from exile (Fitzgerald 2017b, 438–439, C. Koch 2013). Experts like Mark Juergensmeyer (1993, 2000, 2004, 2019) have argued that violent religion wears different masks: “not only is religion a universal agent, but it incarnates in specific religions”: he, therefore, names Islam, Al-Qaeda, the Iranian Revolution as well as Buddhism (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010). By contrast, Juergensmeyer himself, his academic practice of naming, and the nation state of which he is a privileged citizen are all things these religious fanatics are specifically *not*: secular, objective, liberal, neutral, and peaceful (Fitzgerald 2017b, 439). The “religion vs. secularism” paradigm follows the logics of reason vs. non-reason and civilized vs. barbarian according to the motto of “secular civilization” vs. “religious barbarity” (Fitzgerald 2017a, 169—170): “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s and to God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21 after Coogan, Brettler, Newsom and Perkins 2018, 1418).

According to Fitzgerald, world religions have been *made* — as Tomoko Masuzawa (2005) has shown — to give “secular reason” a standpoint, while both simultaneously (i) depended on one another and (ii) excluded each other. These world religions would be part of an essentialized othering process that created members of the same species — sharing an “elusive essence” — contrary to the secular sphere (Fitzgerald 2017a, 173). As long as the *purification* of religion and

secularism works, religion's role in "society" can be either positive or negative (2017b, 435).²⁴ However, if hybrids and "mixings" of religion and the secular appear, this is usually described as "dangerous," like a Molotov cocktail, because it ceases to be "true" or "pure" religion (435).

The essentialization and separation — or, in Latourian words, "purification" — of religious and secular practices can be explained by the dialectical relationship with new powerful interests (i) in banking, trade, and manufacturing/production, (ii) with the transformation of land use rights into private ownership, and (iii) with the commodification of people into forms of slavery or wage labor. The crucial link is the disguise of belief in capital with an aura of the factual — in contrast to religion — so that capital, consumer goods, and markets appear as part of rational knowledge rather than blind superstition. Therefore, whoever deals with *religion* today unconsciously supports this narrative of the inevitability of capitalist operations (451—452). Fitzgerald has furthermore questioned that if liberal capitalism and consumption fulfill many criteria of religion, how can the religious-secular classification system be maintained? If the belief in the capital, city management, or hospitals and their ritualized state are reclassified as religion — and religion is nothing essentially different anymore — it becomes problematic to locate a non-religious secular space (2017b, 436—437).

The so-called "secularization thesis" works through the formula of magic (re-)enchantment of the primitive versus progressive disenchantment of true rational knowledge of the world. The fetish-like enchantment of the circulation of goods, self-regulating markets, money, private property, and capital is seen as a rational and factual practice, freed from centuries of irrational — religious — superstition (443). This is why Fitzgerald argues that the categories of religion and nonreligion are significantly connected to European colonialism and capitalism (451).

According to Fitzgerald, the religion-secular binary — in its simplicity and flexibility — is a powerful ideological tool for so-called "secular reason." This hegemonic construct serves capitalist interests and appears as an offer of liberation from an irrational religious past. Applying this binary wishes to define the rationality of liberal secular democracies and their institutions like

24. Fitzgerald explains religion's simultaneous positivity and negativity in the following way: "It is well known that religion is essentially peace-loving, nonviolent, nonpolitical, concerned with the inner spiritual life and the other world. Religion is kind, tolerant, gentle, nonpolitical and nonprofit-making. Religion is a matter of personal faith and piety, essentially separated from the nonreligious secular state, from politics, and from economics. Religion is concerned with personal and family morality, but not with laws, which are the affair of the state. Religion is essentially that domain of private experience in which the individual soul concerns itself with the rewards and punishments of an afterlife in another world. On the other hand it is equally well known that religion is essentially barbarous, violent, and irrational, causing conflicts through religious terrorism and religious nationalism. This view of religion as essentially violent and irrational is popular today, especially since 9/11" (2017b, 435).

governments, constitutions, schools, universities, and courts. As soon as they use the term “secular,” they serve the interests of capital while considering themselves neutral and objective (Fitzgerald 2017a, 172—173). According to him, the religious-secular binary is fundamental for any neoliberal capitalist system, upon which — not least — the political economy, international relations, and cultural studies are built. This binary normalizes neoliberalism and consumerism since it is commonly identified with secular rationality in contrast to religious insanity (170–171). This is why he argues that “[t]he religion-secular binary is a tool for making exploitation seem normal and inevitable” (171). Practices that resist the global capitalist “extraction of surplus value” are often classified as religious fundamentalism, extremism, and irrationality. According to the author, these “slippery and essentially empty terms” should be removed from the rhetorical toolbox and made “problematic objects of critique wherever they appear” (170–171).

Fitzgerald, therefore, criticizes that Edward Said started his argument with secularity, which is why Said did not expose his secular positioning as silent orientalism. He goes further than Said, for the modern structures of religion(s) have rhetorically served to privilege secular reason and to present secular knowledge as if it were perfectly normal (169–170), neutral, objective, reasonable, and a perfect ground from where to study religions (178). Fitzgerald has argued that “[n]either religion nor the secular are stand-alone categories” since they form a “single oscillating trope (2017a, 172).²⁵

The category of religion has been historically connected with a multitude of non-religious or “secular” terms, like the “ecclesiastical,” “spiritual,” “temporal,” “pagan,” “civil,” “civilized,” “barbaric,” “secular,” “politics,” “the state,” “science,” “economy,” “the sacred” or “the profane.” None have an essential, ahistorical meaning but are bound to specific interests (2017b, 437, 443–444). For secular people, the belief in the existence of religion is essential, just like the belief in the existence of nations (440), which is similar to Latour’s argument (2010a, Latour 2011a, 47) that the moderns believe that others — the nonmodern — believe in belief.

This problem does not least also include the discipline of religious studies because religious studies institutes usually legitimize their existence by assuming that (i) religions are independent *objects* that need to be studied and can be defined according to universal characteristics, and (ii) religious practices are distinctly different from non-religious ones, like political, scientific,

25. Fitzgerald explains this single binary trope in the following way: “*It is either religion or it is secular; it cannot be both. This either-or oscillation makes each half of an empty binary parasitic on the other for its semantic content*” (Fitzgerald 2017a, 172; emphasis added). “This new imagining of “religion” was simultaneously the invention of a new binary, forming the basis for two new essentialized domains, “religion” and “nonreligion”” (Fitzgerald 2017b, 443; emphasis added).

economic or aesthetic *subjects*, which again can explain religion. While some argue that these are purely heuristic separations that should not imply essential differences, once “religious vs. secular” discourses are recycled in hundreds of books, journals, articles, conference papers, university lectures and curricula, research seminars, and symposia, religions are marked as distinct and different from non-religious things. Beyond religious studies, political scientists, historians, judges, ethnologists, etc., *construct* the “religion vs. secular” dichotomy in their contexts according to their research interests and funding requirements. It cannot be stressed enough that “[t]he very act of writing a secular account of religion quietly embeds the distinction without anyone really noticing,” which supports the assumption that science is different from religion, knowledge from faith, and nature from supernature (Fitzgerald 2017b, 445—446; emphasis added; quotation: 445).

While on the one hand, liberal critics have understood Marxism itself as a religion, on the other hand, neoliberal economics, as well as Marxism itself, rhetorically protected themselves as “secular science” and using “scientific secular knowledge” around concepts such as class, social forces, the individual, self-regulating markets, nation states or the end of history (Fitzgerald 2017a, 171). While Liberals and Marxists have different paradigms of secularism and secular knowledge, they both place secularism in the realm of rational and scientific objectivity, as opposed to religion as an irrational belief based on fantasy (Fitzgerald 2017a, 171–172).

When this thesis discusses the *religiousness of secularism* in chapter 4.3. “RELIGION — Religious Buddhist Mediators in Marketing and Individualism,” one should keep Fitzgerald’s (2017b) insights in mind that religion and nonreligion are “rhetorical construction[s],” where secularity needs religion as an object of secular study (444).

1.3.4. Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair: The Religion-Making Machine and the Secular

The term “religion-making” was introduced by Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair in their book *Secularism and Religion-Making* (2011), reflecting how certain social phenomena are (re-)configured within a world religion discourse. The term refers to reifying and institutionalizing specific ideas, social formations, and practices as “religious” (3). Religion-making processes work via normalizing and often functionalist discourses on concepts assumed to be self-evident: religious-secular, sacred-profane, this side-“beyond,” etc. (McCutcheon 2007, Dressler 2010).

Religion-making is a heuristic tool that helps to relate discourses and practices that reify religion — and the secular and its various subcategories — to each other (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 21).

Dressler and Mandair (2011, 21–24) distinguish three modes of “religion-making,” which are almost indistinguishable but also connected and interwoven. (i) “Religion-making from above” as a strategy from an authoritarian — sometimes orientalist — position of power to define things (symbols, language, practices, objects) as “religious” or “secular” — especially in non-Western territories — and confine these through disciplining techniques of the modern state and its institutions (law-making, judiciary, state bureaucracies, state-media, the public education system) or non-state actors in the public sphere taking normative positions like media (print, TV, internet), influential public figures (opposition politicians, public intellectuals, media stars), NGOs and corporations. (ii) “Religion-making from below,” where subordinate and marginalized groups use the language of religion as a means of empowerment, emancipation, appropriation, or subversion against hegemonic regimes, whereby this process is dialectically opposed to “religion-making from above” and displays the second side of the two-track relationship of “cultural translation,” which is why local actors are not passive objects but participate in the production of — orientalist — meaning (King 1999). Finally, (iii) “religion-making from (a pretended) outside,” where an academic discourse on religion gives legitimacy to the first two religion-making discourses by systematizing and therefore normalizing the religious-secular binary and its derivatives. The awareness of academic complicity in the essentialization of others, assumptions of objectivity, and the objectification of religion are not new (i.e., Said 1978, McCutcheon 1997, King 1999, Masuzawa 2005), but Jonathan Z. Smith famously formulated the need for critical self-reflection for the discipline of religious studies: “Religion is solely the creation of the scholar’s study” (1988, xi). Dressler and Mandair ask (2011, 21–24): what exactly is the role of academic and political elites and institutions in creating and maintaining religion and the secular?

According to Dressler and Mandair, what are the policies of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm? Most notably, they identify continuities and a circular relationship between (i) an understanding of historical consciousness, (ii) the assumed secularity of critical thinking or critique, and (iii) the assumption of civilized Western identity. This is achieved by strengthening or reforming the oppositional binarity of self vs. the Other, which remains central to contemporary politics and theory. Instead, Mandair and Dressler propose an understanding of the post-secular, which resists the idea of religion as a historical and anthropological constant. They name the alternative concept the “post-secular-religious,” accepting the insoluble contradiction or *aporia* at the heart of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 3–4). They vote for

an understanding of *postsecularism* — which is at the same time *postreligious* — as an aporia until the point where (i) the religious and the secular are epistemologically and semantically connected, and (ii) the *religious-secular* and its politics are not reiterated (18–19):

1.3.5. Bruno Latour

Key to this thesis is the work by Bruno Latour, which also tackles the questions of relating religion and secularism as well as postsecularism (Latour 2019). From an *ANT* perspective, there is no immanence, only networks, and actors, so “we cannot be disenchanting” (Latour 1993, 128). Latour (2017, 156) explains that irreligiosity is religious itself since it is not about *names* for religions but secularity’s religious *qualities*. Following Schmitt and Voegelin, Latour (2015c) argues that it makes no sense that actors were secularized in the sense of being without God. Thus, according to Latour, there are no secularized collectives. Still, groups have only *changed the names* of their respective “gods” (2017, 153): society (Durkheim 1981), market (Callon 1998), economy, science, globalization (Hardt and Negri 2000, 2004, 2009), etc. According to Latour, proponents of the church-state separation would mostly be Christians because while religion is kept private, the public space of states and nations can easily be considered as a secularized form of what previously was the church (Latour and Leclercq 2016d, 364).

How are actors capable of *inheriting* religion? Secularization “*has only reappropriated the principal feature of the counter-religions – living in the end of times – while shifting the end of times into the utopia of modernization*” (Latour 2017, 284). Secularization — in the spirit of a *counter-religion* — then comes from the tradition of the Nietzschean “death of God” (176) and is best understood as iconoclasm: “Tell me with which hammer you are going to strike which idol, and I’ll know which divinity you serve” (177).

Elisabeth von Thadden (2016) has summarized Latour’s project on the anthropology of the moderns as “So. Jetzt noch mal anders”, meaning “So. Now once again, differently.” However, what does it mean to conceptualize secularism “once again, but different”? Alternatively, and even more radically: How to *reset* secularism? Rephrasing Latour’s thoughts on modernity,²⁶ secularism can be understood to differentiate time, space, development, politics, and religion (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a, 3).

26. The original quotation follows: “Modernity was a way to differentiate past and future, north and south, progress and regress, radical and conservative” (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky and Havemann 2016a, 3).

1.3.5.1. *Reacting to Émile Durkheim: Society and/as Religion*

Latour (2014c) has strongly argued against Émile Durkheim's concept of society — which in many sociological theories stands behind and explains everything from sports and markets up to religion — since religion was “put in place to hide and reveal the existence of what he called “society””. Therefore, Durkheim claimed that society was the only impersonal force and reality behind religion. Nevertheless, Latour detects the monotheistic God in Durkheim's “society” and identifies it as a secularized Yahweh (Latour 2019, 3).²⁷ This is why Latour (2019, 4) calls “secularization” itself an attempt to reinforce this “one God, one society” argument.²⁸ Latour's disagreement with the Durkheimian perspective is not least based on Durkheim's assumptions that there is a fundamental divide between the religious and the profane²⁹ and that there is a God named “society” behind religion. In his Albertus-Magnus professor lecture in Cologne, Latour (2015c) referred to Eric Voegelin by disagreeing with the separation between religion and politics, which is why he identifies (2015b) secularity as a form of civic or civil religion: a religion of non-religion, similar to Polanyi's (1944) “secular religion” of economics.

27. Latour's argument is as follows: “It is not too complicated to [identify the] divine behind *the impersonal agent implied by Durkheim* (and sociology of religion after him) *the very personal agent implied by monotheistic religions*. It's hard not to see in those “social explanations” of religion, the mere replication of the being that Western religions invoke at the origin of their social life. *The notion of “society” is the “one God, one people” of tradition. To put it bluntly “society” is the name given to a barely secularized “Yavhé”*” (Latour 2019, 3; emphasis added).

28. Latour's entire argument on secularization reads as follows: “*So, secularization has always been an attempt at reinforcing the “one God, one society” argument.* The obsession of sociology for explaining the obscure by appealing to what is more obscure is based on the denegation that there is *something* that makes people act, something whose agency has to be carefully scrutinized on its own term and for which *the umbrella term “religion” is terribly inadequate* and which is not “society”. *In other words, it is not society that is behind religion, on the contrary, society is made in part by connections made by people with highly specific types of beings.* This reversal in the direction of explanation is essential if we want to understand and avoid the “one people, one God” argument. Society is what is to be explained not what brings any explanation, especially not when by “society” scholars of a Durkheimian persuasion mean, in effect, the God of Israel and Christianity. *Religion, just like science or law, are not what is to be explained by alluding to social ties but are some of the ingredients making the social ties hold.* At least this is the general principle of actor-network theory of the social order, a principle especially forgotten when religion is “explained” away by sociologists” (Latour 2019, 4; emphasis added).

29. The German quotation follows: “[D]ie Einteilung der Dinge in heilige und profane; den Begriff der Seele, des Geistes, der mythischen Persönlichkeiten, der nationalen und sogar der übernationalen Gottheit” (Durkheim 1981, 556).

1.3.5.2. Religious Fundamentalism: Islamists and Charlie Hebdo

Latour underlines the importance of the political-religious crossing³⁰ by asking for category mistakes, its historicity, the specificity of the modes involved, and the functions of the crossing itself. In the context of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris on January 7, 2015, Latour has worked on the relation between secularism and religion and shown how secularism itself — especially in this situation — becomes a form of “civic religion” (2015b, 2015e, 2015f), “a rather intolerant form of tolerance since it considers all religions as equally absurd” that becomes the “religion of irreligion” (2015b, 172). Latour has suggested a controversial connection between (i) the contemporary European and secular state and (ii) non-state actors of violent religious extremism and even jihad terrorism. In response to the attacks, he wrote in *Le Monde* that the fundamentalism of the terrorists was the same — albeit mutated — as the widely supported secular ideology they sought to destroy. The hegemony over the interpretation of truth — of the Jihadists and the seculars — is what Voegelin has called *political religion*: both claim access to transcendence as the legitimation of their actions — Allah, the “crossed-out God,” theistic reductions in the form of the laws of nature, society or economy — from which they draw political sovereignty. According to Latour, (i) the Jihadists — under their archaic appearance — are thoroughly fanatical modernizers, and (ii) Western secular society only comprises political fundamentalists (Howles 2016c).³¹

30. Latour explains the connection between religion and politics in the following way: “It is hard to think of a richer and more mixed-up crossing than this one since it was as a result of the continuous love-hate relationship between these two sources of passion, not to say fury, that political theology emerged, along with secular versions of Economics, thought of as “*the secular religion*”; Each crossing answers the following canonical questions: 1) *What are the handholds and trials particularly favorable to the detection of the contrast and of category mistakes (and what is the vocabulary specific to each crossing)?* As soon as we grasp the collective, and the process of its collection, we assume a [POL] deity that is quite easily confused with [REL] beings since the announcement of its Presence immediately constitutes a group, a church; the problem is that these two modes of assembly are completely different and belong to a conflicted temporal regime (a conflict that the Church takes on board) and that both need to be reprised constantly. 2) *How has this crossing been elaborated or instituted in the course of history?* The fusion of people and God in the Jewish tradition, as well as political theology since the emergence of the Church, then in the Church as the heir of Empire, gave both themes an undue importance in Western history that no subsequent secularization has been able to wipe out, the conflict of state and Economy having simply inherited the great quarrel between the Pope and the Emperor. 3) *What does this crossing tell us about the two modes of existence being compared?* What is surprising with the two modes, so similar in their fragility, is that they must both be constantly reprised for them to have meaning and that the temptation then is to reduce the burden of reprise by leaning on the other for support: the continuity of the Church propping up the body politic and vice versa. 4) *What are the aims pursued by the investigation that will enable the crossing to be emphasized and instituted?* Intensifying this contrast is essential to restore difference in modes of reprise and to distinguish, finally, what belongs to Caesar from that which belongs to God” (Latour 2013c; “[POL·REL]”; emphasis added).

31. In the language of the “idol breaker,” Latour (2015b) argues: “[W]hat you take as a respectable icon, is what I consider a monstrous idol, and I will smash it — and I will kill you in front of it to make amends to what I respect above all. [...] But of course there is an amazing diversity in what you take as an idol to be smashed to pieces, and what is taken as an icon — a value — to be respected” (172; emphasis added).

Latour takes on Ward's argument (2014, 179) and argues that the secular French state — or any state — cannot act as a “neutral” actor since secularism is a religious ideology. Enshrining “*laïcité*” in legislation and privileging and hegemonializing it as a law upon a population fulfills the characteristics of political religion (Howles 2018, 172).

Secularism as fundamentalism can be applied to the debates on secularism in France. Latour offers a radical “critique” of the secular since he — as David Howles (2016a, 2016b, 2016c) has shown — identifies secularism, not as a neutral scenography on which a politically neutral society can be built. He has used Voegelin to illustrate that secularism can be seen as a “political religion,” a “vehicle of religious ,fundamentalism’,” and as “a religious ideology” (2016c).

Latour has recently taken over Voegelin's political theory in concepts and terminology explicitly to describe the “quasi-religious procedure” of how the transcendental is immanent within the modern regime as an instrument of political sovereignty. Latour highlights how transcendental meta-logic leads to religion remaining a function of immanent, processual, contingent, and dynamic logistics (Howles 2016b).

According to Latour, Hobbes' idea of the *Leviathan* was an armistice and not a peace or negotiation treaty since it was a way to say: absolute certainty, no discussions, no purisms, and authority of society, politics, and religion. For Latour, politics and religion cannot be distinguished because there is either too much religion in politics or too much politics in religion. Since religion and non-religion are so entangled, one never knows what one gets when they are torn apart, namely how much of the other is still with the one: there are no independent domains of religion and non-religion. Unlike Durkheim, Latour does not need to place society behind politics or religion; instead, he lets religion and politics work as connectors or trajectories to tell the truth in a specific mode in one particular tone (Latour 2015c).

Religion and politics are highly fragile modes: (i) when speaking politically to someone, — “we are XYZ ...” — that person becomes a group through speaking politically — and (ii) when speaking religiously, it is not about speaking *about* religion or God, but instead converting someone by what is said. If it fails to convert the other, the religious speech stops. When political or religious talk stops, something completely different begins. Latour (2015c) argues that — following Voegelin — the domains of religion and politics were “exceptionally badly built” — with religion and politics supporting each other, *and* non-religion and non-politics betraying each other so that actors

lose both, and it becomes impossible to distinguish religion and politics — around the time of Thomas Hobbes.³²

1.3.5.3. *The “Crossed-Out God,” or: Modernity as a Theological Project of Transcendence*

Timothy Howles discusses Latour's relationship with the secular in his blog, *The Political Theology of Bruno Latour*. According to Latour, (i) modernity is religious because it uses categories of transcendence to secure political hegemony over minorities, such as the conceptualizations of entities like nature, society, economy, etc. (ii) This is closely interwoven with the highly praised phenomenon of secularism, albeit which fails according to its definition since it promises neutrality — already denied by Graham Ward (2014) — that it could not keep (Howles 2016c). For Latour, “secularism retains the shadow of a religious heritage,” which compromises its supposed neutrality through having failed to dissociate itself from a particular religious tradition, i.e., Christianity. Latour not only suggests that religious ideology is merely vestigial to the secular but that it is integrated into its very structure and definition, which prompts him to argue that Western societies are, above all, characterized by “secular fundamentalisms” (Latour 2013a, 94, Howles 2018, 168—169).³³ However, Latour's assumption that the “West” is religiously fundamentalist does not refer to a specific religious tradition or the so-called “return of religion” (Howles 2016c). In *We have never been Modern*, Latour (1993) already defined the “modern constitution” following four guarantees, in which he worked with the terms of immanence and transcendence (141).³⁴ All four guarantees function as checks and balances for each other by building three pairs of transcendence and

32. In the catalog to his *reset Modernity!* exhibition in Karlsruhe in 2016, Latour explained this complex relationship as follows: “*It is because religion and politics have the potential to unleash enormous energy that we have to be so careful when mixing the two. One way of including both is to fight the urge to break down their idols. Fourteen years ago in this same museum atrium, another “thought exhibition,” Iconoclash, tried to do just that: to suspend the iconoclastic gesture. In the intervening years the situation has unfortunately worsened. It now seems even more difficult to resist the violence of iconoclastic passions, at a time when we must learn how to take care of the earth by uniting the energy of both politics and religion*” (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a, 58; emphasis added).

33. Howles summarizes Latour's argument on the religiosity of secularism: “This verges on theological language: in fact, this is the first hint of Latour's diagnosis of *our contemporary situation as being characterised by ontotheology and by ontotheological assumptions*. Even though it claims to be robustly secular in outlook, *Latour shows how the ideology of modernity functions in terms of the theological category of transcendence*” (Howles 2018, 42; emphasis added).

34. Latour's argument follows: “*1st guarantee: Nature is transcendent but mobilizable (immanent). 2nd guarantee: Society is immanent but it infinitely surpasses us (transcendent). 3rd guarantee: Nature and Society are totally distinct, and the work of purification bears no relation to the work of mediation. 4th guarantee: the crossed-out God is totally absent but ensures arbitration between the two branches of government*” (141).

immanence (34).³⁵ This means that nature and society are simultaneously immanent — as mediation — and transcendent — after purification (Latour 1993, 95). In 1993, Latour pleaded for transcendence, albeit without a contrary, filled with all kinds of mediators and hybrids (129). Latour has instead advocated for a “proliferation of transcendences” in order “to counter the supposed invasion of immanence” (129). Since he does not believe there is an ultimate essence or ground like an immanentized version of nature, he identifies so-called “mini-transcendences” (Latour 2013a) in the sense of movement, a process, or a pass, as it is used in ball games. Transcendence means that things and actors are not determined by themselves but by the entities to which they are related: the religious person is shaped by those things they care about. A “true immanence” would allow these mini-transcendences (Simons 2019, 948–949). This is why Latour (2013a) argues that “[t]here is *mini-transcendence*; there is no *maxi-transcendence*” (402; emphasis added).

Latour calls these two types of transcendence “bad” and “good” transcendence. (i) The first — bad or big transcendence — aims for foundations in substances and essences of the “beyond” (like God, state, or market) or the prior (subject, symbolic) and breaks with processes, and (ii) the second — good or small transcendence — focuses on hiatuses and discontinuities that enable all existents to subsist, which is why small transcendences are synonymous with immanence. Latour (2013c; “Transcendence”) votes for the slogan “[t]ranscendences abound,” which has no interest in the dichotomy between immanence and transcendence. In this sense, “immanence” is a term without an opposite, best described in social and habitual practices. Immanence — synonymous with “good transcendence” — seeks to identify hiatuses and the processes necessary to proceed with any actions (Latour 2013c; “Immanence”).

Latour’s phrase of “the immanentization of transcendence” (Latour 2015, 204) seeks to — again — capture a structural connection between (i) modernity and (ii) the theological understanding of transcendence, primarily through the terms “secularization” and “materialization” (Howles 2018, 146). Like Voegelin, Latour is not interested in a narrative of having passed from obscurantism/religion to Enlightenment/secularism, but (i) from a situation where immanence —

35. Latour (1993) explains these three transcendences and immanences in the following way: “A threefold transcendence and a threefold immanence in a crisscrossed schema that locks in all the possibilities: this is where I locate the power of the moderns. *They have not made Nature; they make Society; they make Nature; they have not made Society; they have not made either; God has made everything; God has made nothing; they have made everything.* [...] By playing three times in a row on the same alternation between transcendence and immanence, the moderns can mobilize Nature, objectify the social, and feel the spiritual presence of God, even while firmly maintaining that Nature escapes us, that Society is our own work, and that God no longer intervenes. *Who could have resisted such a construct?*” (34; emphasis added).

the passage of time — and transcendence — the end of time — were mutually revealed to a situation where (ii) the “beyond” is believed to be realizable here on earth. This is why the moderns were not secularized but immanentized, which makes them not see the terrestrial, but only the transcendent trying to become immanent and failing. Latour (2017, 204) concludes that this is the reason why “[f]undamentalism was born, and has never stopped metastasizing.”

The so-called “immanentization catastrophe” is about the belief that a radical rupture lies behind people: (i) for a Christian, this is called “salvation,” and (ii) for a secular, it is called scientific revolution, which saves actors from religion. This makes no difference because one is “after” the rupture. In front of them lies the kingdom of God — or science — to be realized on earth. Then, the flow of time is replaced by transcendence, although it cannot be realized. Transcendence and immanence are lost, leading to hatred of the world and the certainty of being chosen. A whole line of militants — Islamist fundamentalists, Marxists, secularists, etc. — try to realize the end of time in the present. However, time continues because the “end of time is now in their hands! We do not live in the hands of God, we are the hands of God” (Latour 2015c).

Bruno Latour coined the term “crossed-out God, relegated to the side-lines,” which appears several times in *We have never been Modern* (1993, 32–35, 39, 127–128, 138–139, 142) and is vital in Latour’s later and positive formulation of religion (Howles 2015). The religion supporting modernity is suitable as a tool of instrumentalization and hegemony, which is instantiated as the “crossed-out God” (Howles 2016b). Latour explains that this reopens the question of God, and one no longer needs to “believe in belief” (Latour 1993, 142). God became a function of the modern institution of each individual’s religious experience, while the thwarted God is not found in the usual world. The “divinity” of modernity and the criticism industry would be chimerical because it ultimately deconstructed itself, as theologian Timothy Howles argues (Howles 2015).

Latour’s phrase for this modern religion is “crossed-out God, relegated to the side-lines” or “crossed-out God,” “le Dieu barré, hors jeu” in French, which means more “being called offside,” as in a soccer game. This shows an essential nuance because even if “divinity” is indeed “offside,” this is only the case by a law invented and imposed by the modernists, which could theoretically be replaced. An alternative regime of ontological pluralism could bring God “back onside” again. There is a connection between the thwarted God and a specific heritage of Christian theology, so the reinterpretation of Christian theological themes made it possible to understand God’s transcendence and immanence simultaneously (Latour 1993, 33, Howles 2015).

The “crossed-out God” ultimately *is* the modern version of God, which Latour explains via three “locks”: actors derive definitional power, given that they can leverage transcendence and immanence in the same movement, even if this is mutually and internally contradictory. This back-and-forth movement (i) enables assuming that agency is sometimes out of their control — “the transcendent lock” — or (ii) is created by them, “the immanent lock” (Howles 2015). (iii) A third “lock” results from the modern conception of “God.” The modernists placed God precisely at one of these poles: (i) sometimes at the “transcendent lock,” according to which they have privileged access to a truth regime guaranteed by God’s transcendence, and (ii) sometimes at the “immanent lock,” to preserve their role as masters and determinants of the truth regime, which in their assumption is always the result of their power of action. (iii) The result is a God who serves only to strengthen the modern constitution — available to the modern once they choose either side — as a resource to protect their situation (Howles 2015).

Modernist religion calmed the question of God by removing God from society and nature while still leaving it presentable and usable (Latour 1993, 29–35) and replacing God with other gods like the market, the economy, society, or science. Therefore, Latour argues that “[n]o one is truly modern who does not agree to keep God from interfering with natural law as well as with the laws of the Republic” (33). This is a radical break from the pre-modern Christian God. The reinterpretation of ancient Christian themes enabled God’s transcendence and immanence to be thought of simultaneously: a process since the 16th century Reformation led to God appearing in people’s hearts without interfering in their external affairs. This enabled an individual and utterly spiritual religion that could criticize both the rise of science and society without bringing God into play. Modernity could now be both *secular and religious* simultaneously (33).³⁶

The “crossed-out God” enables modern rule to instrumentalize its subjects, not as free actors but rather as “poor wretches” dominated from above (Latour 2013a, 421). Therefore, God appears everywhere where modern rule needs it: relegated to the sidelines but always exchangeable, like a

36. This modern invention of being religious and secular is explained by Latour in the following way: “Spirituality was reinvented: the all-powerful God could descend into men’s heart of hearts without intervening in any way in their external affairs. A wholly individual and wholly spiritual religion made it possible to criticize both the ascendancy of science and that of society, without needing to bring God into either. *The moderns could now be both secular and pious at the same time* (Weber [...]). This last constitutional guarantee was given *not by a supreme God but by an absent God* - yet His absence did not prevent people from calling on Him at will in the privacy of their own hearts. His position became literally ideal, since He was bracketed twice over, once in metaphysics and again in spirituality. He would no longer interfere in any way with the development of the moderns, but He remained effective and helpful within the spirit of humans alone” (Latour 1993, 33–34; emphasis added).

soccer player waiting for their turn. However, this player cannot only play in one single position but is like an all-purpose weapon adaptable to any situation where subjects are in conditions of rule.

1.3.5.4 Revisiting the Secularization Thesis: Secularizing Science?

[S]ecularization resembles so much a form of religion (a civic religion parading as secular) (Latour and Leclercq 2016e, 365)

Many authors (Stark 1999, Asad 2003) have criticized different sub-theses of secularization theory: its privatization, differentiation, and decline theses. Besides critiques, the heuristic value of some aspects of the secularization thesis shall not be denied (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 19-20). However, from a Latourian perspective,³⁷ the central tensions in the secularization thesis lie in the notions of the subject. Latour's critique on disenchantment positions addresses that these leave no room concerning how human actors are transformed by things that are not subjects. According to Latour (1993, 53), "objects count for nothing; they are just there to be used as the white screen on to which society projects its cinema."

There is an ambiguity between the claims that (i) particular "religious" or transcendent factors have disappeared and (ii) actors can no longer articulate these factors in present times, although they are supposed to be still present (Simons 2019, 950). Latour and philosophers like Michel Serres (2011) and Isabelle Stengers (2000) are somehow correcting "a too strong reading" of the secularization thesis by accepting the secularization of science and synchronously leaving some room for transcendence within science (Simons 2019, 938—939).

According to Latour, it is about "*exiting entirely the false debate about Science and Religion*, by giving back to Science its unrestricted access to remote beings and redirecting Religion towards accessing its neighbors ("prochains")" and again replacing science's idea of knowledge — led by simplifications — with the establishment of chains of reference (Latour 2013c; "[REF·REL]").

On the one hand, the sociologist Steve Fuller (2000) identified sociology as "both sanctifier and secularizer of science" (99) by explaining sociology's enchantment of science with August Comte, who argued that the secularization of society resulted in the sanctification of science. Today,

37. Latour has written less on secularization than on science (Latour and Woolgar 1979, Latour 1987, 1988, 1999a) and the relationship between science and religion (Latour 2001, 2005b). Much has also been written about his relation to science, like Rita Felski's and Stephen Muecke's *Latour and the Humanities* (2020) and Massimiliano Simons on the "secularization of science" (Simons 2019).

a second secularization — that of science itself — would occur through demystification (100). Through this secularizing process, science would have lost any sacred, transcendent, or enchanted societal position (Simons 2019, 925—926). Fuller (1999) argued that “[j]ust as sociology had contributed to the secularization of religion, *science studies would contribute to the secularization of science*” (246; emphasis added).

On the other hand, Latour and others stress that although some forms of transcendence have disappeared or been heavily criticized, others should still play a relevant factor. The debates on secularization bring a central disagreement — between opponents and proponents — into the open: the untenability of science’s secularization. Either science (i) becomes a problematic “immanent frame” — without any transcendence — or it (ii) introduces the new immanentized — or secularized — figure of society (Simons 2019, 948).

The answer to the question of whether secularization *happens* depends on how one looks at nature and science. For instance, Latour (2017, 72) has denied “that science has ‘disenchanted’ the world” and instead argues “that science has always *sung a quite different song* and has always *lived fully enmeshed in the world.*” The problem is not whether science has disenchanted the world but rather a specific understanding of science, based on which one cannot see some “forms of enchantment,” especially in science (Simons 2019, 950). Massimiliano Simons has argued that the secularization of science refers to the abandoning of science — and nature — as something “sacred” (925)

1.3.5.5. *The Secular as the Terrestrial: Gaia, or the Global Climate Crisis*

Following Fitzgerald³⁸, the concept of religion becomes all-encompassing and a useless abstraction (Fitzgerald 2017b, 436—437), which leads him to argue that “[t]he problem then is that *if everything is religion then nothing is*” (Fitzgerald 2017a, 171; emphasis added).

Already in the past, Latour argued that nature and politics have not yet been secularized (2004b, 30—11, Simons 2019, 927) and that “[n]ature could reign over humans as a religious power to which a paradoxical cult, civic and secular, had to be devoted” (Latour 2017, 281). Especially for his recent work on Gaia (Latour 2011b, 2014e, 2014f, 2015d, 2017, 2018, 2020a, 2020g, ZKM

38. Others (Fujda 2019) have also highlighted a connection between Latour and Fitzgerald.

2014, Wark 2017) and the Anthropocene (Latour 2014d), he was objected by critics that he would confuse religion with science and ecology (Latour 2017, 179).³⁹

For at least a decade, Latour has been interested in the figure of Gaia and ecological questions. Latour takes the Gaia figure from James Lovelock⁴⁰ and Lynn Margulis, while the name comes from Hesiod's poem *Theogony*, in which Gaia is a divine figure (Clarke 2017). They place Gaia as an autopoietic superorganism *as* Earth in a secular and not divinized manner (Marovich 2018). Beatrice Marovich has underlined the necessity of thinking about Gaia — usually known as the global environmental and climate crisis — since it *intrudes* (Latour 2014e) within the human world (Marovich 2018).

In the context of his *reset Modernity!* exhibition in 2016, he argued that people remain uncertain about what the secular — or the mundane — actually *is* and to distinguish religion, the secular, and politics (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky and Havemann 2016a, 51). Latour identifies a way from the religious to the secular to the terrestrial (2017, vi), which would lead away

39. Latour responds to these critiques in the following way: “I have never spoken about Gaia without someone objecting immediately that I risked “confusing religious questions with ecological or scientific questions.” *Yet just the opposite is true.* It is because I have an ear for the religious questions that *I very quickly detect those who put religion where it has no business being, in particular in science or in politics.* What has always alerted me is the extent to which the order of nature, its distinction from culture and politics, its obsession with deanimating agents, stems from a particularly troubling form of religion. *It is the ecological mutation that obliges us to secularize – perhaps even to profane – all the (counter-)religions, including that of nature*” (Latour 2017, 179; emphasis added).

40. Lovelock has explained the Gaia concept in the following ways:

“Gaia is the name of the Earth seen as a single physiological system, an entity that is alive at least to the extent that, like other living organisms, its chemistry and temperature are self-regulated at a state favourable for its inhabitants. *I describe Gaia as a control system for the Earth – a self-regulating system something like the familiar thermostat of a domestic iron or oven.* I am an inventor. I find it easy to invent a self-regulating device by first imagining it as a mental picture. [...] In many ways Gaia, like an invention, is difficult to describe. The nearest I can reach is to say that Gaia is an evolving system, a system made up from all living things and their surface environment, the oceans, atmosphere, and crustal rocks, the two parts tightly coupled and indivisible. It is an “emergent domain”— a system that has emerged from the reciprocal evolution of organisms and their environment over the eons of life on Earth. In this system, the self-regulation of climate and chemical composition are entirely automatic. Self-regulation emerges as the system evolves. No foresight, planning, or teleology (suggestion of design or purpose in nature) are involved” (Lovelock 2000, 11; emphasis added).

“To acknowledge Gaia at least for the purpose of argument. I do not expect you to become converts to a new Earth religion. I do not ask you to suspend your common sense. All I do ask is that you consider *Gaia theory as an alternative to the conventional wisdom that sees the Earth as a dead planet made of inanimate rocks, ocean, and atmosphere, and merely inhabited by life. Consider it as a real system, comprising all of life and all of its environment tightly coupled so as to form a self-regulating entity.* [...] I recognize that to view the Earth as if it were alive is just a convenient, but different, way of organizing the facts of the Earth. [...] [T]he Earth might in certain ways be alive, not as the ancients saw her, as a sentient goddess with purpose and foresight, but more like a tree - a tree that exists, never moving except to sway in the wind, yet endlessly conversing with the sunlight and the soil. Using sunlight and water and nutrients to grow and change. But all done so imperceptibly that, to me, the old oak tree on the green is the same as it was when I was a child” (Lovelock 2000, 12; emphasis added).

from “religion of nature” and would allow a — worldly, earthbound, or secular — understanding of materiality (72). According to him, it would be a significant advantage that “[i]n the really secular world to come, both the natural and the supernatural might disappear at last” (Latour 2015d, 38).

Latour aims to establish a new contrast between (i) the religious and secular and (ii) the terrestrial. This makes the latter pure immanence, free of immanentization (2017, 211—212). While the secular would still be religious, Gaia would — finally — be the first non-religious entity, which is essentially about uncertainty regarding the ends. Following Latour, “the “secular” is like nonalcoholic beer,” being “the religious without religion” (Latour 2017, 87). However, Gaia or the terrestrial is not “profane,” “archaic,” “pagan,” “material,” or “secular” (211—212).

In his six *Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion* in Edinburgh in February 2013, Latour talked about the political theology of nature. According to him, Gaia is neither nature nor a deity, but rather something whose understanding needs the extraction from religion—nature (2015d, 3). He has called Gaia “the most *secular* figure of the Earth ever explored by political theory” (8), a “wholly secular arrangement of wholly secular agencies” (29), “the *most secular entity* ever produced by Western science” (58—59), “fully secular assemblage” (82), “the name of a proteiform, monstrous, shameless, primitive goddess” (2017, 87), “a return to the oldest, humblest, most primitive, shapeless and secular goddess of Gaia” (2015d, 121—122), stated that “Gaia is the localized, historical and secularized avatar of Nature” and “Nature appears retrospectively as the epistemological, politicized, religious, fabulous extension of Gaia” (126—127), “Gaia taken as the secular aggregates of all those agencies recognized as acting back through loops of retroaction” (Latour 2015d, 135—136), “Gaia, considered as the secular aggregation of all the agents that can be recognized thanks to the tracing of feedback loops” (Latour 2017, 283), and “Gaia, a (finally secular) figure for nature”, which “probably [is] the least religious entity produced by Western science” and “may be called wholly secular” (87).

According to Latour, Lovelock’s Gaia concept can be described as “*fully secular* [...] if the adjective ‘secular’ means ‘involving no outside cause or spiritual basis,’ and thus fully ‘of this world’” (58—59). However, the terms “secular”/“profane” invoke the contrary terms “religious”/“sacred,” which is why Latour argues for Gaia being “worldly” (87).

Gaia has a history, but it was not designed, controlled, or engineered (Latour 2015d, 66); it has no levels, layers, or zoom (71); it “does not promise peace” or union; it “does not guarantee a stable background” (2017, 270), it is not an organism, and it has “no frame, no goal, no direction”: it is somehow like “history itself” (106—107). Gaia is another way of looking at the Earth without

identifying specific gods like God, evolution, or a thermostat (136—137).⁴¹ According to Philip Conway (2015), Latour is interested in Lovelock’s conception of Gaia in the sense that “there is only one Gaia, but Gaia is not One” (12). There is no holism, but a connectedness of the Earth, which is not “the Globe” since every element builds its environment, but without an organizer, master puppeteer, or God behind (Latour, Salter and Walters 2016g, 13). Gaia is thus a “fully secularized” — nonmodern — concept, which is not based on any “absolute transcendence or immutability” (Howles 2018, 275).⁴²

Conclusion

This chapter has delivered an overview of histories, difficulties, and critiques of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm. (i) In the first part, this chapter investigated various approaches to studying religion. Then a historical perspective on researching religion was added, ending with Latour’s invention of the “crossed-out God,” the interiorized version of God. (ii) This chapter subsequently analyzed the twin relationship between secularism and religion since Martin Luther’s “reformation” of Catholic Christianity and his invention of the “divided self.” Whether Hegel, Locke, Lenin, Durkheim, or Weber, all are pretty certain that these entities named “religion” and the “secular” are two “things” that are entirely distinct. (iii) The third and final part of this chapter researched critiques on the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm by Carl Schmitt, Karl Polanyi, Jan Assmann, Eric Voegelin, and the movie *Timbuktu* (2014) by Abderrahmane Sissako — which has emphasized that the line between religion and politics is perhaps not so easy to draw — as well as Timothy Fitzgerald, Markus Dressler, and Arvind-Pal S. Mandair. The work of Bruno Latour finalized this chapter by identifying religion in Durkheim’s “society” by connecting secularists with Islamist fundamentalists, delineating the mega project modernity as a theological project oriented to

41. Latour explains this argument in the following way: “To put it in still other terms, *he who looks at the Earth as a Globe always sees himself as a God*. If the Sphere is what one wishes to contemplate passively when one is tired of history, how can one manage to trace the connections of the Earth without depicting a sphere? By a movement that turns back on itself, in the form of a *loop*. This is the only way to draw a path between agents without resorting to the notions of parts and a Whole that only the presence of an all-powerful Engineer – Providence, Evolution, or Thermostat – could have set up. *This is the only way to become secular in science as well as in theology*” (Latour 2017, 136—137; emphasis added).

42. This new form of secularism, which does not need the binary of transcendence versus immanence, is explained by Latour as follows: “*To be within the world is no longer to be torn between transcendence and immanence. [...] Transcendence is nowhere but in the many discontinuities that are necessary for agencies to achieve their common existence. It does not constitute another world above and beyond this one, but is distributed deep inside the agencies themselves*. As to immanence, it is never smooth and continuous enough so as to be simply there, offering nothing more than the strange shape of mere matters of fact. It does not make up a world of below, but it is just as much distributed throughout the agencies. „Dappled” would be a good adjective” (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 406; emphasis added).

forms of transcendence — market, science, nature, the economy, globalization, etc. — and turning the so-called secularization thesis on its head by asking whether, how and when science should and could be secularized, as well as identifying Gaia — the intruding and life-threatening climate catastrophe — as the only secular “thing” that there is up to now.

As Latour was arguing against the “Nature vs. Society” narrative (1993, 40), this study argues that the “religion vs. secular” dichotomy only works because the processes of (i) purification — the making of essences — and (ii) mediations, as well as mediators, are never considered together. The famous “*proliferation of hybrids*” (50—51) saturates this very dichotomy, although when both processes are taken together, these *exceptions*, these hybrids — i.e., Buddhist mediators — can be investigated. Instead of alternating between the two sides, this thesis turns to their meeting point and finds processes of mediation and proliferating hybrids⁴³, “the terrain of all the empirical studied carried out on the networks” (96).

Since this promised land of modernity is either long lost or has not been achieved, one should turn to those hybrids and give them spaces and histories. This is why this chapter has investigated — in all necessary length — these very hybrids of the “religious vs. secular” dichotomy instead of purifying either one side or the other and ignoring or devaluing the so-called hybrids.

In chapters 2 to 6, this study will investigate the *secular and religious* symmetrically and thus reverse the *naturalized* relationship between the two. The secular is a religious project, as the religious is a secular project. Secular religious practices (i) distribute a message to convert, transform and change actors, and they (ii) combine transcendent and immanent endeavors by promoting “the end of time” — the assumed “beyond” — in time, here and now without creating an outside world.

In chapter 2, this thesis will now explore the naturalization of Buddhism-as-mediators beyond something secular or religious, which will “test” — and hopefully prove — if these modern theories or “nonmodern” critiques can be verified. How and why does Buddhism-as-mediators’ assumed secularity or religiosity become *natural* and thus irreversible?

43. Latour (1993) explains moderns’ horror regarding hybrids resulting in purification: “Moderns do differ from premoderns by this single trait: they refuse to conceptualize quasi-objects as such. *In their eyes, hybrids present the horror that must be avoided at all costs by a ceaseless, even maniacal purification* (112; emphasis added). *There are so many hybrids that no one knows any longer how to lodge them in the old promised land of modernity*” (131; emphasis added).

PART II

Buddha Brands in London

Chapter 2

Natural and Material Buddhism-as-Mediators

Introduction

This chapter will investigate how Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are gathering beyond the *secular and religious* divide in a *naturalized* way through (i) tradition — emotions, experiences, and senses — (ii) metamorphosis and transformation, as well as (iii) habitual practices, which are assembling, gathering and mediating Buddhist materialities to make something *new* — a composition — out of Buddhist traditions, some hybrid of Buddhist brands and mediators, consumerism, and neoliberalism.

2.1. TRADITION — Natural and Material Buddhist Mediators

Tradition — or repetition and reproduction — is about the continuation and inheriting of existents, institutes lines of force, lineages, and societies, and alternates in exploring continuities (Latour 2013a, 488–489). Buddhist mediations and mediators seem to be about the repetition of neoliberal societies and consuming practices, which need naturalized networks of bodies, clothing, gender, and sex. Tradition is about improving, regenerating, or connecting (with) one’s own and other bodies.

Life is not only cognitive and mental but essentially material and sensual. Neoliberal consumption practices fundamentally need and transform materiality. Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding generate a relation between the medium, the brand, the material commodity, and the material user, which inevitably needs the material level. To understand how neoliberal consumption of Buddhist mediators works materially, one must ask oneself what happens during the consumption of commodities since Buddhist brands seem to mediate into commodified social usages. The Buddhification of things gives products a Buddhist “vibe,” “sound,” “feel,” and “look.” Mediators are materialized as the experiences actors make, the emotions they feel, and the senses activated in their sensorium. Using emotions in branding and mediators is nothing new. As Edgar Cabanas and Eva Illouz (2019) argue, there is an increasingly growing “happiness industry” that —

scientifically — transforms normality into happiness. As some scholars say, is “happy the new normal” (Cabanas and Illouz 2019)? Besides Buddhism being associated with asceticism and meditation, advertising and consumerism increasingly use emotions and emotional branding. Although following Marc Gobé (2009), there are two leading emotions — hope and fear — Buddhist mediators are emotionally represented mainly by happiness. Which senses are activated by which commodities? How many of the five senses are activated by Buddhist mediators, i.e., secularism? However, happiness is not the last end since corporations are profiting from these hopeful emotions, like the hope to be a better and optimized self or the hope to become a better, less destructive humanity and live in a better, less painful world. This optimization can be reached through AI, but it can also lead to fear, and trust is an emotion companies need to bind consumers to their companies and brands.

2.1.1. Lives, Experiences, and Practices

Consumers’ lives, experiences, and practices significantly bind them to a specific brand in the long term. If users consider the brand dynamic and flexible because the offers are adapted for different users — even those who do not want to sign a long-term contract — this creates “brand loyalty,” i.e., users remaining loyal to their brand and thus keep coming back. For instance, the creative agency *Karmarama* has created for *OSN (Orbit Showtime Network)* — a satellite provider with over 180 channels for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), France, and the UK — *Wavo*, a mobile app (fig. 3.1) to “redesign the user experience, placing the customer right at the heart of OSN’s offering.” OSN delivered unknown liberties in Middle Eastern TV, which earned them 100% more visibility on digital delivery (Karmarama 2020a). Thus, Buddha brands aim to optimize lived experiences of their users lives, practices, and experiences.

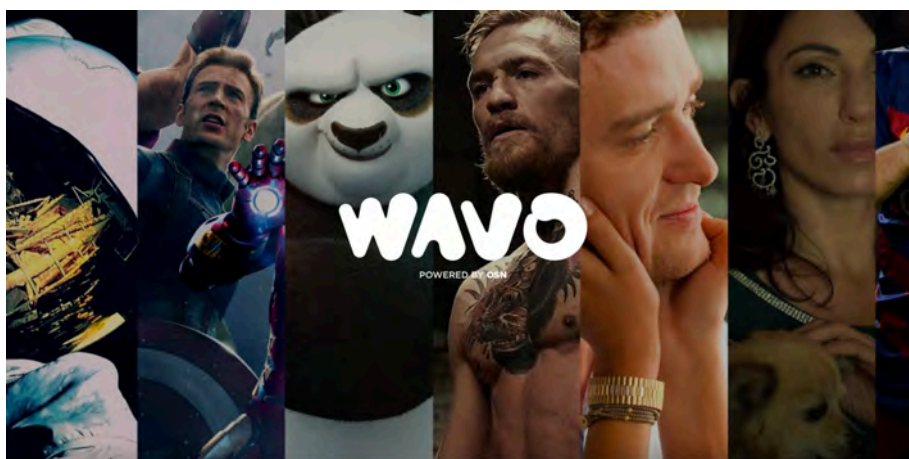


FIGURE 3.1. Advertising campaign of *Wavo* by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

2.1.2. Emotions

There is much literature on research fields like emotions, therapy, and self-help (Illouz 2008), emotions and/as commodities (Illouz 2018), emotions as a kind of practice (Scheer 2012), politics of affect and emotional regimes in global yoga (A. Koch 2018), the relations between love and capitalism (Illouz 1997, 2012) and emotions and religion (Gade 2015).

2.1.2.1. Fear

When the *European Union* closed its external borders — for the first time — for 30 days by March 17, 2020, at the latest, and safety and prevention became paramount, consumption and branding slowed down: without moving people — as the *Washington Post* demonstrates (fig. 3.2) (Stevens 2020) — the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus disease 2019)¹ slowed down, as did consumption and the effects of branding and mediation. While the left diagram — the online version is animated — shows the rapid speed at which each actor infects another with the virus when all actors are moving, the right diagram displays the significant slowdown in the spread of the virus when only a few actors are moving.

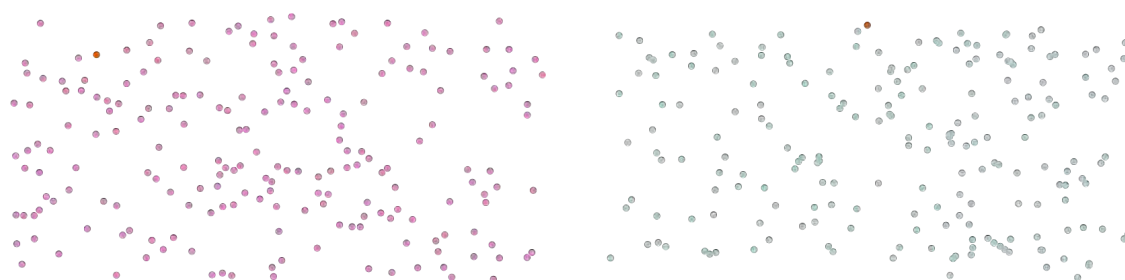


FIGURE 3.2. Graphics showing the simulation of COVID-19 spreading in the *Washington Post*, March 2020.

This can be applied wonderfully to the spread of branding, marketing, and mediation: actors condemned to inactivity neither spread COVID-19 nor can they spend money — in the usual physical way — even if they are advertised to a brand. Moving and healthy actors are necessary for

1. In March 2020, Žižek hypothesized that after COVID-19, actors would think about themselves differently. The most disturbing lesson the virus has in store for people would be that “humans are much less sovereign than they think. He carries on with what he is told. He speaks and does not know what he is saying. He emerges — and at some point, he disappears from the earth’s surface again. He must be able to bear that without going crazy” (Žižek 2020; translated by author).

Žižek explained in an interview with *The Spectator* in March 2020 “that Europe is so weakened that it will not be able to react in a unified way, and that’s what I mean when I say coronavirus gives a new chance to communism” — but not old-style communism, but rather to follow the *World Health Organization* (*WHO*) decrees of mobilization and coordination. Keeping the “good sides of capitalism” but through a “coordinated state” and “social effort to mobilize” would not only be necessary for dealing with COVID-19 but also with the ecological and refugee crisis (Nash 2020).

branding, mediation, and secularism; otherwise, even the nicest smiling Buddha in a shop window or the most beautiful Buddha advertising cannot activate much consumerism. For instance, there is the image of the Buddha with the breathing mask² sprayed on a brick wall in New Delhi (India) (fig. 3.3) or the Buddha with a breathing mask in a German pharmacy in Mannheim (fig. 3.4). However, pharmacies usually promote health and happiness, in certain situations also visually process the emotion of fear and dealing with it.



FIGURE 3.3. *Left*, Graffiti of the Buddha wearing a COVID-19 face mask in Mumbai, India. March 16, 2020.

FIGURE 3.4. *Right*, Buddha figure with a breathing mask in the *Einhorn Apotheke* pharmacy in R 1, 2–3 in Mannheim (Germany).

2.1.2.2. Happiness

The artist Metis Atash’s Funkybuddha “Happiness is a Choice” (fig. 3.5) (Atash 2020b) is part of the recently emerging happiness industry.³ Similarly, dining at *ROKA Charlotte Street* in London, one can order a so-called “[c]hocolate [B]uddha with salted caramel belly” for dessert (fig. 3.6), who smiles at one, and when opening the belly with the spoon caramel comes out, representing pure happiness (“Photo: Chocolate buddha with salted caramel belly.” 2020). In September 2019, the German chain *Tchibo* — founded as a coffee merchant and is now one of Germany’s largest retailers — offered various products advertising happiness for sale, including meditating and smiling Buddhas (fig. 3.7), as well as printed cups and T-shirts. The cosmetic chain *Rituals* has

2. Since March 2020, via *Google Images*, one can find thousands of images with Buddha figures and COVID-19 face masks, like fig. 3.3.

3. Publications like Sara Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Donna Freitas’ *The Happiness Effect* (2017), Regina Tödter’s *Buddha räumt auf: Wie man mit weniger glücklich wird* (2015), and former Chief Business Officer of Google X Mo Gawdat’s *Solve for Happy: Engineer Your Path to Joy* (2017, *Solve for Happy* 2020) and his project *One Billion Happy* (2020) are only the tip of the iceberg when looking at general introductions to the happiness topic. Inken Prohl and Ursula Richard (2015f) have investigated discourses of self-optimization and the “need to be happy” within the global transformations of Buddhism.

made the so-called “Ritual of Happy Buddha” (fig. 3.8), which makes the consumer “smile and the world smiles back.” This ritual should generate “happiness in 4 steps” and would take 26 minutes by using specific *Rituals* products.⁴

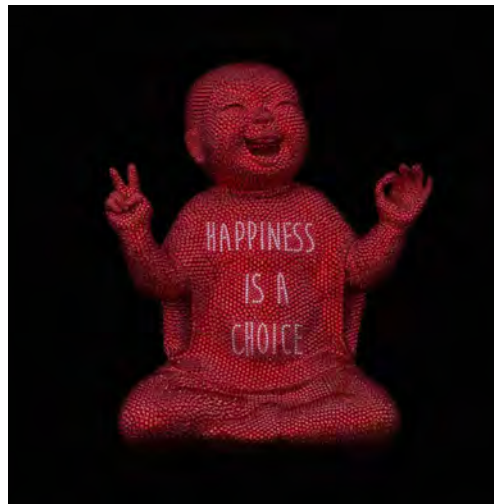


FIGURE 3.5. Funkybuddha “Happiness is a Choice.” Artwork by Metis Atash.

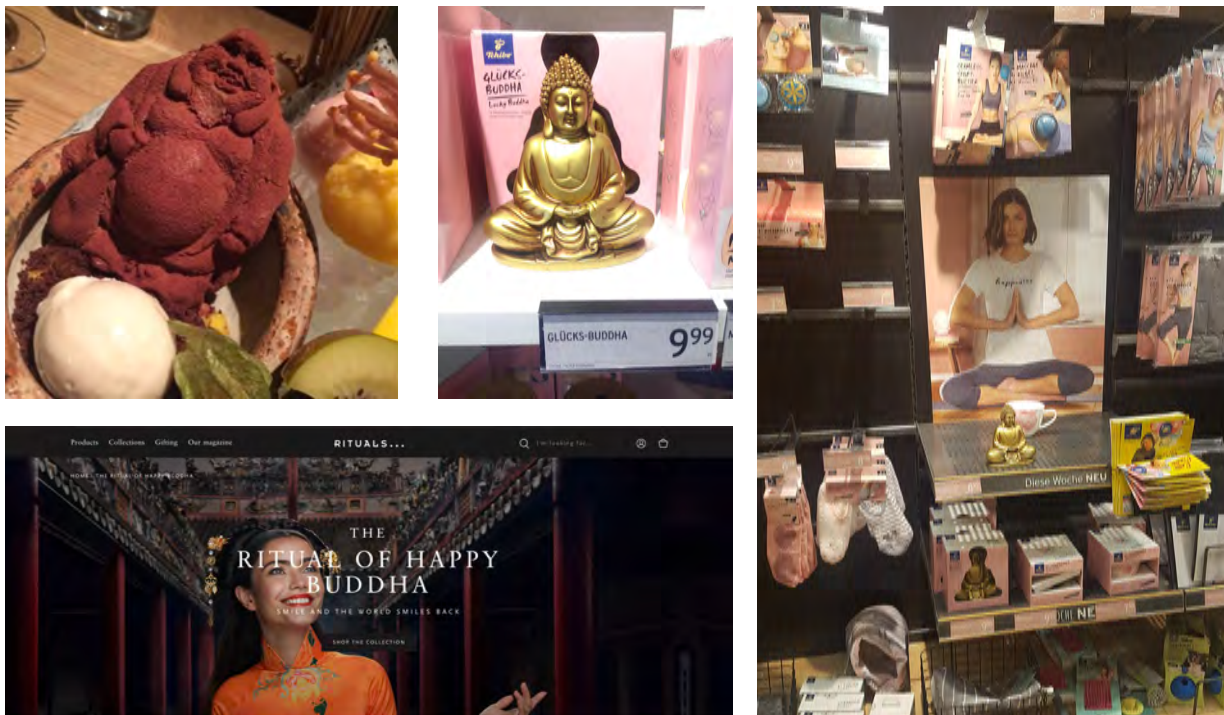


FIGURE 3.6. Top left, Chocolate Buddha with salted caramel at *ROKA* Charlotte Street in London (UK).

FIGURE 3.7. Top center and right, Happiness Buddha at *Tchibo* shop in Speyer (Germany).

FIGURE 3.8. Bottom left, *Rituals* website explains and advertises the “Ritual of Happy Buddha.”

4. The ritualized tradition is as follows: “In ancient China, 1100 years ago, The Laughing Buddha was a famous monk whose legendary smile brought joy wherever he went. For centuries, rubbing his belly has symbolised good luck and prosperity. *This tradition is the inspiration for a collection of uplifting products that celebrate his positivity.* Infused with Sweet Orange and the moodenhancing power of Cedar Wood, *our energising Happy Buddha collection adds a daily dose of happiness to your life*” (Rituals 2020; emphasis added).

2.1.2.3. Hope

Another important emotion often addressed by mediational Buddhist brands is hope. It is triggered mainly by the self-optimization discourse and found in body optimizations by *Fat Buddha Yoga*, companies like the *Zen Clinic* in Colchester (UK) offering body enhancement like dental, cosmetic surgery, hearing care, and various aesthetic surgeries (fig. 3.9) (Zen Clinic 2020), or *Zen Bootcamp* in Teddington (UK), which works with client testimonials and repeatedly emphasizes the benefits of self-enhancement. One of those is Felicity Smith summing it up nicely: “Fitter, healthier, happier...” (fig. 3.10). *ZEN Bootcamp* offers ““a workout like no other’ ... Blitz the body fat and get in the best shape of your life with full body workouts combining running, sprinting, bodyweight and core circuits, kettle bells, boxing and team games.” They use the so-called “Z.E.N.S.” system, which stands for zeal, exercise, nutrition, and system (Zen Bootcamp 2020).

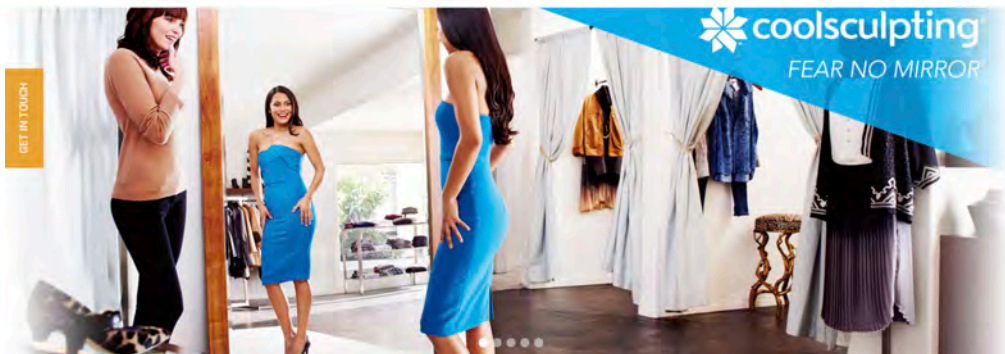


FIGURE 3.9. Top, Slogan by *Zen Clinic* advertising “coolsculpting. Fear no mirror”.

FIGURE 3.10. Bottom, *Zen Bootcamp* advertising “Teddington’s Leading Venue for Bootcamps.”

2.1.3. Sensuality

Listen to Buddha, and travel to the world's most fascinating places through your senses.

—Buddha-Bar 2020a

Sensual studies scholars, anthropologists, and scholars of religion have researched the relations between senses and culture/religion⁵ for a long time. As Inken Prohl (2012a, 382—383) has shown, the approach of material religion is also interested in “materials as carriers of non-verbal messages.” It includes statues, images, smells, sounds, and cognitively, sensually, and emotionally stimulating rituals that can be described as “sensational forms” (Meyer 2010), or “sensory impressions as a guarantee of meaning” (Prohl 2006), or in Prohl’s words:

Understanding how practitioners make ‘sense’ of religion means asking how religion looks, tastes, smells, and feels. Religion, in other words, is subject to the senses and sense-perception; it is not only a cognitive endeavor. (Prohl 2006, 34; translated by author)

In their study *Sensual Religion: Religion and the Five Senses* (2018a), Graham Harvey and Jessica Hughes investigate that hearing, seeing, tasting, touching, and smelling are at the core of any religion — i.e., including any Buddhist mediator or secularism in general — which generates specific views and perspectives on — perceiving — the world (Harvey 2018b, viii). To what extent does religion require sensuality, physical practices, experiences, and relationships? How can one better understand how religions are lived and performed by focusing on specific senses and their relationships? (1) The term “senses” — in religions as well as other human practices — refers to mechanisms through which bodies gain knowledge of their environment: senses of smell, taste, sight, hearing, and touch are ways of knowing the world, while the combination of the senses can be

5. There is much literature on this topic in general (Classen 1993, 2014-2016, 2017, Göbel and Prinz 2007, Serres 2008, Pentcheva 2010, Day 2013, Howes and Classen 2014c, Betts 2017, Howes 2003, 2005, 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2018). However, there is a multitude of works on specific senses like smelling (Chan 1989, Rasmussen 1999, Kenna 2005, Henshaw 2013, 2014), tasting (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 1973, 1978, 1981, Visser 1986, Douglas 1997, Korsmeyer 2007, Norman 2012, De Souza 2015), seeing (Lymberopoulou and Ambers 2011), hearing (DeNora 2000, Montiglio 2000), touching (James 2011, de Witte 2015, Graham 2020) as well as combinations of several senses (Bartoshuk and Duffy 2007, Pentcheva 2011, Diamond, Cronk and Rosen 2014), especially in connection with marketing (Howes 2007, 2008).

Others (Lindstrom 2010b) have investigated the “sensory secrets behind the stuff we buy,” and some of these general works have already dealt with religion. Still, scholars of religion are also long aware of the relations between the senses and religion (Morgan 1998, 1999, 2005, 2007a, 2012, 2015, 2018, Morgan and Promey 2001, Bräunlein 2004b, Meyer 2008, Promey 2014, Harvey 2013, 2015, 2018, Bertschinger, Fritz, Höpflinger and Mäder 2017, Gauthier 2018a, De Souza 2018, Pezzoli-Olgiati 2016, Fritz, Höpflinger, Knauß, Mäder and Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, Harvey and Hughes 2018a, Hughes 2018, Kamash 2018, Lymberopoulou 2018, Whitehead 2018).

called “sensorium.” There is always a negotiation between the senses because none works alone. Still, some dominate others for a particular time, and some work more harmoniously with others in specific contexts. Senses can be manipulated in such a way that on special occasions, certain senses are emphasized over others while simultaneously devaluing all of the other senses and presenting them as a distraction from the more important or “real” sensual approach; for instance, “seeing” is often considered more trustworthy and informative than the other senses. Religions particularly seem to encourage either excessive or very modest sensuality. Collectives often include training to block out distractions from other senses so that what is to be heard is heard, what is to be seen is seen, or the breath is felt while meditating, etc. (Harvey 2018c, 2–3).

Most commodities can be seen but not heard or tasted. Some trigger all five senses, and some trigger almost none. Is this related to the financial success of specific brands and mediators?

Harvey (2018b) has defined religion as a way that does not end with the five senses but includes other senses, which he calls “senses of place, decorum, decency, value, health/well-being, the uncanny, humour, honour and others.” These would make it easier to investigate movements, relationships, interactions, and spaces (ix). Harvey defines religion as being sensual and corporeal, “something that people (always bodies) do in the world (always physical)” (vii). The central insight of Harvey’s and Hughes’ book (2018a) is that some experiences and religious activities can privilege certain senses, and senses sometimes work together. Often religions would put senses in the background in favor of “spirituality” and “cognition” (Harvey 2018b, vii). Sensual religion shares its foundations with approaches that study religion in everyday practices and performances, materiality, embodiment, and affects. Harvey emphasizes the basic assumption of sensual religion that “religion is something people do,” which includes the cognitive, the sensual, and the material (Harvey 2018b, viii). He contributes “to expand [the] consideration of religion as a fully sensual (if not only sensual) activity,” which therefore is a better description of what religion *does* (Harvey 2018c, 14). Finally, Harvey (2018c) argues that actors constantly interact between their sensory materiality, the world, and cultural traits (2–3).

The following chapter will investigate how Buddhist mediators activate specific (out of the classical five) senses, which senses are primarily used, which companies and industries use which senses, and to what extent.

(i) The hearing or auditory sense is triggered by sounds, which come in a variety of shapes like the music in physical architectural stores (in *Rituals* or the *Religion* clothing store), in bars and restaurants (*Buddha-Bar*), yoga courses (*Fat Buddha Yoga*) or by watching TV or internet advertising (*KFChill*). For instance, the advertising company *Mother London* (2018a, 2020) designed *KFChill* on the so-called *Mindful Day* on September 12 for *Kentucky Fried Chicken* (*KFC*). They explained the campaign as “bring[ing] the fun to mindfulness” (Mother London 2018b). Hermeti Balarin — partner at *Mother London*— said that users should “[f]orget falling rain or crackling fire. Nothing beats the sound of frying chicken or sizzling bacon to get your mind to relax”. The *KFChill*⁶ taster films were supported by paid social advertising across *YouTube*, *Instagram*, and *Facebook* (Mother London 2018b). There are three sounds: “Relax to the sound of ... Frying Chicken”, “Unwind to the sound of ... Sizzling Bacon,” and “De-Stress to the sound of ... Simmering Gravy”. These tracks can even be downloaded for up to one-hour length (fig. 3.11) (Mother London 2020).



FIGURE 3.11. Video stills of *Kentucky Fried Chicken*’s *KFChill* campaign (2018), designed by *Mother London*.

London’s *Fat Buddha Yoga* (*FBY*) also creates music — since the owner Jessica Skye is a DJ — and by May 2020, it had released 23 volumes of so-called *Fat Buddha Sessions* on *Spotify* (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020d) — “deep, dope and down tempo mixes” (figs. 3.12–3.13) — because “[m]usic is a huge part of the *FBY* experience, we create bespoke mixes and playlists to suit every session [...] look up ‘fat buddha music’)” (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020a, 2020d). The *Buddha-Bar*⁷ even

6. *KFChill* explains its approach in the following way: “Welcome to *KFChill*. If you thought that the sounds of nature were relaxing, here’s another way to unwind. *It’s time to free your mind and immerse yourself in the actual sounds of KFC. So take a deep breath and fill your senses with Finger Lickin’ Good Vibes. Listen. Sit back. Relax*” (*KFChill* 2018; emphasis added).

7. Music is also crucial for the international franchise *Buddha-Bar*, which they explain as follows: “Since its opening, the *Buddha-Bar*’s musical identity has embodied an innovative and avant-garde aspect, thanks to the subtle mixture of captivating Electro-Ethnic rhythms and tribal sounds, played each evening by a resident DJ. In perfect harmony with the restaurant’s décor and atmosphere, this poignant and constantly innovative musical style enchants both the Parisian and international clientele. *Deep in the DNA of the concept, music has always played a major role in the Buddha-Bar universe*. Since 2000, George V Records has been trying to recreate the magic of places in compilations that have become cult” (*Buddha-Bar* 2020a; emphasis added).

sells compilation albums as CDs — 22 volumes to date — for around 10 to 15 Euros, whose covers show creative adaptations of the Buddha figure (fig. 3.14) (Buddha-Bar 2020a, 2020b). *DeepZen* — located in London and Oxford — also works with the auditory sense since they bring “emotive speech” to life (fig. 3.15). They create audiobooks, read content, work with e-learning and literacy, and produce voiceovers for videos and games (DeepZen 2020).



Emotive Speech Brought to Life



FIGURE 3.12. *Top left*, Cover art of Jessica Skye’s music, posted by *Fat Buddha Yoga* on *Spotify*.

FIGURE 3.13. *Top center*, Jessica Skye from *Fat Buddha Yoga* as a DJ at *Snowbombing* in Mayrhofen, Austria.

FIGURE 3.14. *Top right*, Cover art of *Buddha-Bar*’s music for beach parties.

FIGURE 3.15. *Bottom*, Image by *DeepZen* visualizing artificial voice acting.

(ii) The seeing or visual sense is triggered by the colors and symbols of most products, objects, and services. The most visually-focused website in popular culture today is *Instagram*. The social media platform for uploading images and videos — which belongs to *Facebook* — was founded in 2010, and many Buddhist branding companies — like *Fat Buddha Yoga* (fig 3.16) (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020c) — almost naturally have *Instagram* accounts to express their lifestyles and reach thousands of people visually. Popular culture — like Metis Atash’s *Punkbuddhas* (fig. 3.17) — is strongly infused with visuality since every product is, first and foremost, visible. To survive in

this situation of visual stimulation, brands must stand out and be visually more exciting and louder than others. This is precisely what Buddhist mediators deliver: they first stimulate visually, engaging the consumer to look at the object or product for a little longer, think about it, and ultimately consume it.

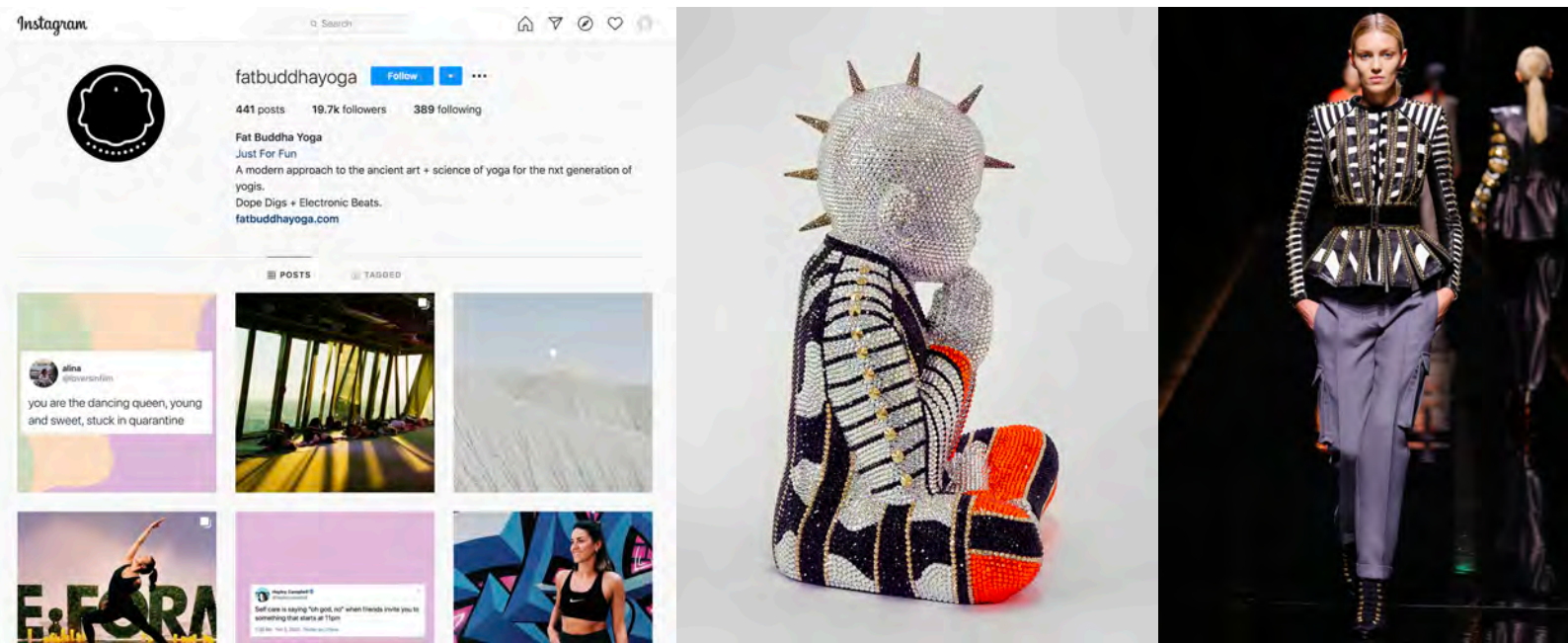


FIGURE 3.16. Left, Screenshot of *Fat Buddha Yoga*'s *Instagram* profile.

FIGURE 3.17. Center and right, *Punkbuddha* "Into the Wild II" by Metis Atash featuring Balmain's *Fall 2014 Ready-to-wear* collection. 46*36*30cm.

Birmingham-based *Big Buddha Seeds* are highly creative in visually adapting Buddha figures to popular cultural themes. For instance, they attract the user by putting Buddha on a *Silver Surfer* board, referring to the fictional superhero *Silver Surfer*⁸ from the Marvel Universe (figs. 3.18–3.19). They also refer to the infamous *Godfather* movie trilogy — based on the crime novel by Mario Puzo (1969) — by Francis Ford Coppola (1972, 1974, and 1990) (figs. 3.20–3.21) (*Big Buddha Seeds* 2020).

8. The *Silver Surfer* figure first appeared in the comic book *Fantastic Four* #48 in 1966 and in several comics, games, movies (like the *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* from 2007), books, and TV series.

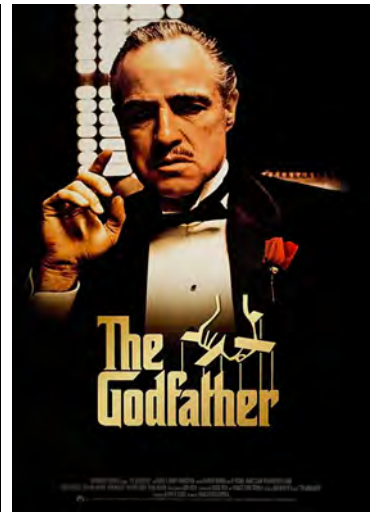


Fig. 3.18. Left, Buddha figure dressed as *Silver Surfer* on the cover of *Big Buddha Seeds* cannabis seeds packaging.

Fig. 3.19. Second left, Movie advertising for *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer* from 2007. Directed by Tim Story.

Fig. 3.20. Second right, Buddha figure dressed as the godfather on the cover of *Big Buddha Seeds* cannabis seeds packaging.

Fig. 3.21. Right, The movie cover of the first part of *The Godfather* from 1972. Directed by Francis Ford Coppola.

(iii) The tasting or gustatory sense is triggered by companies like Spanish gin producer *Cubical*, founded in 1920 in Birmingham and distilled at the Langley Distillery in Bishop’s Stortford, around 50km northeast of London. According to them, the gin “acquires its definitive personality in Bodegas Williams & Humbert thanks to its fusion with a wide variety of more than ten 100% natural Cubicalals [*sic*], which grant it that fine and elegantly balanced flavour”. They produce classical London dry gin and different flavors and colors: *Kiss* is pink, and *Mango* is orange (fig. 3.22) (Cubical 2020). A unique feature of this gin is the Buddha head, which is carved into the glass bottle as well as on top of the bottle’s cap about the use of Buddha’s hand (fig. 3.23), which they explain as being “used as a religious offering in Buddhist temples and, according to the legend, Buddha prefers it with the “fingers” positioned so that it looks like a closed hand, a symbol of the act of prayer” (Cubical 2020).



FIGURE 3.22. *Left*, Selection of different gins by *Cubical*.

FIGURE 3.23. *Right*, Buddha’s hand or “fingered citron”.

London’s *Buddha-Bar* also has a variety of gustatory experiences, including cocktails, dinner, and snacks. Personal sensory dining experiences at *Buddha-Bar London* included the Wagyu beef with black garlic truffle sauce (fig. 3.24) and the cocktails *Rose Petal Martini* and *So be @ Miami* (fig. 3.25).



FIGURE 3.24. *Left*, Wagyu beef with black garlic truffle sauce at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 3.25. *Right*, Cocktails at *Buddha-Bar* in 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

(iv) The touching or somatosensory sense is activated by shaped “things” like the *Punkbuddha* “Camopop,” which — like most *Punkbuddhas* — comprises 24,000 Swarovski crystals and additionally crystallized spikes. The Buddha figure and the handbag must have a unique hand feeling (fig. 3.26) (Atash 2020a).



FIGURE 3.26. *Punkbuddha* “Camopop” by Metish Atash featuring *Valentino’s Fall 2014 Collection*. 46*36*30cm.

(v) The cosmetic products of *Rituals’* “Ritual of Happy Buddha” series trigger both somatosensory and smelling or olfactory senses. This very ritual — 26 minutes in length — is advised to be undertaken in four steps (figs. 3.27–3.30) to effect “happiness,” according to a very detailed description⁹ (*Rituals* 2020).

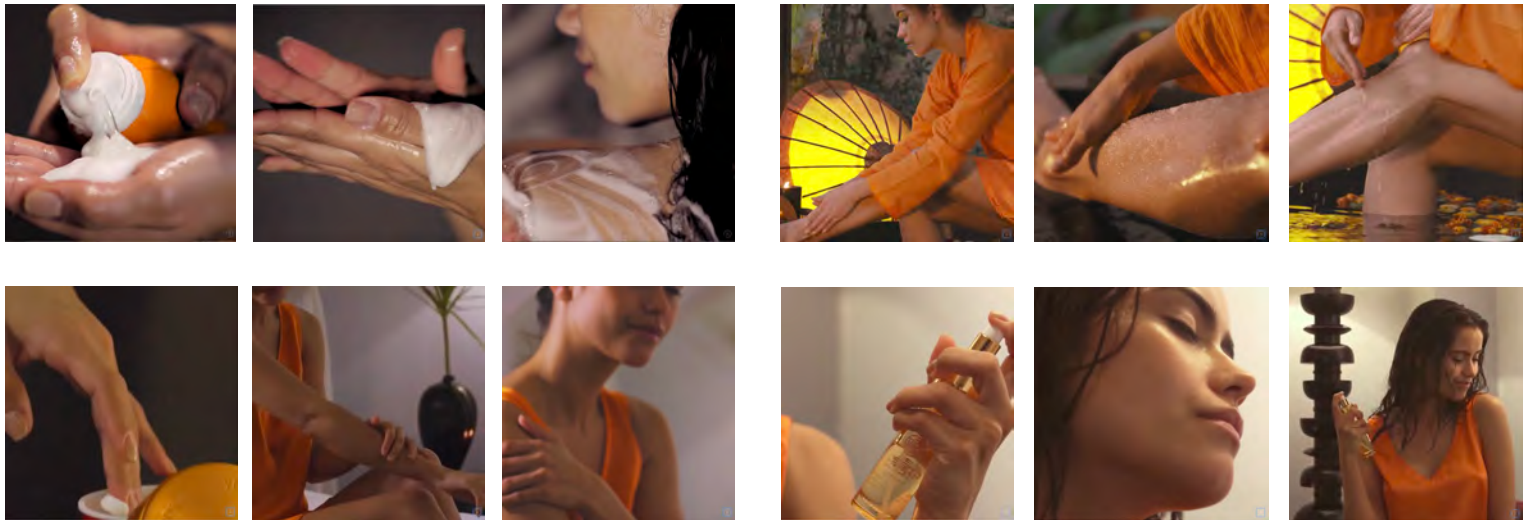


FIGURE 3.27. *Triple pair top left*, Video still of practicing the “Ritual of Happy Buddha” by *Rituals*: step 1.

FIGURE 3.28. *Triple pair top right*, Video still of practicing the “Ritual of Happy Buddha” by *Rituals*: step 2.

FIGURE 3.29. *Triple pair bottom left*, Video still of practicing the “Ritual of Happy Buddha” by *Rituals*: step 3.

FIGURE 3.30. *Triple pair bottom right*, Video still of practicing the “Ritual of Happy Buddha” by *Rituals*: step 4.

9. The description reads as follows: “1. Energise — 3 mins: Use a small amount of gel, enjoy the rich, soothing foam when it comes in contact with water. 2. Exfoliate — 10 mins: Massage this body scrub into damp skin with circular movements, then rinse with warm water. 3. Nourish — 10 mins: Apply this rich cream every day and massage it into your skin. 4. Flourish. 3 mins: Spray this mist over your hair and skin for a lovely head-to-toe scent” (*Rituals* 2020).

It varies tremendously whether Buddhist mediators address several or only a few specific senses — one can say that there is a spectrum between one and five — and it indeed cannot be said that the former is “more successful” than the latter. On the one hand, some products and services only trigger a few senses, such as companies in the financial sector: *Credit Karma*, *Smartkarma*, *Zentria*, and many others have websites, so they mainly appeal to the visual sense — some even have only one page of text or their logo with one image on their website (figs. 3.31–3.32) — but there is rarely sound unless there are videos (fig. 3.33), there is no taste or something to smell and hardly anything to touch unless they have finance apps (fig. 3.34). When talking to a financial advisor, the auditory sense joins in, and perhaps the haptic sense when shaking hands. However, Buddhist mediators that only appear on websites are primarily about visuality and seeing.

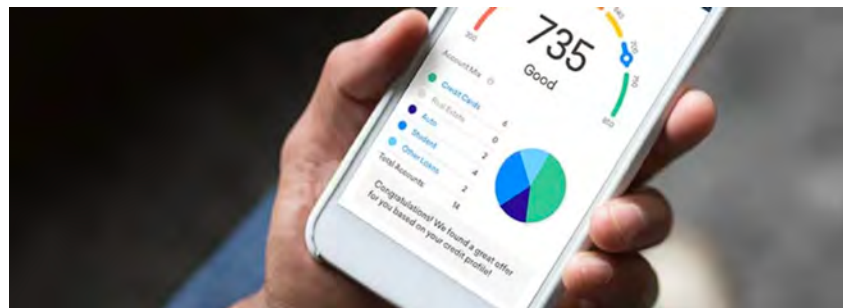
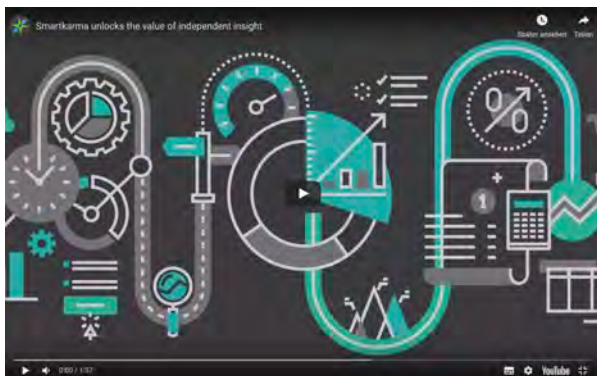


FIGURE 3.31. *Top left*, Screenshot of *Zen Assets*' website header.

FIGURE 3.32. *Top right*, Screenshot of *Satori*'s website.

FIGURE 3.33. *Bottom left*, Introductory video by *Smartkarma*.

FIGURE 3.34. *Bottom right*, Finance app by *Credit Karma*.

On the other hand, some Buddhist mediators appeal to many or even all senses, like *Buddha-Bar*, *Cubical*, *Nirvana Brewery*, *Karma Cola*, or *Buddha Teas*. These are products that — in addition to their websites — have visual locations like pharmacies, *ROKA* restaurants, and *Tchibo* shops, something to listen to like *Buddha-Bar* and *Fat Buddha Yoga*, offer something to eat or drink

like *Buddha-Bar* or *Nirvana Brewery*, *Karma Cola* and *Buddha Teas* (figs. 3.35–3.37) as well as smell like *Rituals*, or in some cases even distribute something to touch like *Rituals* products.

Ultimately, Buddhist brands and mediators — like the American denim brand *True Religion* advertises — are “fashion for the senses” (fig. 3.38).

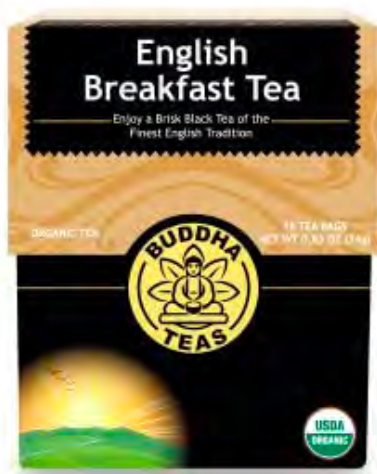


FIGURE 3.35. *Top left*, “Classic IPA” beer by *Nirvana Brewery*.

FIGURE 3.36. *Top right*, Holding *Karma Cola* on a bicycle.

FIGURE 3.37. *Bottom left*, Tea packaging by *Buddha Teas*.

FIGURE 3.38. *Bottom right*, Buddha figure with guitar, *True Religion* naming, and “Fashion for the Senses” Slogan.

2.2. TRANSFORMATION — Translative and Transformative Buddhist Mediators in Knowledge

Transformation is about change to subsist, ensuring continuity through upheavals and delivering “healing techniques” (Latour 2013c; “[MET]”). The term “translation” has been widely used in *ANT* to investigate how heterogeneous associations are interlocked when tracking networks of scientific or technical practice. This tradition comes from French philosopher Michel Serres (1974) and his works on the figure of Hermes, whose third volume was subtitled “translation.” “Translation” fundamentally breaks with the idea of transportation without transformation. Science studies have shown that even scientific transfer is a translation. According to Latour (2013c, “Translation”), “all transfers [...] are made as a result of transformations or translations”. The opposing term to translation is “displacement,” where the place is changed without any transformation. The notion of translation “rejects the principle of non-contradiction by which a thing cannot be, in the same respect, both itself and another (or itself and its opposite).” This understanding of “translation” moves beyond notions of substances. It focuses on mediators as the standard case. Something can be itself by being something other. According to language theory, “translation” is a specific case of transition, passage, or movement — associated with “loss,” “betrayal,” or “treason” since language’s nature is mediation.

In *We have never been Modern* (1993), “translation” was used in opposition to “purification”: while the first — connected to networks and mediation — would create hybrids or mixtures, the latter would create distinct ontological zones, somewhat connected to criticism. The crux was that both would need each other, although Latour assumed — the “paradox of the moderns” — that the second made the first possible because when hybrids were forbidden, the more possible these became. The nonmodern perspective would enable investigating these two practices together, changing pasts and futures (10—12).

Translated Buddhist mediators are where hybrids, mediators, and networks proliferate and move to the center of attention. The argument is that secularism is a hugely networked translation project from various other networks (like Buddhism, religion, consumerism, etc.) via modes of gathering, assembling, and mediating “things” — as the previous three chapters have tried to demonstrate — to create something *new*. Secularism as translation is transfer and transformation at the same time, again and again. This will be investigated in the following case study on the “arrival” of the Buddhist *Burma Pavilion* in the *British Empire Exhibition* 1924–1925.

2.2.1. *The Burma Pavilion in the British Empire Exhibition 1924–1925*

The translocal translatability of Buddhist mediators is perfectly illustrated in the context of the so-called *Burma Pavilion* of the *British Empire Exhibition* of 1924–1925 (fig. 3.39) and its afterlife. The integration into a specific translocal contact zone (Pratt 1991, Falser and Juneja 2013b) and target context can be theoretically provided with the concept of *translocal translation* (Bachmann-Medick 1997, Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, Sturge 2007, Bachmann-Medick 2016), which highlights that new and different meanings were added to new contexts.

The *British Empire Exhibition* of 1924/25 at Wembley (The British Empire Exhibition 1923, The British Empire Exhibition 1926, Lawrence 1925a, 1925b) in north-west London — which is also the site of *Wembley Arena* and *Wembley Stadium* — was one of many successors of the first exhibition of this kind, which took place at London's *Crystal Palace* in 1851. Products and architecture from all over the world were presented and (re)produced, often including those of Great Britain's colonies. This colonial project was copied in various European colonial states, such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands. For the 1924 exhibition in Wembley, each participant was assigned one or more “national” pavilions, like India, Burma, Great Britain, Canada, and many more. For the so-called *Burma Pavilion* (The British Empire Exhibition 1924c), the Western Gate of the Arakan pagoda at Mandalay (British Empire Exhibition the Bridge House, 1924) — located in former British Burma and present-day Myanmar — was reconstructed in Mandalay and shipped to Wembley. In the following year — the second year of the extremely popular and therefore extended exhibition — large parts of the pavilion were sold to the *Schweppes* company (Wembley Exhibition 1925, “Schweppes Tudor Village. Burma Pavilion” 1925), which again made a so-called *Tudor Village* out of the high-quality and precious teak wood — thus “recycled” the pavilion — and shipped this whole village to Sydney (fig. 3.40). In the process, the building was conserved, transformed, shipped, photographically documented, and further after 1925 sold to all parts of the world, whether for *Schweppes* or as a garden pavilion in Henley on Thames, which today is on sale for \$10,748—16,122 (“Los 778. A good early [...]” 2008) (fig. 3.41).



LOS 778

A GOOD EARLY 20TH CENTURY BURMESE TEAK GARDEN PAVILION OR SUMMER HOUSE

circa 1923

£ 8,000 - 12,000

€ 9,100 - 14,000

[FOLLOW](#)

The Henley Sale

19 Jul 2008, 10:00 BST

Henley on Thames

FIGURE 3.39. *Top left, Burma Pavilion in the construction process for The British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London (UK).*

FIGURE 3.40. *Top right, Postcard of Schweppes Tudor Village and Burma Pavilion at The British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London (UK), 1925.*

FIGURE 3.41. *Bottom, Bonhams' auction (2008) of Burmese teak garden pavilion or summer house from the Burma Pavilion at The British Empire Exhibition in Wembley, London (UK).*

Manufacturing this architecture in former Burma, the British needed help from the government of Burma in the United Kingdom (The British Empire Exhibition 1925). This architecture also changed its meanings and functions since it imitated a pagoda — i.e., a Buddhist building — while at Wembley, it was not intended to *perform* Buddhist religious traditions but rather illustrate, *represent*, and dominate them. This building can be called “political religious” — in Erich Voegelin’s (1938) sense — because its original religious, traditional Buddhist functions were replaced by the functions that a world exhibition had to fulfill. In this and other exhibitionary complexes like world exhibitions (Mathur 1998, Munro 2010), the buildings of *other* cultures were shown synchronously with those of their *own* culture, i.e., the *British Empire Pavilion*. As Sharon Macdonald (1998) has argued, displaying is political. This was intended to create a contrast

between what was imagined to be more advanced and less advanced civilizations, making the overall world exhibition project a marker of the civilization status of the British and their belief in the project of modernity. Even though the *Burma Pavilion* was built in this context, it certainly illustrates — unlike the *British Empire Pavilion* — a significantly more significant number of visitors and greater popularity with the public.

Colonial projects like this had a specific relationship to objects, material culture, and museums. However, they also included local people; for instance, when the Myanmar locals — who were “brought along” for the construction, maintenance, and organization of the facility at Wembley — began to practice “Buddhist” religious, traditional rituals in front of the Buddha figure displayed in the pavilion (fig. 3.42) or when they were ringing a bell that traditionally hangs in front of a pagoda to announce the beginning of a ritual ceremony. British newspapers immediately transformed these performances into something like “Wembley’s Big Ben” (fig. 3.43) or caricatures in the satirical periodical *Punch, or the London Charivari*, which also publicly made orientalist, racist, and ethnocentrist references. A specific drawing therein shows a “Burmese” — today called a “Myanmar” — in a traditional local sport, juggling several balls on his body, including the rather judgmental caption: “Mr. Very Showy” (fig. 3.44). The painting — which appeared in the newspaper *The Sphere* — was named *The Wondrous Mingling of Races* and shows the display of cultures and religious traditions as a collage — or what Véronique Altglas (2014b) has called a “bricolage” (fig. 3.45) — particularly here in the context of “religious exoticism”: there is a cowboy, a gentleman with a top hat and walking stick, a pavilion of a Buddhist pagoda, Indian palace architecture, a man with a turban, and a woman in a sari. Ultimately, this picture provides a refined definition of religion: a message of the creative practice of transformation and change, which also offers many “ending times in time” that rely on social relations like empires, nations, modernity, cultures, etc.



FIGURE 3.42. *Top left*, Buddhist praying before a Buddha figure at Wembley’s *The British Empire Exhibition* in London(UK), 1924.

FIGURE 3.43. *Top right*, Buddhist ringing “Wembley’s Big Ben” at *The British Empire Exhibition* in London (UK), 1924.

FIGURE 3.44. *Bottom left*, Caricature of juggling Myanmar named “Mr. Very Showy” in the satirical periodical *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 1924.

FIGURE 3.45. *Bottom right*, Painting of a scene with people dressed as cowboys, mannequins, London’s upper class, and people from the Near and Far East at Wembley’s *The British Empire Exhibition* in London (UK), 1924.

The *Burma Pavilion* also generated relationships between actors and allowed networks to emerge and be maintained: the material object was manufactured — physically — in both Myanmar

and England through research in the form of literary and architectural sources. The pavilion was supposed to represent authenticity: in other words, the — simplified — assumption that transfer without transformation was possible. The physical bodies of Myanmar people who were brought to Wembley were photographically staged there and archived in a multitude of newspapers¹⁰ (Wembley’s Big Ben 1924, Evoe 1924, The Wondrous Mingling of Races 1924, ““Buddha” Throne Room” 1924, India and The East 1924), anaglyphs (The British Empire Exhibition in Relief: Wembley Anaglyphs 1924), books and articles (The British Empire Exhibition 1924a—h), albums (The British Empire Exhibition 1924d) and souvenir picture books (The British Library 1925). Photographs in newspapers display dress codes for ladies and gentlemen, orientalized women in dancing poses, and white men in cowboy outfits, which altogether could also be interpreted as techniques of controlling and governing glances, visualities, bodies, gender roles, and heteronormative performances. Therefore practices at Wembley could also generate *images* and *image conflicts* as icons and iconoclashes. A popular technique of creating icons was the — easily affordable and consumable — sale of postcards with views of far and near “things” and spaces like pavilions, the Old London Bridge, and *other* cultures, such as British Burma, as well as the sale of stamps displaying the pavilion, or the production, import, and sale of perfume in the pavilion (fig. 3.46), which is still on sale on *eBay* for £69, which is around \$96 (Themintedone 2020)¹¹.

Finally, the *Burma Pavilion* and its translocal translation of Buddhist designs in Wembley is an excellent example of general secularization processes: the range, possibilities, limits, effects, resistances, reversals, limitations, and dynamics of specific secularisms and Buddhist mediators concerning actors, artifacts, performances. In general, Buddhist mediators as translation are about religious recycling¹² since they transform existing discourses and materialities of Buddhist traditions and adapt and recycle them. Latour has called this mediational aspect “hiatus,” a gap that

10. These are in 1923, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, *The Midland Daily Telegraph*, *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, *Hull Daily Mail*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette*. In 1924 the following newspapers repeatedly reported on the exhibition: *The Children’s Newspaper*, *Cornubian and Redruth Times*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Sketch*, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, *Freeman’s Journal*, *The Grantham Journal*, *The Timber Trades Journal*, *The Illustrated London News*, *Leeds Mercury*, *Manchester City News*, *Mining Journal*, *Newcastle Illustrated Chronicle*, *Northern Whig*, *Punch*, or the *London Charivari*, *Engineering*, *The Bath Chronicle and Weekly Gazette*, *The Burton Observer*, *The Bystander*, *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Daily Graphic*, *The Daily Herald*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Graphic*, *The Illustrated News*, *The Shoe Trade Journal*, *The Sphere*, *The Times*, *The Times. Education Supplement*, *The Yorkshire Observer*. In 1925 this was edited: *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*.

11. A screenshot of the auction can be found in the author’s archives as proof of the price.

12. The author owes the term “religious recycling” to one of his students, Joshua Hofmann.

needs existents to be reprised (2013c; “Mediation” and “Hiatus”): essentially, secularism can be described as a cascade of recyclings and mediations.



FIGURE 3.46. Perfume from the *Burma Pavilion* at *The British Empire Exhibition* in Wembley, London (UK), 1924—25.

2.3. PRACTICE — Habitual Buddhist Mediators in Practice

Habitus (Muecke 2012) is about uninterrupted courses of action and the paying or losing of attention. Practice¹³ alternates in obtaining essences (Latour 2013a, 488–489). Materialities — bodies, gender, and sex — are part of mediating practices because — out of the traditional Buddhist content — something new and compositional can be created, which is not contradicted by something like the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm but rather secures multiplicities.

2.3.1. Bodies

[T]he mind is like the rider and the body is like the horse... Buddhist saying. Look after your body groom it well like you would a horse.

—Buddha Beauty Company 2013; emphasis added

13. Practice has been studied by several religious studies scholars like Pamela E. Klassen (2008) and Meredith B. McGuire (2008).

Human bodies¹⁴ are about many things: Are bodies healthy or not? Are bodies moving or standing still? Is the body a sacred thing like a temple? When is a body like a spa and has to regenerate? When does the body have to party like a nightclub? Do the answers to these questions depend on specific times, discourses, contexts, and actors?

According to Sam Gill, moving bodies are at the core of religions, which he tries to prove by analyzing the dystopian film *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) (fig. 3.47). By taking the primacy of self-moving, Gill (2017) develops seven propositions: the importance of religion/religions, defining religion, the body, metastability and nonlinearity, coherence, gesture, and place. However, religious studies scholar Anne Koch (2017) has reminded one that *body knowledge* also enables the regulation of actors because as soon as knowledge is ascribed to bodies, it must be optimized and falls under the usual forms of neoliberal governance.

Especially in the fitness, yoga, and beauty discourse — for instance, *Fat Buddha Yoga*, *The Beauty Buddha*, or *Zen Bootcamp* — bodies are set in motion and optimized. *Fat Buddha Yoga* advertises itself with the slogan, “Sometimes your body is a temple. Other times it needs to be a Spa. There’s nothing selfish about selfcare” (fig. 3.48) and adds an image with “self-care” by *heydayskincare* (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020b). *Fat Buddha Yoga*’s slogan “Peace. Love. Look good naked” is also quite catchy. Together with optimizing and perfecting the self’s body (figs. 3.49–3.50), it fits perfectly well into neoliberal optimization strategies: “enhance your naked body!”

14. Much has been written on bodies and embodiment, such as on the relationship between bodies and politics (Body Politics 2020, Latour, Schaffer and Gagliardi 2020c), Michel Foucault in his famous lectures at the *Collège de France* 1978—1979 (2014), bodybuilding (Latour 2020e), bodies, materiality, and religion (A. Koch 2007 and 2017, Krüger and Weibel 2015, Kornberg Greenberg 2018, Body and Religion 2020, Harvey and Zubko 2020), bodies and knowledge (A. Koch 2007, 2015a, 2016), bodies, technology, and subjectivity (Duttweiler 2003a, 2003b), neoliberalism and obese bodies (Shugart 2010), bodies and fashion (Haller 2015), embodiment (Polit 2013), going beyond the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy (Scarinzi 2015), things, objects and artifacts (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007, Hazard 2018), materiality in general (Hazard 2013, 2019) and matter and meaning (Barad 2007). Latour has complicated things in his essays on body talk and the normative dimension of science studies (2004). He also connects body politics to biology, politics, and social theory (Latour, Schaffer, and Gagliardi 2020c).



PEACE. LOVE.
LOOK GOOD NAKED.

FIGURE 3.47. Top left, Movie advertising for *Mad Max: Fury Road* from 2015. Directed by George Miller.

FIGURE 3.48. Top right, Advertising banner for self-care. Facebook post by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

FIGURE 3.49. Bottom left, Jessica Skye of *Fat Buddha Yoga* performing a yoga pose.

FIGURE 3.50. Bottom right, Slogan of “Peace. Love. Look good naked” by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

On January 29, 2016, *Fat Buddha Yoga* posted on *Facebook*, “Your body is a temple... But sometimes it needs to be a nightclub!” with an image stating, “*pours coconut oil over entire life*” (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020b). Moving, dancing, and celebrating bodies are also to be found in *Funky Buddha Club* (fig. 2.51) or the *Raving Buddha*, and *Run Zen* offers so-called “mindful running workshops,” yoga courses, and resilience training for runners (fig. 3.52), which allows participants to “run with more enjoyment and awareness — prevent injury through learning good running form — find greater all-round wellbeing.” Like many others, *Run Zen*’s mindfulness approach comes from Jon Kabat-Zinn, who says, “[m]indfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on

purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.” *Run Zen* thus combines the practices of mindfulness with those of running (Run Zen 2020).



FIGURE 3.51. Left, Party at “Funky Friday.” Facebook post by Funky Buddha Club.

FIGURE 3.52. Center and right, Mindful running by Run Zen.

2.3.2. Gender

Gender¹⁵ roles, especially “women,” are present everywhere, including in Buddhist mediators (fig. 3.53). Women are an object of consumption; they are “used” and constructed for mediating and branding purposes, and while — according to the author’s estimations — half of the consumers are women and half are men, producers are primarily male, perhaps 60 or 70 percent.¹⁶

15. Of course, there is considerable literature on women, including bestsellers like *Invisible Women* by Caroline Criado-Perez (2019), Stefanie Duttweiler’s work on the relations among gender, body, and identity as recursive responsiveness (2013), *fEMPOWER* (2021), gender guidebooks (Braun and Stephan 2013, Albrecht, Alvir, Baumgartner et. al. 2021), Jessica Albrecht’s, Paridhi Gupta’s, Lucy Threadgold’s, and Leandro Wallace’s *En-Gender 2021: Interdisciplinary explorations of Gender Studies* (2022), the relationship between gender and religion (Heller 2003, Woodhead 2007, Höpflinger, Jeffers and Pezzoli-Olgiati 2008, Auga 2020, Auga 2022, Martin, Schwaderer and Waldner 2022), the relation between queer and transgender studies and religion (Wilcox 2021), masculinities (Connell 1995), gender and climate change (Fletcher and Reed 2023), Buddhism and women (Starkey 2020, Flynn 2022), the end of gender (Soh 2020), gender and religious studies (Franke and Maske 2012), Buddhism and gender (Gross 2018), cynical theories, activist scholarship and identity politics (Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020), wokeness (McWorther 2021, Lindsay and Pincourt 2021, Prohl 2022a), the primatological difference in gender (Waal 2022), or Kathleen Stock on material reality and feminism (2021).

16. These estimations follow the research on Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist branding in London, based on Companies House (2020) and CompanyCheck (2020).



FIGURE 3.53. *Punkbuddha* “Act Like a Lady, Think Like a Boss” featuring Chanel’s *Fall Ready-to-wear 2015 collection*. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

Images of women are everywhere: (i) the British company *Buddha Sista* — a hairdressing salon for black women — has invented the term “buddhasistahood”, and the frequency of women featured, the specialization of offers by and for women points to a male—female gender gap (fig. 3.54); (ii) companies like the *Zen Skin Clinic* (2020) (fig. 3.55) have used images of women to model gender roles and ideals of beauty; (iii) videos of women before and during the COVID-19 lockdown — with a painted full beard (figs. 3.56—3.57) (*The Beauty Buddha* 2020) — show the social expectations of “women”; (iv) an image of a woman (fig. 3.58) wearing a tank top with a meditating fox in lotus position is used in branding, because the image of a young — pierced in the nose — and “alternative-looking” woman seems to sell well; (v) and finally, *Nirvana Creative Production House* has created a sexualized and feminized human-sized M&M figure in London’s *M&M World* store (fig. 3.59), after having been contacted for refreshing the store by *Mars* (*Nirvana Creative Production House* 2020).



FIGURE 3.54. Top left, Advertising banner for “Buddhasistahood” by *Buddha Sista*.

FIGURE 3.55. Top center, Advertising on the website by *Zen Skin Clinic*.

FIGURE 3.56. Top right, Cartoon of girls before and after the COVID-19 lockdown. *Facebook post by The Beauty Buddha*.

FIGURE 3.57. Bottom left, Video under the motto “we’re all in this together” in the context of COVID-19. *Facebook post by The Beauty Buddha (with Kalia Costa - freelance beauty therapist)*.

FIGURE 3.58. Bottom center, A woman is wearing a T-shirt with a meditating fox from *Pink Buddha*, a clothing store in Vienna, Austria.

FIGURE 3.59. Bottom right, Sexualized and feminized human-sized *M&M* figure in *M&M World* at Leicester Square in London (UK), made by *Nirvana Creative Production House*.

Through their reference to haute couture designers for women, Metis Atash’s *Punkbuddhas* represent not only personalities but also gender roles and role models: they are either elegant (figs. 3.60), chic and fancy (fig. 3.63), sexy (fig. 3.61) or colorful (figs. 3.62, 3.64–3.65) (Atash 2020a).

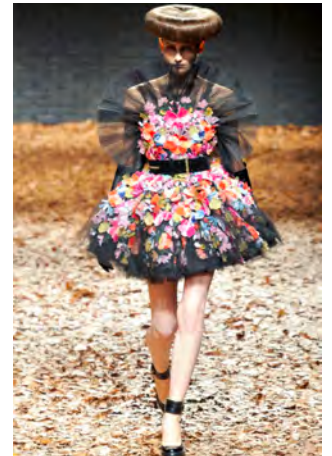
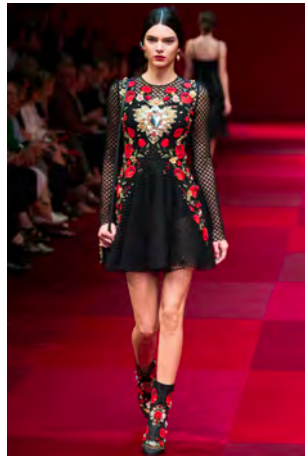


FIGURE 3.60. Top, Punkbuddha “Tweed” featuring Chanel’s *Fall/Winter 1995 Houndstooth* collection. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

FIGURE 3.61. Bottom left pair, Punkbuddha “Carmen the Duchess” featuring Dolce & Gabbana’s *Spring 2015 Ready-to-wear* collection. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

FIGURE 3.62. Bottom right pair, Punkbuddha “Rollin Like a Thunder” featuring Alexander McQueen’s *Spring 2013 Ready-to-wear* collection. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

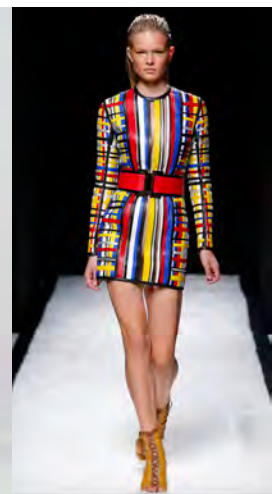
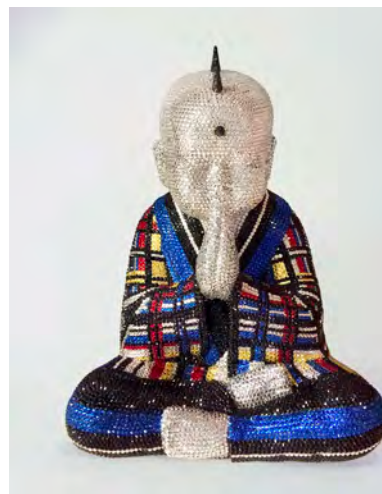


FIGURE 3.63. Left pair, Punkbuddha “Flowerpower,” featuring Chanel’s *Pre-Fall 2015* collection. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

FIGURE 3.64. Right pair, Punkbuddha “Check Check” featuring Balmain’s *Spring 2015 Ready-to-wear* collection. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.



FIGURE 3.65. *Punkbuddha* “Pretty Little Liars” featuring Valentino’s *Fall 2014 Ready-to-wear collection*. 46*36*30cm. Artwork by Metis Atash.

2.3.3. Sex

This thesis follows Judith Butler (1990, 1993, and 2004) and others (Ore 2023) in arguing that sex, gender, difference, and inequality are socially constructed. When looking at mediated Buddhist brands, on the one hand, *having* “sexed up” bodies or “look good naked” usually reiterates recreational purposes in a heteronormative sense; on the other hand, the appearance of *Zen* condoms and *Zen* sex toys also connects with the neoliberal self-optimization or relaxation discourse. For instance, *Sensual Sutra* claims to be “The Specialist in Sex Toys,” and it advertises with a photo of a woman (fig. 3.66) in front of a black background with long black hair, a black bra, lascivious look and one finger on her lips. The — religious — message of *sex* very quickly becomes clear: “change your life to having the best sex you can have, not anytime, but now!” *Zen Condoms* from West Sussex combines two market-conscious and highly profitable slogans in their naming — “sex sells” and “Zen sells” (fig. 3.67) — and *Karma Tantric* offers the “Most Sensual Erotic Massage in London” at 44(!) locations in London, by so-called “Karma girls,” who have received specialist training at the *Karma Tantric Training Academy* and offer “ten Karma erotic massage experiences” (fig. 3.68).

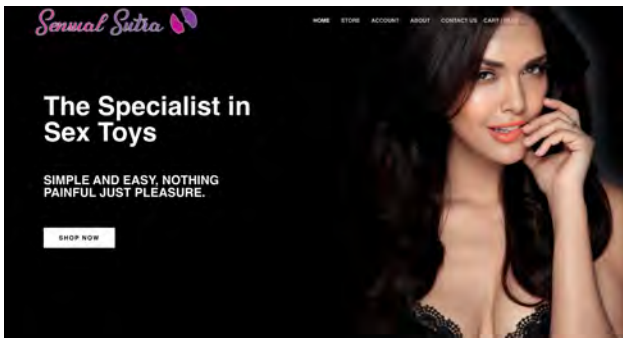


FIGURE 3.66. Top left, Slogan, label, and logo on the website of *Sensual Sutra*.

FIGURE 3.67. Top right, Packaging of condoms by *Zen Condoms*.

FIGURE 3.68. Bottom, Ten erotic massage experiences by *Karma Tantric*.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to prove that Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are *naturalized* beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm in modes of tradition, transformation, and metamorphosis, as well as a habitual practice.

(i) Buddhist mediators are repeated and reproduced as a *tradition* through shaping human experiences and their loyalties to brands and companies. They reach out at an emotional level — like happiness or fear — and thus become very persuasive. Buddhist mediators also attack human senses, but multisensual brands are not necessarily more effective than monosensual ones. One can identify that these mediated brands appear anywhere — sometimes sensually more “subtle,” sometimes more aggressive — and their presence, in general, is growing.

(ii) Buddhist mediators are *transformed* or metamorphosed on plenty of knowledge and translation dimensions. They become something *new*, one of the most usual and ordinary processes occurring when social actors are involved. Different discourses, contexts, actors, and materials change the perception, appearance, value, and function of something ordinarily called “Buddhism.”

(iii) Buddhist mediators have been *practiced* through the modification of bodies in many ways, like in fitness, health, or yoga discourses. Buddhist mediators speak in a gendered language

since women appear more often in advertising campaigns. When mediated brands are sexualized — mostly with women, pointing to a male—female gender gap — the heteronormative side strategies and effects should be alarming. Other sexualizations within Buddhist mediators also aim at men and heterosexual and homosexual couples as customers.

Actants — which are not only human actors but also Buddhist mediators, aesthetics, products, corporations, and much more — come together in encounters that would not typically be framed as “Buddhism,” but they nevertheless *gather*, *mediate* and *assemble* all kinds of actants and thereby create some *new* and *natural* Buddhism-as-mediators. This new “thing” could be identified as a *compositionist* engagement protecting multiplicity¹⁷, form, or practice with and of mediators of Buddha, including discourses of tradition, transformation, and practice.

17. This is true until this supposed secularity of marketing and individualism is discussed from a somewhat different angle in chapter 4.3. “RELIGION — Religious Buddhist Mediators in Marketing and Individualism,” i.e., as a religious project.

Chapter 3

Material and Objective Buddhism-as-Mediators

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are *gathering* beyond the *secular and religious* divide in a *materialized and objectified* way through (i) technology, (ii) innovation, fictions, arts, and entertainment, as well as (iii) knowledge, reference, and science to make something *new* — a composition — out of Buddhist traditions, some hybrid of Buddhist brands and mediators, consumerism and neoliberalism.

3.1. TECHNOLOGY — Technological Buddhist Mediators in Detours and Zigzags

According to Latour (2013a, 488–489), technology is about the zigzags of ingenuity and invention, rearrangement, setting up, adjusting and failing, destroying, and imitation. Technology institutes delegations, arrangements, and inventions, and it alternates in the folding and redistributing of resistances. Many have written about the influence of technology on people’s lives.¹ Although almost every company owns a website, most companies also use social media, and some even create apps. Buddhist mediators as a form of branding are an increasingly digital trend. Even if companies have physical shops, these brands offer the opportunity to buy Buddhified content online and on mobile. It is not least due to the generation gap that actors are using the internet, purchasing via websites and mobile devices, influencing and being influenced by social media and apps. Brands also invent technological content with Buddhified namings like Intel’s *Nervana Neural Network Processor (NNP)*.

1. See for instance, Yuval Noah Harari’s *Homo Deus* (2016) and the journal *Religions* — edited by Noreen Herzfeld — which released the special issue “Religion and the New Technologies” in 2017.

3.1.1. Apps

Beyond the amazingly popular meditation apps, many companies use Buddhified apps like AI-generated *AppZen* (2021), which automates invoices without manual work. For instance, *Tara Dry Cleaners* (2019) even offer digital laundry services via their so-called “CleanCloud” app (fig. 4.1). In 2014, *Karmarama*, together with *Unilever Foundry* and *New Aer*, created *Tesco*’s largest *iBeacons* trial, which included an app with which one could invite friends to free ice cream within reach to the *Magnum* cabinets (fig. 4.2) (*Karmarama* 2020a).

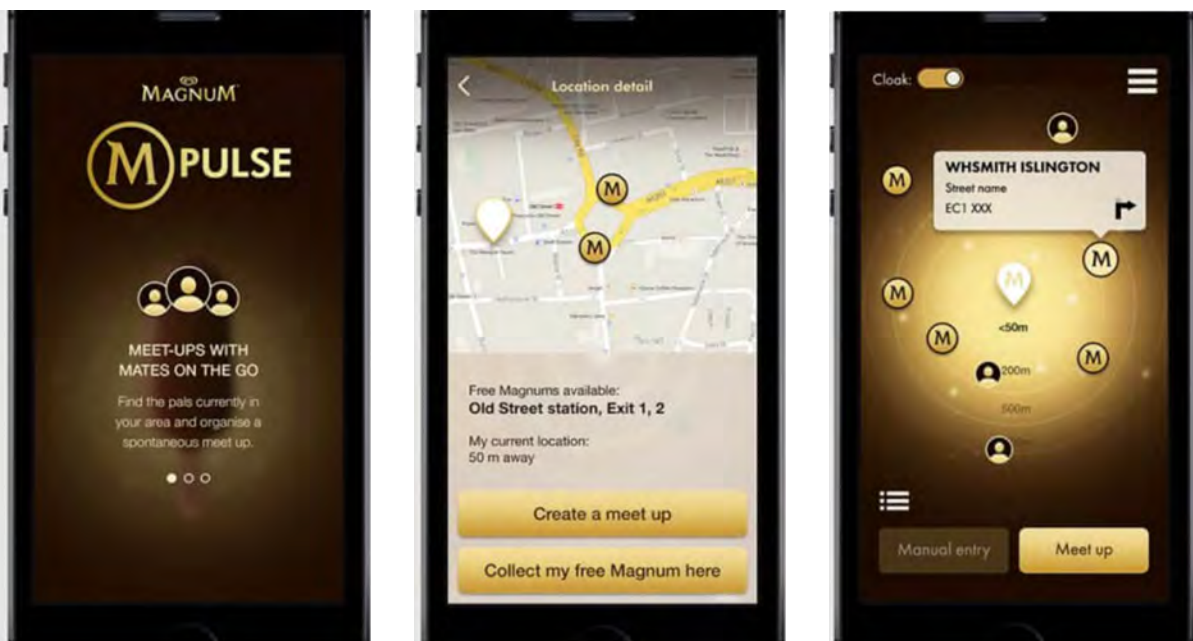
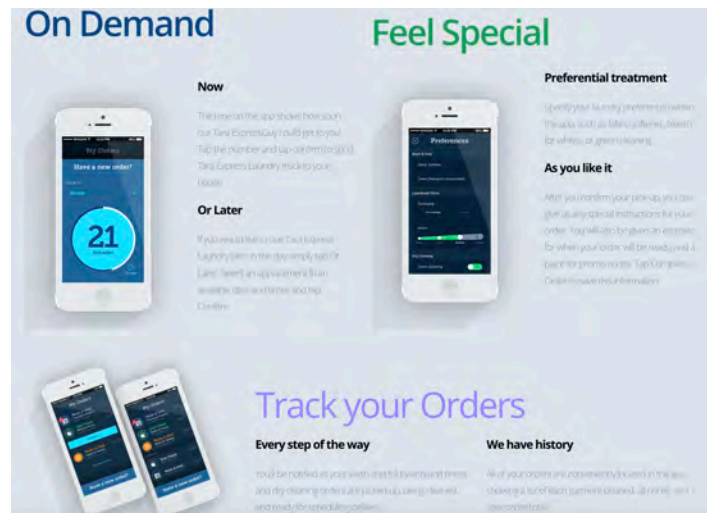


FIGURE 4.1. Top, Advertising for digital laundry by *Tara Dry Cleaners*.

FIGURE 4.2. Bottom, *Magnum M Pulse* app produced by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

In 2017, *Karmarama* created an app (fig. 4.3) for *Pride in London* — an annual LGBTQ² pride festival and parade. (Karmarama 2020a). For *Pride in London*'s 2017's overall theme of “Love Happens Here,” the app included “a map with stories ‘pinned’ to locations all over the city highlighting powerful personal moments from hundreds of LGBTQ Londoners that users could add to as well” (Karmarama 2020a).

In 2018, *Karmarama* created *The Stroke Stopwatch App* (fig. 4.4) for *Boehringer Ingelheim*, based on a timer for the first 60 minutes in the hospital, because any 15 minutes saved for a stroke patient would reduce the patient's risk of dying. The app enables “hospitals to reduce their ‘door-to-needle’ time, increasing survival rates and reducing the long-term impact of the stroke for the patient” (Karmarama 2020a).

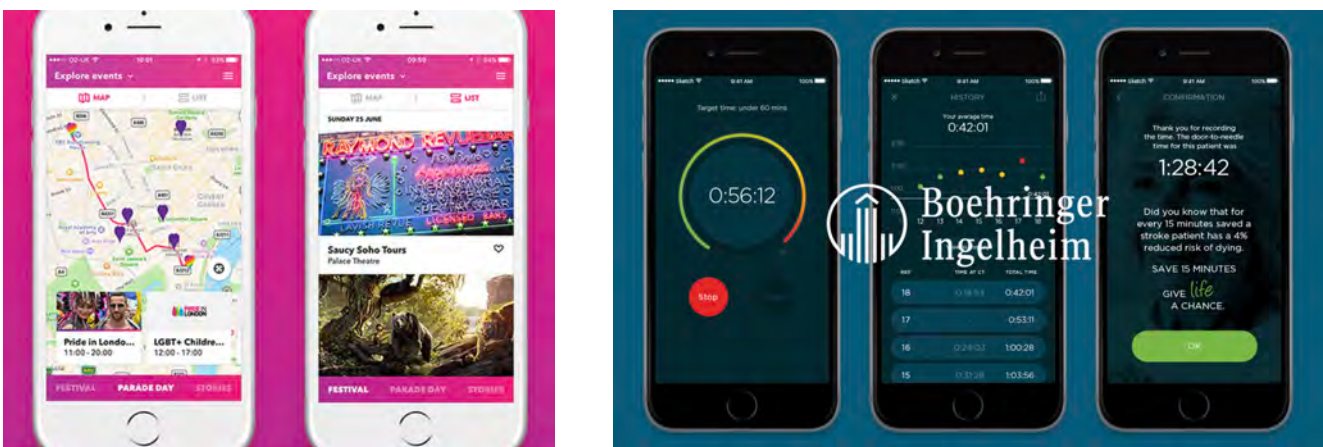


FIGURE 4.3. Left, *Pride in London* app made by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

FIGURE 4.4. Right, *The Stroke Stopwatch App* by *Boehringer Ingelheim* made by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

3.1.2. Digitalization

With *Samsara*'s opening of its London office in May 2016, the self-proclaimed “leader in industrial IoT” (fig. 4.5) — the so-called “Internet of Things” — moved to the United Kingdom. *Samsara*³ certainly knows what digitalization means for companies.

2. The term “LGBTQ” is an initialism — from various terms like LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTI, LGBTIQ/LGBT+, or LGBTQIA+ — referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer identities.

3. In 2019, *Samsara* was ranked number three in *LinkedIn Top Startups* and 67 in *Forbes*' “The Cloud 100” and won several *International Business Awards*. *Samsara* has over 10,000 global customers, more than 1,300 employees, offices in San Francisco, San Jose, Atlanta, and London, major investors — *Andreessen Horowitz*, *General Catalyst*, *Tiger Global*, and *Dragoneer* — 200,000 new devices added every year, and 100 billion sensor data points collected yearly (Samsara 2020).

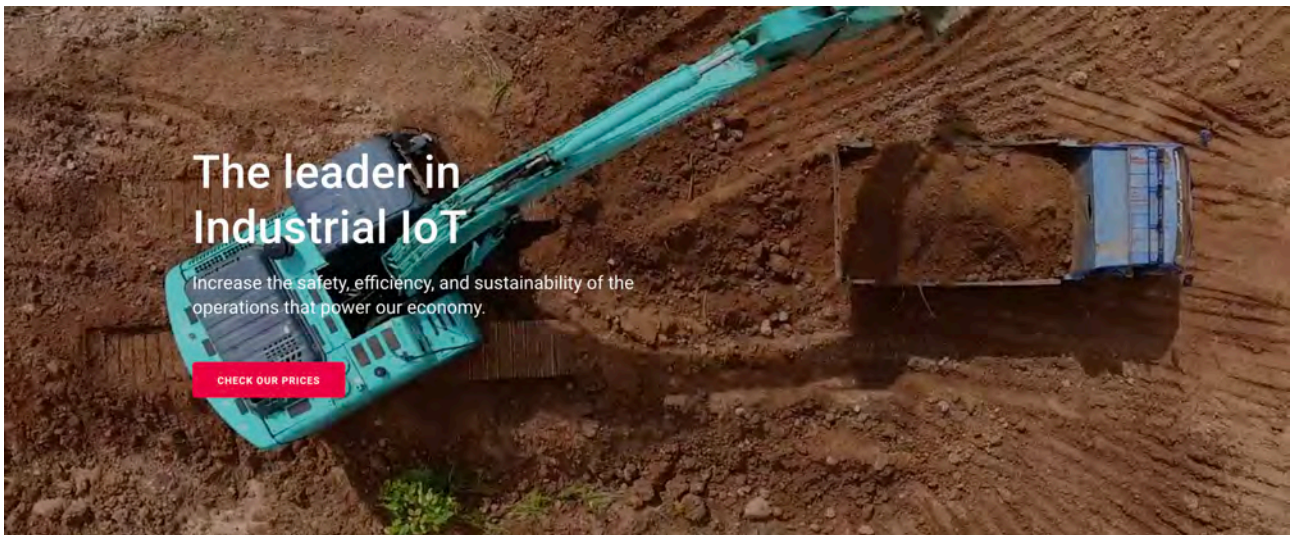


FIGURE 4.5. The advertising slogan of “the leader in industrial IoT” by *Samsara*.

On the one hand, several companies are using Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding that participate in digitalization, like the mindfulness app *Headspace*⁴ (fig. 4.6), *Karma Koin* — which is about digital payments and digital money (2020) (fig. 4.8) — or the fact that almost every company is using websites, some of which are relatively high-end with many videos like those of *Karma* — the “Content Creators, Game Changers, Film Lovers, Innovators” — *Wisebuddah*, *Nirvana Studios* or *Karmarama*. On the other hand, there are some businesses such as the cult tavern *Weinloch* — meaning something like “wine hole” — in Heidelberg, which proudly announces in German on an old, yellowed sign hanging at their window: “We have no WiFi — talk to each other — pretend it is 1995”. Under it is a sticker that says: “a place of happiness in Heidelberg — no WiFi, as if it was 1949”. The *Weinloch* was founded that year, so the motto is: act as if nothing has happened. Somehow this is reminiscent of a simulation in which time and space are crossed out (fig. 4.7), like in a casino where all clocks are removed. Digitalization is not for everyone, and niches, alternatives, and “counter cultures” will not die out.

4. The still unpublished PhD thesis by the author’s colleague from *Heidelberg University*, Benedikt Kastner, has researched mindfulness in apps and, therefore, *Headspace*.

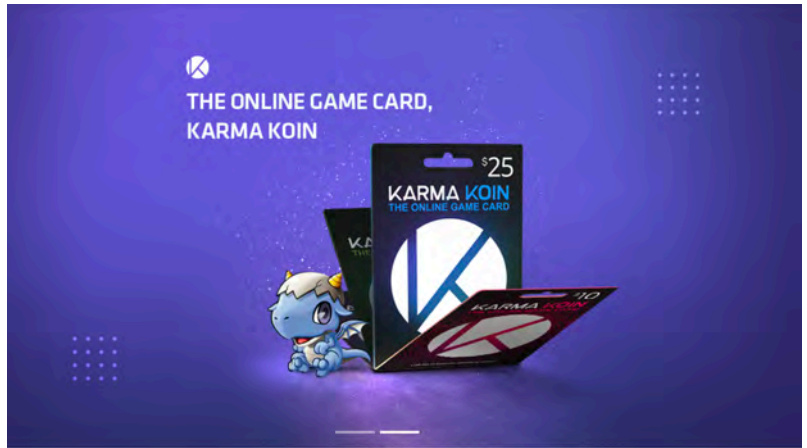


FIGURE 4.6. Left, The top-rated mindfulness app *Headspace*.

FIGURE 4.7. Center, Advertisement in German saying “We have no WiFi — talk to each other — pretend it is 1995” and “a place of happiness in Heidelberg — no WiFi, as if it was 1949”. 2019.

FIGURE 4.8. Right, Online game card *Karma Coin*.

3.1.3. Artificial Intelligence (AI)

As already seen, mediated Buddhist branding is increasingly digitalized and mobile, focusing on websites, social media, and apps. While this trend does not least point to a generation gap, AI technologies⁵ will be a significant issue for the next decades and generations. Brands increasingly invest in researching and selling AI technologies, and recent years of studying AI have

5. There is considerable literature on AI-related issues like the relationship between post-/transhumanism and AI (Bostrom 2005, Bostrom 2014, Loh 2018, Vita-More 2018, Ai-Da Robot 2020, Affectiva 2020, Global Future 2045 2020, Posthuman Studies Hub 2020, Vita-More 2020a, What Is Transhumanism 2020, Krüger 2021); (ii) the relations between AI and cars (Waymo 2020); (iii) bodies by design (Vita-More 2014); (iv) the connection between human enhancement and augmentation (Vita-More 2002, Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung 2018, Humanity Plus 2020, Vita-More 2020b, Sienna 2020); (v) machine learning (DeepMind 2020a); (vi) body optimization in the digital age (Babich 2016); (vii) questions on mind and matter (Mind Matters News 2020); (viii) the “planetary costs” of AI (Crawford 2021); (ix) Buddhist perspectives on AI and transhumanism (Tricycle 2010, Leis 2013, Anderson 2015, Kim 2019, Buddhist Transhumanism 2020); (x) the relationship between happiness and AI by former Chief Business Officer (CBO) of *Google X*, Mo Gawdat (Gawdat 2017, One Billion Happy 2020); (xi) a robot performing as a Buddhist priest (Klein 2019); (xii) relations between AI and robotics (Heffernan 2019); (xiii) the relationship between digital media, AI, and religion (Natale and Pasulka 2020, Singler 2020); (xiv) relations between AI and the religious studies scholar (Singler 2017); (xv) connections between big data, inequality, and threats to democracy (O’Neil 2017); (xv) developing an AI god by former *Google* engineer Anthony Levandowski (Solon 2017); (xvi) relations between AI and the material religion approach (Prohl 2021a, Prohl 2021b); (xvii) relations between Buddhism, capitalism, and AI (Prohl 2022c); (xviii) *Google* seeking to “advance AI for everyone” (2020) with its director of engineering Ray Kurzweil’s famous bestsellers *The Age of Spiritual Machines* (1999), *The Singularity is Near* (2005), and grappling other AI-connected issues (2009, 2020); and (xix) historical perspectives on AI (Harari 2015, 2016, 2018).

shown massive technological developments and rapid changes in human lives. Large companies like *Google*, *Amazon*, and others already have AI centers researching how to make lives easier, happier, and better. Together with these innovations, positive and negative post- and transhumanist agendas are discussed in terms of either (i) how humankind could benefit and advance as a whole or (ii) AI is associated with the dangers and fears of humans becoming replaced by intelligent machines.

Brands using Buddhist mediators are already using these technologies because they are trending and highly innovative, and they are one of the latest steps on the modernization front. For instance, the Helsinki-based company *ZenRobotics* focuses on AI-led robotic waste recycling, which is “powered by ZenBrAIIn” (2021). The South Korean artist Wang Zi Won makes sculptures taking up traditional Buddhist themes like Buddha, Buddhahood, saṃsāra, Avalokiteśvara, nirvāṇa, and bodhisattva. His works share that they are all technical apparatuses, i.e., they can move hands, feet, or heads to perform certain gestures and movements. For instance, his work *Buddha-z nirvana* (fig. 4.9) from 2014 shows three white Buddhas made of urethane sitting in a lotus position but without arms. They are sitting in the air because they are held by silver-colored cogwheels, making them move, while white ornaments are attached to their backs, which also move mechanically. The Buddhas have calm faces with no smiles on them and closed eyes. Wang Zi Won’s depiction of nirvāṇa appears sober, calm, and above all, technical and mechanical: in other words, nirvāṇa equals machine Buddhas. From this artistic perspective, it is only a tiny step to AI that could generate Buddhas and nirvāṇa, i.e., the ideal of transhuman agendas.



FIGURE 4.9. “Buddha-Z Nirvana” artwork by Wang Zi Won. 2014. 33*23*40cm. Urethane, metallic material, machinery, and electronic device (CPU board, motor).

The AI company *Samsara* creates so-called “AI dash cams” (fig. 4.10) as part of “collision avoidance systems,” which can “analyze the road and driver behavior in real-time.” These cams can detect distracted driving (figs. 4.11–4.12), identify stop signs, and may soon detect tailgating. *Samsara’s* customers can also reduce high-risk driver behavior using the *Samsara* app (fig. 4.13) (Samsara 2020a).

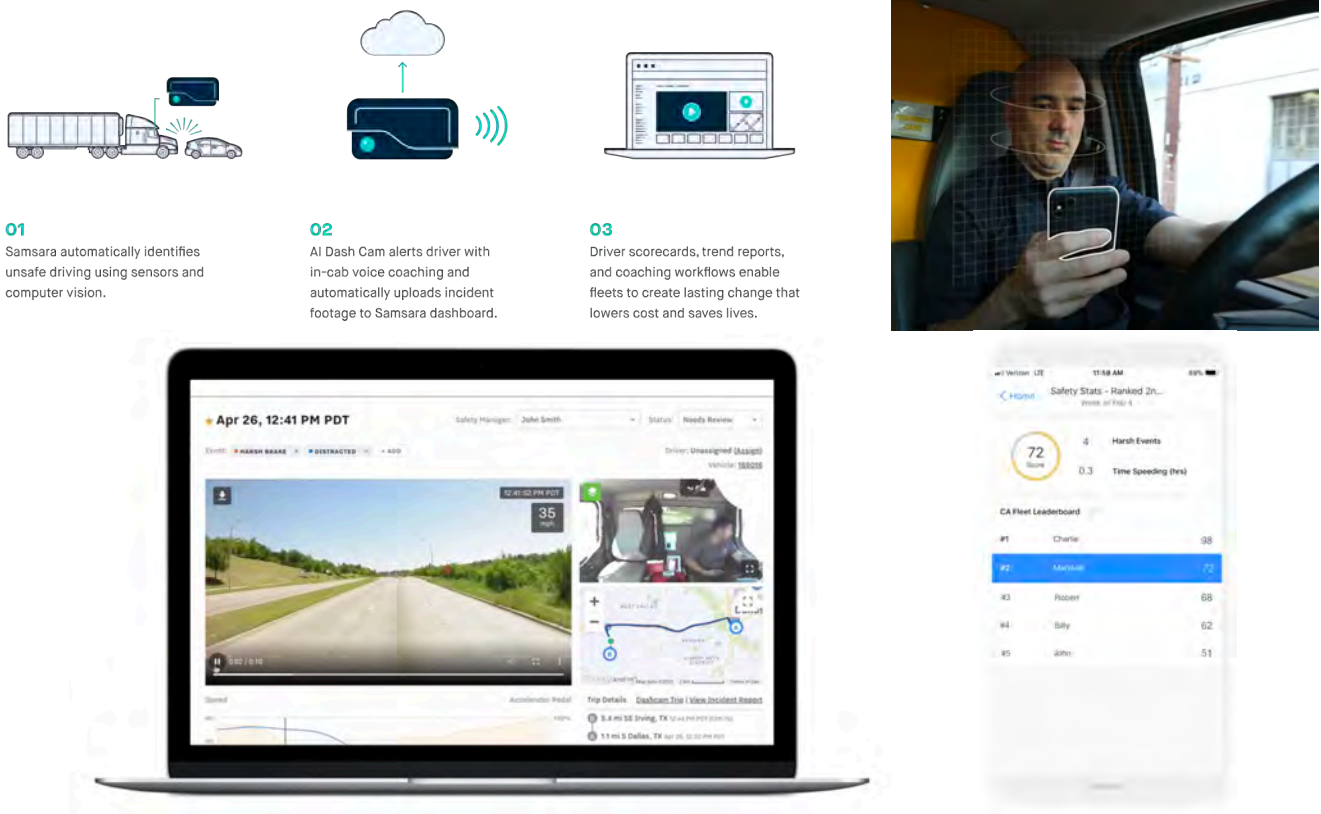


FIGURE 4.10. Top left, AI-based *Samsara* dash cams.

FIGURE 4.11. Top right, App by *Samsara* to detect distracted driving.

FIGURE 4.12. Bottom left, App by *Samsara* to gain visibility into distracted driving and near-misses.

FIGURE 4.13. Bottom right, App by *Samsara* to reduce high-risk driver behavior.

Tenzo is an AI-based app that helps restaurants and bars run their business from anywhere. The app eliminates understaffing, matches labor to predict sales, always orders the right amount, and helps restaurant managers. *Tenzo* has a vast integration network, including *Tripadvisor*, *Google Places*, *Twitter*, *Facebook*, and many others. It connects different systems like social media reviews, scheduling staff, point of sale, weather, and events, as well as inventory in one single app (fig. 4.15), providing the management team with “superpowers” (fig. 4.16) (Tenzo 2020). *Tenzo* has several large customers like *The Breakfast Club* and *Macellaio: Roberto Costa* (fig. 4.17). At the same time, the latter’s founder and CEO, Roberto Costa, says, “[t]his is the most incredible piece of

software I have used for our business. It provides valuable insights.” It is “pure and simple,” like the restaurant itself. The app allows so-called “automated A.I. forecasting” (fig. 4.14), which means being able to “always order the right amount, eliminate food waste, and never be overstaffed or understaffed again.” To reduce the human impact on the planet, *Tenzo* aims to revolutionize the business of restaurants’ data and make businesses more efficient (Tenzo 2020).

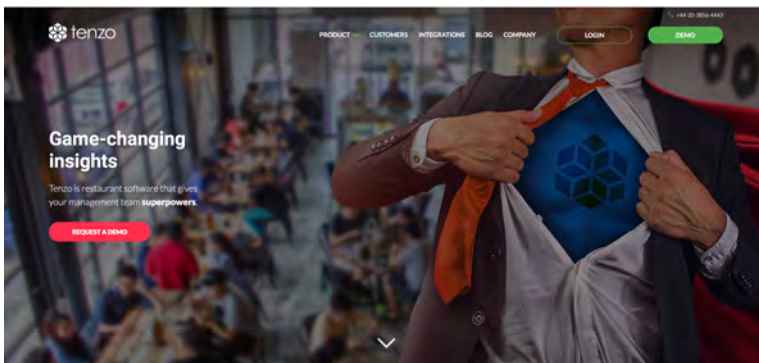


FIGURE 4.14. Top left, AI forecasting by *Tenzo*.

FIGURE 4.15. Top right, AI forecasting by *Tenzo*.

FIGURE 4.16. Bottom left, Advertising for *Tenzo*’s app with “Game-changing insights.”

FIGURE 4.17. Bottom right, Macellaio: Roberto Costa, client of *Tenzo*.

For *Kensho*⁶ (2020) — founded in 2013 and located in New York, Cambridge, Washington, and Los Angeles — “data is everything” (fig. 4.18). *Kensho*’s capabilities are machine learning, data science and statistical analysis, data connectivity, and application development (Kensho 2020).

6. The *World Economic Forum* named *Kensho* a “Technology Pioneer — one of the most innovative private technology companies in the world” they were also in *Forbes*’ “Fintech 50 — the 50 most innovative private companies in Fintech globally”, the “AI 100 — the 100 most promising private artificial intelligence companies globally” and *Fortune* has named “Kensho one of the 5 Hottest Companies in Fintech” (Kensho 2020). *Kensho* uses the *Visallo* tool to “connect the dots” and “understand complex relationships hidden in your data” because *Visallo* helps companies to investigate, visualize, collaborate, and secure (Visallo 2020). They have also created the so-called “Kensho AI Lab,” which hosts events, tech talks, and hacks (fig. 4.19) (Kensho AI Lab 2020).

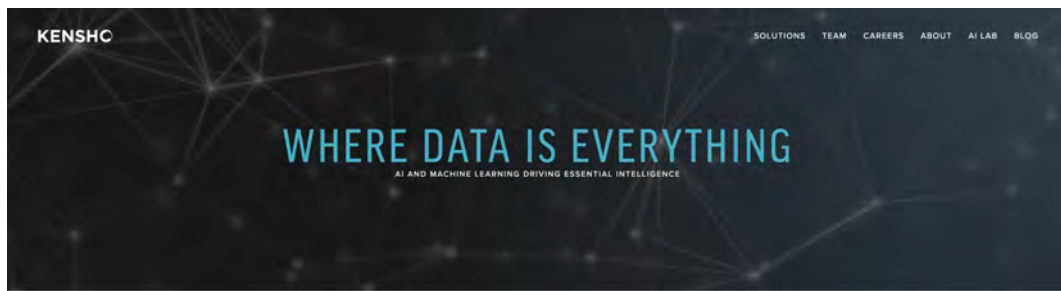


FIGURE 4.18. Top, Kensho’s slogan is “Where data is everything.”

FIGURE 4.19. Bottom, Kensho’s AI lab.

3.1.4. Self-Driving

Zenzic — with many project partners such as *Cisco*, *Coventry University*, *Toshiba*, *Jaguar Land Rover*, *Bosch*, *IBM*, *Oxfordshire Country Council*, *Honda*, the *University of Bristol*, *UK Atomic Energy Authority*, and many others — is developing connected and automated mobility by working on some critical areas like connectivity, cyber security, data, infrastructure, mapping, safety, services, simulation, society and people, testing, trust, and vehicles. The company has described itself as “[a]ccelerating the self-driving revolution by uniting industry, government and academia.” *Zenzic* has created six core facilities in the *Testbed UK* within a three-hour radius between London, Coventry, Warwickshire, Bedfordshire, and Buckinghamshire, to test connected and self-driving technologies. In addition, *Zenzic* has invested around \$1.61 million in projects supporting cyber security in developing these technologies. Their envisioned *concept* is relatively consistent with actual *reality* (figs. 4.20–4.21) because globally, the self-driving sector should be worth \$1,219 billion overall by 2035 — 52 Billion in the UK alone. *Zenzic* also tries to connect industry, government, and academia by putting the UK first (*Zenzic* 2020).



FIGURE 4.20. Top left and right, Self-driving: concept vs. reality. Presentation by Zenzic.

FIGURE 4.21. Bottom, “Connected and Automated Mobility” (CAM) roadmap *Testbed UK* by Zenzic.

*Zenuity*⁷ — with offices in Sweden, Germany, the US, and China — describes itself as “a new *adas* — “advanced driver assistance systems” — and *ad* — “automated driving” — software company, which “originates from the safety leaders of the automotive industry” (fig. 4.22) (*Zenuity 2020*).



FIGURE 4.22. Self-driving system by *Zenuity*.

7. Volvo’s and Veoneer’s joint venture company *Zenuity* was dissolved in 2020 (Petereit 2020).

The investigation of Buddhist mediators within the technology industry has illustrated that the developments in the coming years will become almost impossible to negotiate without the app, digitalization, AI, and self-driving sectors.

Thus, this chapter has tried to identify religious processes in Buddhist mediators' use of technology: (i) it promotes and — quite literally — sells specific messages to change and transform actors, society as a whole, or specific areas like driving, eating, paying, meditating to become better, optimized and more efficient; and (ii) technology thus aims to achieve “the end of time” — an assumed “beyond” — in this world and within one's lifetime. These “beyonds” differ in their focus on safety, connectedness, eco-friendliness, relaxation, or health, but their transcendent character could be realized within this immanent realm.

3.2. INNOVATION — Fictional Buddhist Mediators in Art and Entertainment

Transformations⁸ are about making something pass, installing it, protecting/alienating, or destroying something. Transformations alternate in exploring differences (Latour 2013a, 488—489) like Buddhist mediators and branding.

3.2.1. Pop Art

The openness and dynamics of neoliberal markets lead to innovative Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding, either in artists and musicians who work on Buddhist themes or companies combining Buddhist mediators with popular cultural narratives like the *Godfather* movie trilogy, rock bands, or *Oreo* cookies to create a bricolage. Neoliberal brands seem highly creative and innovative; performing neoliberalism needs creative people's generative and vitalizing power in creative markets.

The cannabis seed-selling company *Big Buddha Seeds* (2020) is highly innovative in using Buddhist mediators. Its logo displays a Buddha sitting in a lotus position, holding a cannabis plant in his left hand. Around him are other cannabis plantations and an Asian village scenario (fig. 4.23).

8. Anne Koch (2015b) has researched commodification and commercialization processes and/as religions, and many others have analyzed the relationship between Buddhism and neoliberal popular culture: the online platform *The Buddhist Centre* (n.d.) has also studied the relationship between Buddhism “versus” neoliberalism, albeit from a traditional Buddhist perspective with the aim of “breaking the silence” and “changing the story.” Trine Brox (2019) has investigated what happens to the aura of Buddhist material objects in the age of mass production.



FIGURE 4.23. Advertising for cannabis seeds with a seated Buddha by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

Many artists work with Buddhist mediators, like Banksy, Gonkar Gyatso, Metis Atash, Damien Hirst, and Wang Zi Won. With *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, British artist Damien Hirst — one of the notable names in the British as well as global art scene for at least three decades — tells the story of a fictitious sunken ancient Greek ship called *Apistos* (Unbelievable) in a solo exhibition displayed in Venice from April 9 to December 3, 2017, at Palazzo Grassi (Punta della Dogana). Hirst photographically documents the recovery of the ship and exhibits over 280 artifacts⁹. The recovered treasures include various sizes and dimensions: from pieces measuring just a few centimeters to a colossal piece over 18 meters high. These artifacts also vary in simulating traces of age and transience to a greater or lesser extent. Among these artifacts were also several Buddha figures, of which the largest is the so-called *Jade Buddha* measuring 102*81.5*51.4cm (fig. 4.24) (Hirst 2017). This Buddha is displayed in a seated pose, and legs crossed, hands on his legs, with a hair chignon and a smiling face. The object’s materiality simulates the influence of age and nature through an algae coating due to the figure’s — supposedly — millennia-long stay in the Indian Ocean off the coast of East Africa. This is also why further details of the Buddha figure are challenging to discern. Furthermore, “Four Small Buddhas” is made of bronze with a size of about 20*15*10cm. All four show the Buddha in a sitting pose, cross-legged and with the arms on the legs, while only one rests one arm on one knee (Hirst 2017).

9. These include ancient Egyptian kings, gods and sphinxes, Hindu gods (Garuda, Kali), Greek gods and god-like figures (Cerberus, Hydra, Bacchus, Andromeda and sea monsters, Kronos, the Minotaur, Medusa, the skulls of a cyclops and a unicorn), Roman gods (Mars, Neptune), Aztec gods (Olmec dragon, Quetzalcoatl, Huehuetotl), pop cultural figures (Mickey Mouse, Goofy, Mooglie and Balu, Katie Perry as Ishtar Yo-landi, a self-portrait of Damien Hirst), several objects (hands in prayer, swords, vessels, helmets, shields, chains, rings and jewelry, coins, gold nuggets, shells) and figures (fantasy figures, animals, demons, the head of death, mermaids) (Hirst 2017).



FIGURE 4.24. Jade Buddha from *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* by Damien Hirst, 2017.

Can objects like Cat Stevens' *Buddha and the Chocolate Box*¹⁰ (fig. 4.24) from 1974 ("Cat Stevens: Buddha and the Chocolate Box." 2020, "Buddha & The Chocolate Box 1974 [...] ." 2020) be identified as a "new" and "Western" type of Buddhism? According to an anecdote by Stevens (who converted to Islam in 1979 and has been known as Yusuf Islam ever since), the title of the eighth album was created when he held a Buddha figure in one hand and a box of chocolates in the other on his way to a performance on an airplane. At that moment, he thought that these two objects would be his last if he died on the plane. He would have to choose between the religious/spiritual and the material: on the album, he decided on the former, not least hinting at his later life and conversion to Islam (D'Arcy 2013, 87).

The album cover displays a golden Buddha in a seated pose under the title, the left arm on the left thigh, with the inside of the hand pointing upwards, while the right arm is angled and the hand points upwards, the inside of the hand looking at the observer. On the back of the album cover is a Japanese-like depiction of a child telling a story in ten individual motifs: a journey where the boy meets a spider, finds a box of chocolate, and inside are chocolate Buddha figures wrapped in golden foil (figs. 4.25–4.26). The ninth motif shows a moment of realization, possibly that he does not have to decide between the material and the spiritual because the spiritual (the Buddha figure) is in the material (the chocolate). Finally, the tenth motif shows how the boy continues his journey

10. In the UK, the album went gold and reached number three on the album charts ("Cat Stevens: Buddha and the Chocolate Box," n.d., Official Charts, n.d.).

toward the sunrise. In the album’s inlay is a photograph of the golden chocolate Buddhas, one of which is unpacked, and the chocolate becomes visible (Tralfaz-Archives 2012).



FIGURE 4.25. *Left and center*, Front and back cover of Cat Stevens’ *Buddha and the Chocolate Box*, 1974.

FIGURE 4.26. *Right*, Inside art of Cat Stevens’ *Buddha and the Chocolate Box*, 1974, with gold-packed chocolate Buddhas.

Buddhist mediators are widely transformed within Western neoliberal contexts: they are commodified, commercialized, and popularized for entertainment purposes, like Metis Atash’s pop art “Dalai Lama” (fig. 4.27). Gonkar Gyatso has put “polychromatic labels, brand cut-outs, stickers and various commercial flotsam” on the meditating Buddha plastic (fig. 4.28) (Mikocki 2012). Tessa Packard — a designer of luxurious “contemporary fine jewellery” — has created earrings in the shape of smiling Buddha faces, arranged in a cocktail glass with an artificial liquid cocktail and a slice of orange (fig. 4.29). In the US, there are plant-based energy drinks named *Lotus* (2020b) and the New York-based e-commerce web development agency *Karma Creative* (2020), and in Australia, *Samsara* (2020b) is selling furniture and homewares (figs. 4.30–4.32).



FIGURE 4.27. *Top left*, Pop art “Dalai Lama,” 2016. Artwork by Metis Atash.

FIGURE 4.28. *Top center*, “Do What You Love, Realm Three” Gonkar Gyatso. Art Basel, Miami, 2012.

FIGURE 4.29. *Top right*, “Cocktail” earrings by Tessa Packard.

FIGURE 4.30. *Bottom left*, “Power Up Your Life” by Lotus Plant Energy.

FIGURE 4.31. *Bottom center*, “We bring Zen to your Online Business Universe” by Karma Creative.

FIGURE 4.32. *Bottom right*, Furniture and homewares by Samsara.

3.2.2. TV Series: Vikings and the Buddha

On January 2, 2019, the sixteenth episode of season 5 of the Canadian-Irish historical drama television series *Vikings*¹¹ (since 2013) was named “The Buddha” and showed the young Viking Hvitserk becoming interested in Buddhism because an Asian trader gave him a Buddha figure (fig. 4.33). However, the appearance of Buddhism in the so-called “West” and specifically in England is not an invention of popular culture, movies, and films. However, it can be dated back to the time of

11. This series is inspired by the sagas of Viking Ragnar Lothbrok, one of the best-known Norse heroes and the scourge of England and France. It shows Ragnar’s rise from farmer to the king in early medieval Scandinavia in the 9th century (IMDB 2021).

the *Viking Age* (798–1066), namely the Viking’s expansion in military, trade, and settlement widely across Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East, and further westward to Iceland, Greenland, and Vinland. In 1904–1905, the *Osebergskipet* or so-called “Oseberg ship” (fig. 4.34) was excavated in a large burial mound near Oseberg farm — Vestfold county in Norway — by Norwegian archaeologist Haakon Shetelig and Swedish archaeologist Gabriel Gustafson (1853–1915).



FIGURE 4.33. *Top*, Buddha figure in the TV series *Vikings* in season 5, episode 16.

FIGURE 4.34. *Bottom left*, Excavation in 1904 of the Oseberg ship in Vestfold County, Norway, dating AD 834.

FIGURE 4.35. *Bottom right*, Digitalization of the Oseberg ship at *The Viking Ship Museum and Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo* by *Matterport*.

This ship and accompanying “objects” are displayed at *The Viking Ship Museum* (fig. 4.35), which is part of the *Museum of Cultural History* at the University of Oslo (The Viking Ship Museum and Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo 2016a and 2016b), at Bygdøy in the West of Oslo (Norway), which is stunningly virtualized by the Sunnyvale, California-based company *Matterport* (2020). It is one of the best-preserved Viking ship finds, and the burial dates to 834 AD. Although it was looted since the Middle Ages, some grave goods deemed worthless by thieves have survived to the present day. Part of these discoveries in Oseberg is the so-called Buddha-bøtte or “Buddha bucket” (fig. 4.36). The wooden bucket’s handle is attached to two anthropomorphic and identical figures that were often compared to Buddha sitting in the lotus

position, Sanskrit “padmāsana” (fig. 4.37): The head is flat, the eyes are closed, and his breast is ornamented with brass red and yellow cloisonné enamel on which there are four swastikas attached. The so-called “Oseberg Buddha” (Sjøvold 1954, Sjøvold 1963, Mac Namidhe 1989/1990, Mac Gonagle and Krusseva 2017) does not seem to have been imported from Asia, like the 6th century Buddha statue from Helgö, Sweden (“The Helgö Buddha.” 2016) which is now in the Stockholm’s *Swedish Museum of National Antiquities* (The Swedish History Museum 2020). However, its origin might be Ireland or England (fig. 4.38) (Durham 2002, 15, “Seated Buddha Statuette [...]” 2009).



FIGURE 4.36. *Left*, “Buddha bucket” from the Oseberg ship.

FIGURE 4.37. *Center*, Seated Buddha statue from Oseberg ship’s so-called “Buddha bucket.”

FIGURE 4.38. *Right*, Seated Buddha statue from Helgö, Sweden, now in *The Swedish History Museum* in Helgö, Sweden.

Although the ship’s placing into its burial mound dates from AD 834, parts of the ship date from around 800, and the ship itself could even be older (Durham 2002, 16). Vikings traded in, and beyond, Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, the Baltic Sea, Russia, Istanbul, and Jerusalem, and according to Susan M. Margeson, large Viking market towns included Birka (Sweden), Kaupang (Norway), Hedeby (Denmark; today’s Germany), Dublin (Ireland), Kyiv (Ukraine), and York (England). Margeson argues that the craftsmanship of the “Buddha bucket” suggests that the figures were made in England (2010, 26). The trade between the Vikings and England is evidenced several times, even known in children’s books like *The Vikings* (2007, 15–18) by Katie Kubesh, Niki McNeil, and Kimm Bellotto. Then again, the “Buddha bucket” could also originate in Ireland

because the decorative motifs on the “Buddha” can also be seen in Irish art, especially the so-called *The Book of Durrow*, which was probably created between 650–700 (Trinity College Library Dublin, n.d., Colm 2012).

3.3. KNOWLEDGE — Scientific Buddhist Mediators in Chains of Reference

Knowledge — or reference¹² — is about the paving with inscriptions and the bringing back and losing of information¹³, whereby it creates constants through transformations, and it alternates in the reaching of remote entities (Latour 2013a, 488–489). According to Latour, *knowledge* has been deflated and thus corrupted by simplification, placing “ideal knowledge” in the center and implied transportation without transformation, the “copy=model correspondence.” Consequently, knowledge had to answer the question of the multiplicity of categories. However, it was never equipped to do so in the reference — but only in the multiplicity/preposition — mode, which was, therefore, unable to “protect” and “conserve” multiplicity (Latour 2013c; “Knowledge”).

12. Latour’s term “reference” does not refer to science, nature, or knowledge but rather a process that aims to define a chain carrying information through many transformations. Reference is about information through transformations; it is producing knowledge, which creates constancy through these transformations, and it alternates in the aiming for continuity (Latour 2013c; “[REF]”). “Reference” etymologically — “refer” in Latin — means a process of “bringing back” information through multiple transformations while maintaining some constants. According to Latour, “this piling up or stacking effect” has given science its power. Reference is thus a reclassification of “knowledge,” which enables investigating objectivity without taking it for the perfect simplified information (of a double-click) (Latour 2013c; “Reference, Referent”). The notion of “chains of reference” refers to the processes that maintain constants and thus enable gaining access to the distant, namely information. These chains may “define a bridge between known object and knowing subject,” which may only become visible through science (Latour 2013c; “Chains of Reference”).

13. Simplified “information” is a transfer without transformation, which is a “displacement” only, but in a positive sense, “information” is “synonymous with immutable mobiles or access to remote beings.” Information and knowledge come from a philosophy of *being-as-being* and the troublesome history of dealing with the *being-as-other* (Latour 2013c; “Information”).

3.3.1. The Kew Gardens Pagoda — The “Taste” Of China

The appearance of other cultures¹⁴ in the “West” — here, the Chinese in Britain — has been discussed by several scholars under several terms: (i) “otherness” (Colley 1992, Bachmann-Medick 2017), (ii) “translation” (Bachmann-Medick 1997, Tymoczko and Gentzler 2002, Falser 2013a, Bachmann-Medick 2014), (iii) “chinoiserie” (Jacobson 1993, Sloboda 2014) and (iv) “influence” (Erdberg 1936, Zhu 2009).

A specific case of representing other cultures in the UK is the Kew Pagoda (Chambers 1763, Harris 1966, Harris 1970), built in 1761-1762 by Sir William Chambers, which is situated in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames in southwest Greater London (fig. 4.39). The Chinese Nanjing Pagoda — seen and depicted by Johan Nieuhof (1618-1672) in his *Het gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie* (1665) (English: *An Embassy from the East-India Company*) (fig. 4.41) — was the picture-perfect global icon of China that was *translated* into architecture, porcelain, tapestry, furniture, and garden architecture in the UK, France, and Germany. In 2002-2003, this pagoda was central in Kew Gardens’ proposal to become a *UNESCO* world heritage site (fig. 4.40) (Chris Blandford Associates 2003, UNESCO 2002, UNESCO 2003a, UNESCO 2003b, UNESCO 2013).

14. According to Susanne Bachmann-Medick, there are three grammars or fundamental structures of *otherness*: (i) segmentation and (sub)division, which frames *otherness* as context-dependent and allows the shift from “enemy” to “friend,” and thereby the emergence of alliances and the neutralization of conflicts; (ii) inclusion that sub-includes others in a hierarchized pattern, who then become a “part of us” (Baumann and Gingrich 2004, x—xi); and finally (iii) orientalizing, which creates “self” and “other” through negative reflection following the motto “what is good in us is lacking in them” (Baumann and Gingrich 2004, x). The latter works within a normative and binary classification framework — we=good/them=bad — in which the other or Orient — especially according to Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) — is understandable as a subordinate knowledge object and an imaginary construct. This practice is often associated with “temporal distancing” (Fabian 1983, 30) and “denial of coevalness” (32) (Baumann and Gingrich 2004, x, Bachmann-Medick 2017, 7–8).



ROYAL BOTANIC GARDENS, KEW
WORLD HERITAGE SITE NOMINATION DOCUMENT

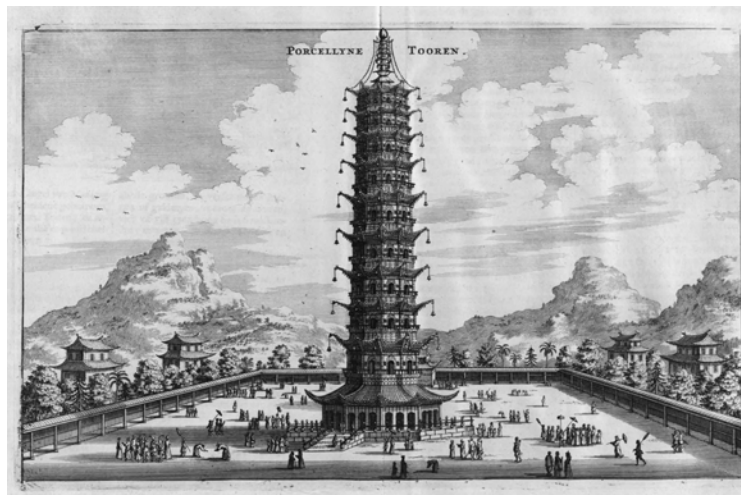


Figure 4.39. *Top left*, Pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK), built by William Chambers between 1761 and 1762.

FIGURE 4.40. *Top right*, The cover page with the pagoda of “World Heritage Site Nomination Document” for Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in London (UK), 2003.

FIGURE 4.41. *Bottom*, “Porcellyne Tooren” or the Nanjing Pagoda in China. Drawing by Johan Nieuhof 1665.

In 1763, Chambers published and engraved *Plans, Elevations, Sections, and Perspective Views of the Gardens and Buildings at Kew in Surry* with 44 plates (Chambers 1763), financed by King George III (Harris 1970, 33). In this publication, Chambers depicted and explained this pagoda: 163 feet high — around 50 meters — ten stories that diminish in height and diameter. All the roofs’ angles were adorned with giant dragons (fig. 4.42). In 1756, Chambers began with

*Designs for Chinese Buildings*¹⁵ — published in 1757 — which contains 21 plates and a drawing of a Chinese pagoda near Canton (fig. 4.43) (Harris 1970, 8, Chambers 1757).

Kew Gardens in its entirety can be called a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which is a precursor of the first 19th-century world fairs since it displayed not only the Chinese pagoda but also an Alhambra, Greek and Roman temples, a Gothic Cathedral, the so-called House of Confucius, a Japanese gateway and a Turkish mosque with two minarets (fig. 4.44).

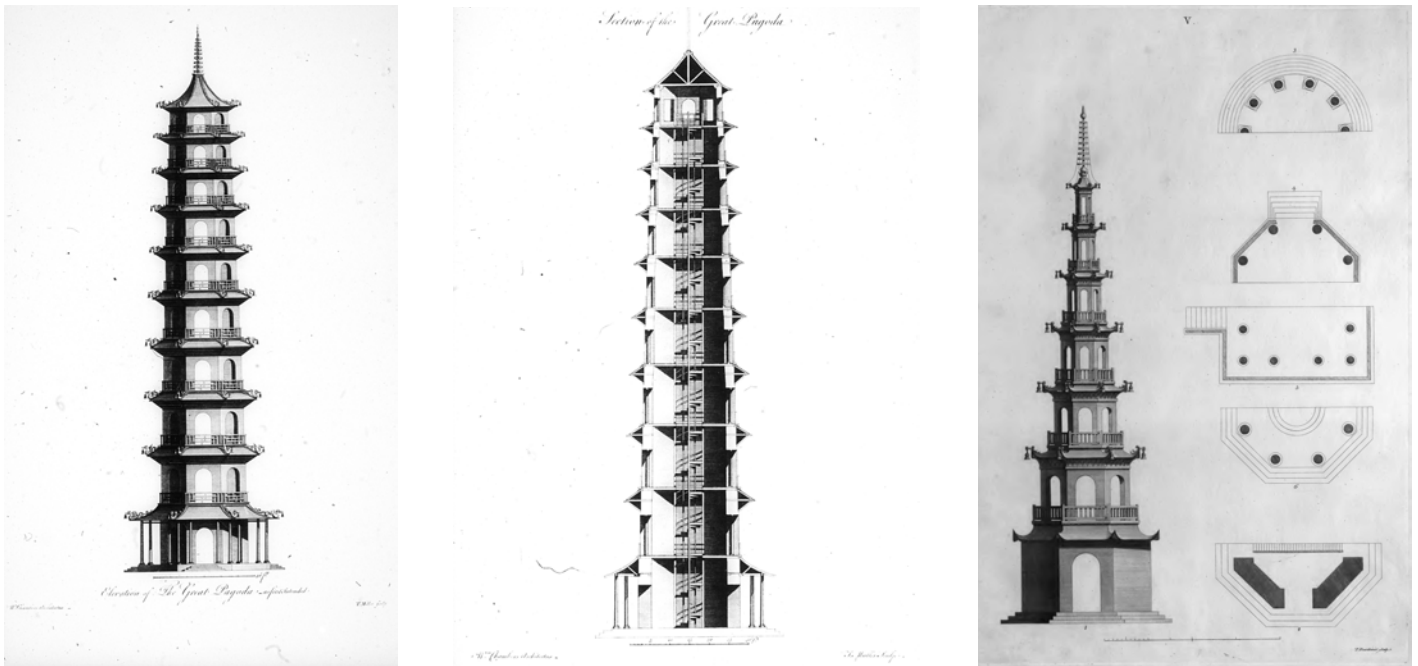


FIGURE 4.42. *Left and center*, Print of the pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK), published by William Chambers in 1763.

FIGURE 4.43. *Right*, Drawing of a pagoda (taa) near Canton, China, published by William Chambers in 1753.

15. In *Designs for Chinese Buildings*, Chambers spoke of Chinese architecture as “toys”: “Though I am publishing a work of Chinese Architecture, let it not be suspected that my intention is to promote a taste so much inferior to the antique, and so very unfit for our climate: [...] I look upon them as *toys in architecture*: and as *toys* are sometimes, an account of their *oddity*, prettyness, or neatness of workmanship, admitted into the cabinets of the curious, so may Chinese buildings be sometimes allowed a place among compositions of a nobler kind” (Chambers 1757, without pagination, foreword 1–2; emphasis added).

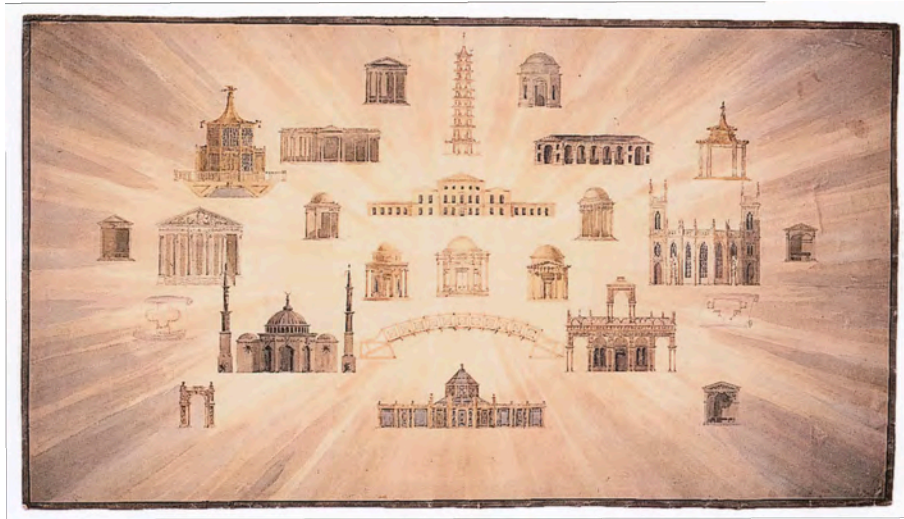


FIGURE 4.44. Drawings of buildings at Kew Gardens in London (UK) by Sir John Soane and pupils from 1809.

When detailed travel reports, as well as historical, philosophical, and scientific treatises on the Other, were increasingly available in the 18th century, they served as a trigger for the import and materialization of this *oriental Other* through the creation of exotic and illusory — for instance — architectural fantasies for Western artificial garden landscapes. Mediators such as Nieuhof’s publication and Chambers’ pagoda were powerful translation tools used to appropriate the local-built heritage of China, which also produced a particular stock of *knowledge* of certain “cultures” by integrating these into various civilizational master narratives like architectural or religious history and cultural heritage, whereby Europe was located at its — *modernizing* — endpoint (Falser 2013a, 85). The Europeans — colonial powers in almost any part of the world, but not in China — materialized their colonial manner through architectural objects *known* from China on British soil and, in this way, showed its European presence in all parts of the world, since they assumed to have a hegemonic privilege and power, which not only stereotyped and mythologized the Asian source as the primitive and exotic *Other* as the *Orient* but it influenced the self-representation of the *self* as the *Occident* within a “process of strangeness and familiarization” (Carbonell 1996, 79, 84). As has been shown, there was a massive *gathering of knowledge* on material culture from China to Europe, including an arsenal of images and texts that were transferred in a highly selective manner, which was then integrated into cultural-political representations of power (Falser 2013a, 83) and knowledge. Written or printed descriptions of the *Other* were often re-translated into architectural representations to frame European cultural supremacy by canonizing — and mostly downgrading

— oriental architecture by using it to create orientalizing pleasure architecture within landscape gardens (Falser 2013a, 85).¹⁶

In her 2007 publication *Representing Others*, Kate Sturge argued that translation “assumes that *representations are not innocent copies of external reality* but are *built out of the requirements and presuppositions of the receiving discourse*” (8; emphasis added). The long-awaited reopening of the Kew pagoda in the spring of 2018, funded by the government and the Queen, was “face-lifted” at the cost of five million pounds (Hardman 2018). It included 80 3D-printed dragons (fig. 4.45) (Kennedy 2018) and two new automata which refer to the 18th century, and a hole in the floor — secured by plexiglass — going through all floors, which reminds of the smoke bomb testings within the pagoda in World War I (figs. 4.46–4.47) (The National Archives 1929—1931, Skellon Studio 2018).



FIGURE 4.45. *Left*, 3D-printed dragons on the pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK).

FIGURE 4.46. *Center*, Plexiglass on the floor of the pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK) for displaying the World War I smoke-bomb test site.

FIGURE 4.47. *Right*, Modern copies of automata refer to 18th-century automata in the pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK).

3.3.2. Representation and Facts Through Art and Products

According to Latour, the concept of a “fact” etymologically is two opposing things: (i) constructed or (ii) not constructed by humans. Facts are also at the same time (a) silent — since

16. Falser explains this architectural translation in the following way: “*Selected buildings were cut out of the original cultural context and translated into the own culture, but did not arrive [...] there in the exact same form, but experienced through a process of translation into their European form of representation a multi-faceted transformation through selection* (also intentional omission of certain, in some cases not known more-information), *interpretation* (more often stereotypization, as contentual reduction also essentialization, within the Asian context as orientalization) and finally the *re-arrangement*, which can negatively be called a falsification of the original, and positively a highly-creative description and re-formulation within the quality of an artwork sui generis” (Falser 2013a, 85; translated by author; emphasis added).

only humans possess language — and (b) chatty, to silence anyone doubting what facts or actors speaking for facts say. Unlike the “artifact,” the “fact” is indisputable, “which puts an end to discussion.” The word “fact” designates the truth of a statement and the actor making the statement. Science studies have illustrated that the experimental situation “makes facts speak for themselves.” Latour ascribes to Austin — because of the “referent” — the “significant discovery that constatives are barely different from performatives” (Latour 2013c; “Facts (Facts That Speak For Themselves)”).

The idolizing and iconizing of traditional religious resources show that *secularizations* transform and re-use former “idols” for “iconic” purposes, leading to critique and violence. Secularist projects and practices are also religious, at least believing in disbelief that former Buddhist mediators can be emptied of any religiously traditional content. There are many examples of “cultural adding,” where one collective adds certain aspects of its own “culture” to specific materialities of another collective. For instance, the British built a signaling station in Ava in Myanmar on top of a pagoda and thus re-mediated the pagoda for British military purposes (fig. 4.48).



FIGURE 4.48. Photograph of a signaling station at Ava, Myanmar, 1886.

“Cultural recycling” is similar to “cultural adding,” whereby existing cultural resources are used to create something new. Gonkar Gyatso — a contemporary artist born in Tibet and living in London — is known for his Buddha paintings and sculptures in which Buddha is composed of different mosaic-like parts (figs. 4.49–4.50). These depictions can be used to artistically visualize how Buddhist mediators and aesthetics are translated into representations of various other “things”

— traffic, military, games, popular culture, smartphones, leisure — and branded mediations in general (Gonkar Gyatso 2020).

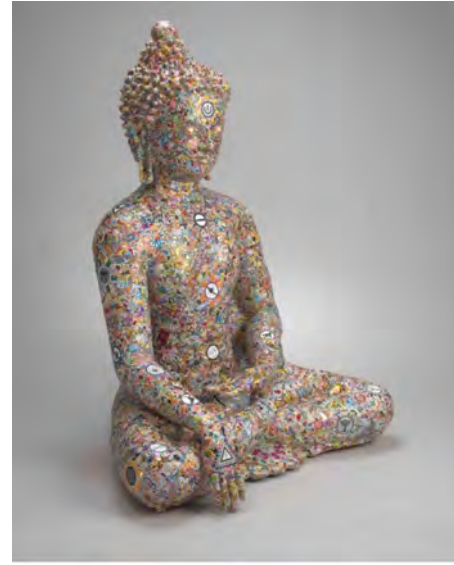


FIGURE 4.49. *Left*, “Buddha Shakyamuni” by Gonkar Gyatso. 122*90cm. Neuhoff Gallery, New York, 2007, “Tibetan Encounters Contemporary Meets Tradition.”

FIGURE 4.50. *Right*, “Excuse Me While I Kiss the Sky” Gonkar Gyatso. 147*81*71cm. Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia, August 20 — October 15, 2011, “Three Realms.”

The *Punkbuddhas* by Metis Atash impressively illustrate that Buddhism and Buddhist mediators in the age of global, neoliberal consumption, and capitalism *represent* a specific mediality of these very structures. However, they do not perform as a “medium” that would mediate between established entities A and B, but “mediality” means that the carrier — here, *Punkbuddha* “Roseskull” (fig. 4.51), which refers to Alexander McQueen’s *Spring 2015 Ready-to-wear collection* — is *consumed* after the process of mediation: in other words, it disappears. These Buddhas are physically still there, but they point to the gap between consumer and designer, capitalism and capitalist actor, consumption and consumer, and religion and religious actor, whereby the mediator “Buddha” is lost like any other *mediator* within the process of *mediation* in favor of the *mediated*. Ultimately, all Buddhist “things” — and the shoe by *Valentino* (fig. 4.52) — disappear in favor of significant meta-processes such as consumption, capitalism, neoliberalism, and the specific relations these networks inherit. However, these would also disappear, i.e., *constancy* is only generated when some things are *mediated* and “consumed” in the mediation process.

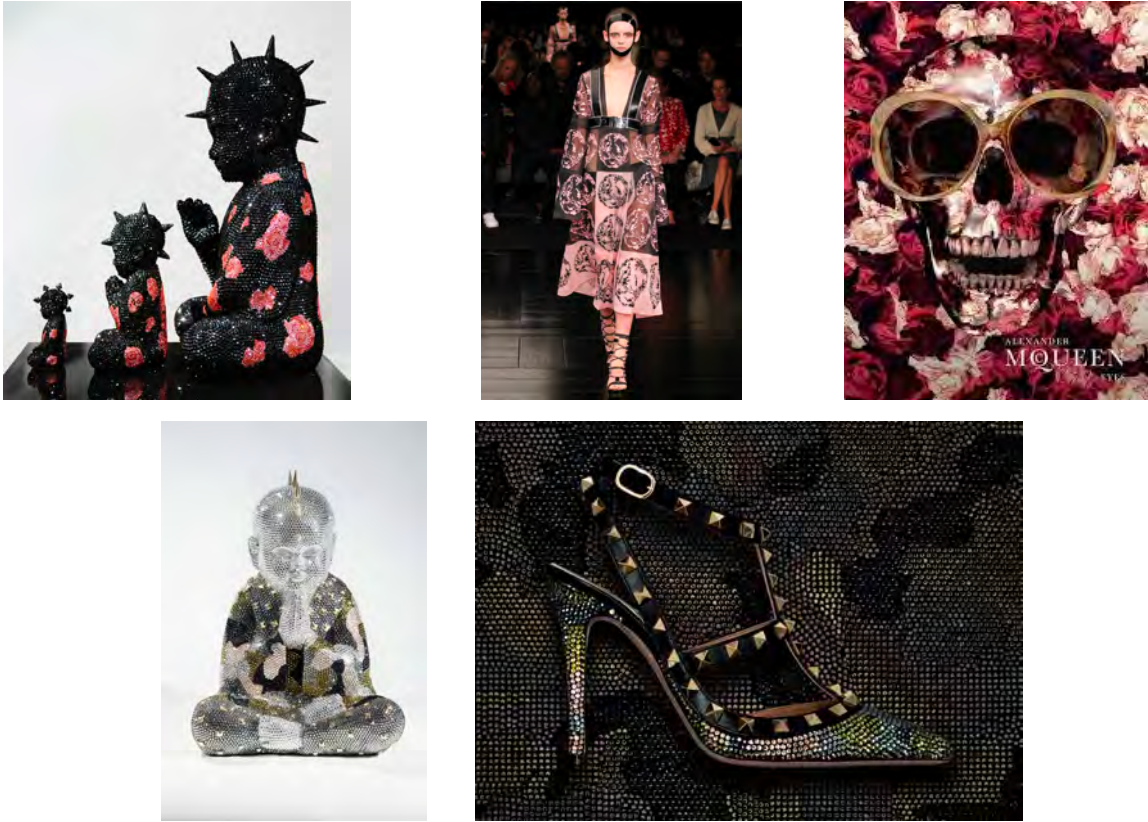


FIGURE 4.51. *Top, Punkbuddha “Roseskull” by Metis Atash featuring Alexander McQueen’s Spring 2015 Ready-to-wear collection. 46*23*13cm.*

FIGURE 4.52. *Bottom, Punkbuddha “Camo” by Metis Atash featuring Valentino’s Fall/Winter 2014 Camouflage collection. 46*23*13cm.*

Conclusion

Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands *assemble* beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm in an *objectified* and *materialized* way with various actors within networks of technology, innovation — how they are creative, produce art, fashion, and entertainment — and referential knowledge.

(i) Buddhist mediators are *technologized* through detours and zigzags, which this chapter has tried to identify in apps, forms of (anti)digitalization, AI, and self-driving, which heavily use Buddhist mediators.

(ii) Buddhist mediators are *innovatively* fictionalized by art and entertainment discourses. Pop artists, movies, and TV series use Buddhist mediators in various shapes and re-invent the “classical Buddha” for an artsy and mediatized audience.

(iii) Buddhist mediators are *referred* to through forms of knowledge and chains of reference. This chapter has presented case studies ranging from museums, pagodas in public gardens, and world exhibition pavilions, all of which share stages of re-presentation and identity politics.

Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and brands again do not reflect a “traditional” version of something called “Buddhism.” However, it can *assemble* many *things* that actors produce, generate, and refer to, which finally creates and makes some *new, material, and objective* Buddhism-as-mediators. This Buddhism-as-mediators — generated through *assembling* — is a form of *compositionist* engagement with things referring to Buddhist mediators, which protects multiplicity, including technology, innovation, and scientific discourses.

Chapter 4

Subjective Buddhism-as-Mediators

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Buddhism, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are *gathering* beyond the *secular and religious* divide in a *subjectified* way through (i) politics — modes of governance, control, and security — (ii) law regarding museums, collections, and artifacts, as well as advertising, tattoos, and bars in South-East Asia, as well as (iii) religion to convert people of assumed “beyonds” and achieve these within the present time. This chapter will thus investigate how Buddhist mediators are creating something new — a composition — out of Buddhist traditions, a multitude of so-called “secularized” hybrids of Buddhist brands and mediators, consumerism, and neoliberalism. This thesis cannot assume some “native subject” or individual; the notion of quasi-subjects respects the “modernist obsession with subjectivity” — i.e., politics, law, and religion — and makes the distinction. Quasi-subjects — as well as quasi-objects — help to undo the “obsession with the object-subject opposition” (Latour 2013c; “Quasi-Subjects”).

4.1. POLITICS — Political Buddhist Mediators in “We As a Group”

4.1.1. Politics, Governance, Control, and Security

Following Latour (2013a, 488–489), politics produces groups and figures of assemblies. In religious studies, there is much literature on the relationship between politics, economy, and governance (Martikainen and Gauthier 2013). But in which branding markets and for what purposes are Buddhist mediators used? Some corporations have become increasingly powerful — supported by governments and cities — and supervise, track, buy, and sell users’ digital data. Indeed, somehow this trend is connected to Buddhist mediators, but to what effects?

Governance and control are major issues in mediations and mediators. Since classical governance discourses are schools, politics, and the military, they also use Buddhist mediators in projects like the *Mindfulness in Schools Project* (short *MiSP*) (fig. 5.1) (Mindfulness in Schools Project 2020). *MiSP* is based on the teachings of the famous Jon Kabat-Zinn — “the founding father of secular mindfulness” — who described mindfulness as “being alive and knowing it.” In his spirit, they explain mindfulness as the training of attention and being “more aware of what is actually happening, rather than worrying about what *has* happened or might happen” (Mindfulness in School Project 2020).

This is why *MiSP* is “a practice of stopping and noticing” and “training in attention and awareness.” They claim to be “evidence-based” and “endorsed by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence,” and they distinguish themselves specifically from not being about breathing exercises, yoga, religion, spirituality, “emptying your mind,” or “chilling out” (Mindfulness in School Project 2020). In October 2015, the UK-based *The Mindfulness Initiative* — located in Sheffield (UK) with research centers in Bangor, Exeter, Oxford, and Sussex universities — initiated the *Mindful Nation UK Report* — “[t]he first policy document of its kind, investigating the potential for mindfulness-based interventions across various domains of public policy” — created by the *Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group (MAPPG)* (fig. 5.2). The *MAPPG* lists its impact as 250 UK parliamentarians trained in mindfulness and now practicing in Westminster, fourteen national parliaments having begun mindfulness programs inspired and supported by their work and 40 politicians worldwide who attended the first “Global congress of mindful legislators” in 2017. The former *MAPPG* Labour Co-Chair — Chris Ruane — also asked the former British Prime Minister Theresa May some questions on mindfulness (fig. 5.3) (The Mindfulness Initiative 2020).

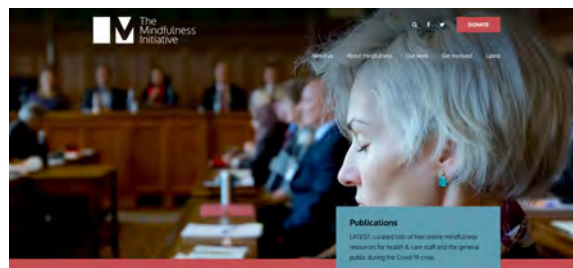


FIGURE 5.1. *Left*, Slogan “Being Alive and Knowing it” by the *Mindfulness in Schools Project*.

FIGURE 5.2. *Center*, Screenshot of mindfulness website, owned by *The Mindfulness Initiative*.

FIGURE 5.3. *Right*, Former Prime Minister Theresa May (2016—2019) answered questions about mindfulness in the Parliament of the United Kingdom, referred to by *The Mindfulness Initiative*.

Critics of neoliberalism advise being aware of the governing tools neoliberal mediators provide. Buddhist mediators can be found in all modern institutions like politics, schools, sciences, and the arts. The *British Army* has commissioned *Karmarama* — a company with a Buddhist-inspired naming — to produce three promotional videos. In 2018, they created “This is belonging,” which displays soldiers in a war situation in a quiet moment: one of them has received a letter from his family. Inside is a note that says “morning” only and a bag of tea that he smells, which makes him cry immediately. Then another soldier brings him a cup of hot water for the tea bag. This is followed by the slogan “find your belonging.” The video was made to “motivate people to make the positive life changing decision to join the Army, we had to make it feel attainable to people who could be put off by intimidating stereotypes,” *Karmarama* says. The campaign — including posters showing soldiers and saying “this is belonging” (fig. 5.4) — was one of the most talked-about in British army history with record-breaking results, prompting a steady increase in applications (*Karmarama* 2020a). They tried to break expectations, tackle stereotypes, and redefine “what it meant to be a soldier” beyond being “a straight, white man, and even if you were, you didn’t have to be a robot or superhero” (*Karmarama* 2020a).

The “British Army 1” video made by *Karmarama* — which was switched off by the provider but can still be streamed on *YouTube* (“British Army Reaches Out [...]” 2019) — shows three actors. First, a young man is playing video games synchronized with war scenes and war wounded. Then comes the slogan “Your Army Needs You.” Second, an office scene is displayed in which an employee is wrapped in bubble wrap by his colleagues, a trash can is placed on his head, and he is beaten with cardboard sticks. Here, again war scenes are synchronously faded in. Third, an army chef is given an apron by his fellow soldiers, on which a muscular half-naked man is shown. This scene also ends with the slogan “Your Army Needs You” (fig. 5.5). The video is aimed to show young people what the army offered them and what “they couldn’t find elsewhere.” *Karmarama* argued that they “needed to create work bold enough to earn our audience’s attention and break out of advertising and into culture”. This video achieved a PR reach of 4.8 billion in the first week alone, whereby “[o]n the day the campaign launched, more people applied to join the Army than on any other day in over a year” (*Karmarama* 2020a).



FIGURE 5.4. Left, Advertising poster of the British Army by *Karmarama*, London (UK).



FIGURE 5.5. Right, Advertising poster of the British Army by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

“The British Army 2” video from 2020 shows soldiers in a war scenario, and it displays a protagonist who wonders where confidence comes from. Several “offers” by “false friends” follow, like a bodybuilder who promises him a steel body, three friends who want to go out and drink with him, a clothes salesman who promises him the best outfits, and the sound of “likes,” i.e., social media platforms. These four “temptations” are interrupted by a soldier colleague, and the narrator ends with saying: “Lots of things can give you confidence, for a little while. But confidence that lasts a lifetime? There’s one place you’ll find that”. After all three videos, the Army slogan beneath the British flag appears: “Army. Be the Best. Find Where You Belong. Search Army Jobs” (Karmarama 2020a). The Buddhist-inspired naming of the advertising company — *Karmarama* — will hardly be seen by consumers. Still, *Karmarama* was chosen by the *British Army* to advertise for them, and thus Buddhist mediators and brands appeal to different consumers and customers. Regarding Buddhist mediators, it is not primarily about the actor watching the video, but the *British Army* as *Karmarama*’s customer.

Then there are a variety of other companies connected to the government. *Kensho* has received money from the venture capital arm of the CIA, In-Q-Tel, and they built “analytical products used by some of the world’s biggest financial institutions and the U.S. Intelligence Community” (Kensho 2020). *Zenzic*’s aim for a self-driving revolution is made possible through the coming together of industry (AI, legal, insurance, automotive, telecoms, infrastructure, technical networks), government (Innovate UK, Department for Transport, Department for International Trade, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, Centre for Connected &

Autonomous Vehicles) and academia (communications, human factors, energy, ethics, and AI) (fig. 5.6) (Zenzic 2020).

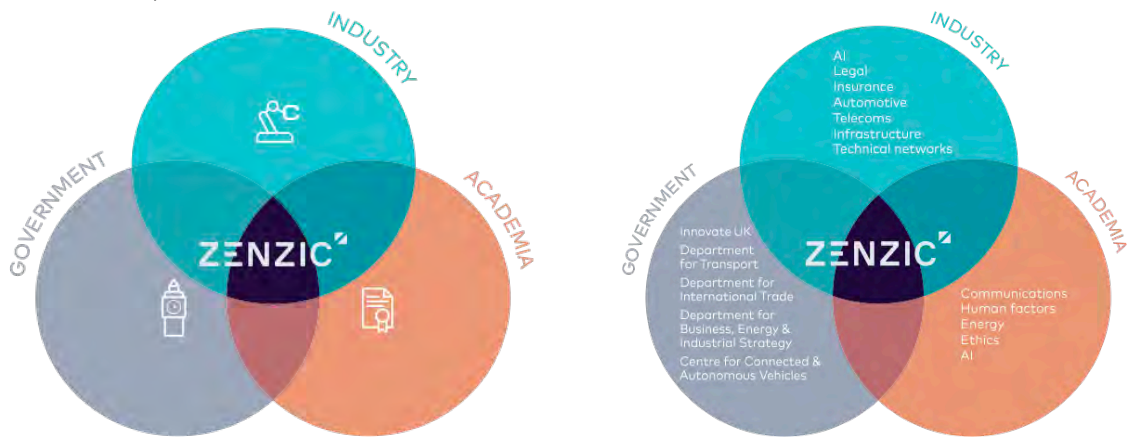


FIGURE 5.6. Diagrams showing the entanglement of government, industry, and academia aiming to accelerate the self-driving revolution. Diagrams by Zenzic.

4.1.2. Segmentation and Subdivision as Tribalism

The first mode of dealing with the other is the segmentation and subdivision referring to mediated Buddhist brands found in — neoliberal and consumerist — forms of tribalism¹. The *Buddha-Bar London* is a fine example of tribalism: several-meter-long dragon-shaped lamp decorations, bamboo poles as ceiling decoration, and lantern lamps (figs. 5.7.–5.9). The shape, look, and feeling of Buddhist — i.e., Asian — mediators are designed for a specific tribe: the educated, middle- to upper-class Londoner who likes to have a drink or a dinner in a fancy Asian space. When entering the bar, actors become part of the mediated *brand community*.

1. Business scholars Harry A. Taute and Jeremy Sierra (2014) have introduced the concept of “brand tribalism” as “customers often want to feel engaged with the brand they purchase. These brand tribal members share something emotively more than mere brand ownership” (2). Brand tribalism can be defined as “determinants of brand attitude and repurchase intention” (3); namely, brand tribe consumers are those who are devoted to specific brands (4). They distinguish four dimensions of brand tribes: lineage (bound together), social structure (different from others), sense of community, and defense of tribe (6). In this sense, the sociologist Luigi Gentili has argued that the “tribe works because it satisfies the “desire for community”” in a passionate, compulsive, and customer-fidelized way. Tribalism searches for a collective bond in society in the form of “micro-groups” — i.e., high society, fan groups, clubs, or gangs (“The Future of Marketing [...]” 2020).

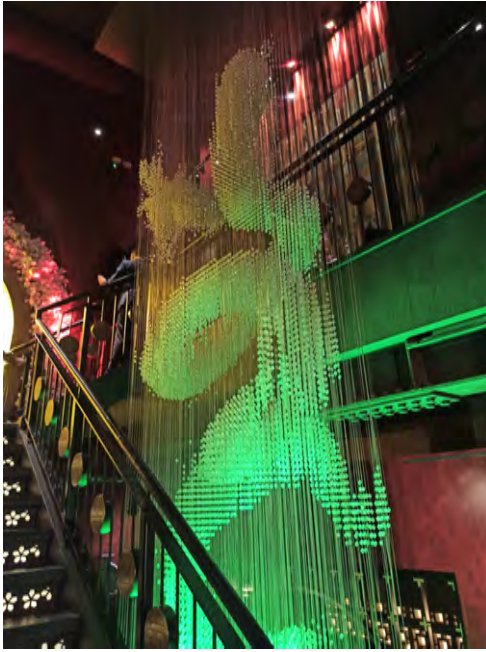


FIGURE 5.7. *Top left*, Dragon-shaped lamp decoration in *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 5.8. *Top right*, Lantern lamps in *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 5.9. *Bottom*, Bamboo poles as ceiling decoration at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

4.1.3. *Orientalism*

The third mode of grappling with others can be found in — the degrading way of — orientalist practices. Jane Naomi Iwamura (2011) has argued in her *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* that “[w]ithin this hyperreal environment, orientalized stereotypes begin to take on their own reality and justify their own truths” (8). However, are Buddhist mediators orientalist, and what does the use of Buddhist and Asian mediators say about “us” and “them”?

This drawing of the Buddha (fig. 5.10) is one the first English ones ever made — printed in 1800 — and it stems from the English embassy under the leadership of Michael Symes to the kingdom of Ava in 1795. The image shows the Buddha in Bodh Gaya in India (then Bengal). Buddha is seated in the lotus position, the right foot on the left knee, the left arm on the left foot, and the right arm on the left lower leg; he seems to be wearing a robe and has a pearl necklace around his forehead and a pointed hat on his head. The nose is very sharp and angular, the ears are rectangular, and he smiles at the viewer. Today, one could say that this rather strange and child-like Buddha is not authentic but ideological and an effect of the politics of the times. This drawing marks the beginning of a specific pictorial reception of the Buddha — at least in England — a reception that has been since then transformed several times, but ultimately it shows the procedures for how to engage with the *other* concerning the *self*: “they are childish”-“we are not childish,” “Buddhism is weird”-“Christianity is not weird,” “they live in the past and are not civilized”-“we live in the present and are civilization per se,” etc.



Drawn by Capt. Crooket.

Image of Buddha at Gaya in Bengal.

FIGURE 5.10. Image of Buddha at Gaya in former Bengal, published by Michael Symes (1800) and drawn by Captain Crooket in the context of an embassy to the Kingdom of Ava, sent by the governor-general of India in 1795.

Finally, one can say that — mainly in the historical past — Buddhist mediators were used for downgrading the other to upgrade the — Western, liberal — self. Indeed parts of this orientaling mechanic are also embedded within the other two modes of tribalism and exoticism. However, Buddhist mediators today are primarily about inclusion, segmentation, or (sub)division, not othering and up-/downgrading.

4.2. LAW — Legal Buddhist Mediators in Museums, Artifacts, and Fun

4.2.1. Theodor Heinrich Thomann and the Museums of Ethnology Hamburg and Berlin

According to Latour (2013a), law institutes safety-bearers and links cases and actions via means (488–489). In the field of politics, law, and Buddhism in Great Britain, various transnational linkages of translocality can be worked out.² The juridical incident discussed here involves two Germans who, around 1900, robbed the city of Pagan — today’s Bagan — in former British Burma of many treasures. (i) Fritz von Noetling — a German geologist in British services in Calcutta as superintendent of the Geological Survey of India — sent pieces from Pagan and other Burmese places to Adolf Bastian’s Berlin *Museum of Ethnology* since 1881, as well as (ii) Theodor Heinrich Thomann, who visited Pagan in 1899 together with a group of archaeological treasure hunters (Zöllner 2002, 44, *Ethnological Museum Berlin 1891–1895 and 1896–1919*). In the second half of the 19th century, Germany and other countries offered the public their ethnological museums to (i) gain insights into the lives of people from the regions of the world that were now available for trade and travel and (ii) provide material for research into their “cultures.” There was intense competition between these newly founded institutions, making them necessary to preserve — attractive and scientifically relevant — exhibits. Noetling and Thomann provided the core of the Burmese collections of the Berlin and Hamburg *Museums of Ethnology* originating from the shipments from British Burma to Germany. On the one hand, Noetling was persuaded by Fedor Jagor — a friend of the Berlin museum whom he had met in Kolkata (former Calcutta) — to collect pieces from Pagan and other places in British Burma. As a reward for his services, Noetling demanded an imperial order and received one through the intervention of Adolf Bastian (Zöllner 2002, 44–45). On the other hand, Thomann was a professional treasure hunter who pretended to be an archaeologist (fig. 5.11). He called himself “Thomann Gillis” and, together with five German assistants since 1899, he removed paintings from the walls of the Weiky-in Kubyauck-gyi pagoda and other sites in Pagan

2. For instance, Bastian Alison (2014) has written his master’s thesis on the museumification of Burmese images.

and prepared them for transport. His activities were reported to the British authorities, and some pieces were restored and replaced. Consideration was given to bringing the case to court. Eventually, it was decided to ban Thomann from British Burma, and the British District Commissioner expelled him and his accomplices, which he complained about (45). In 1906 — after lengthy negotiations — Thomann sold everything he could ship to the Hamburg *Museum of Ethnology* for an enormous sum, paid by the city government of Hamburg, and in 1923 Thomann published his monograph on the city of Pagan (46).³

The “affair” around the German Theodor Heinrich Thomann (Archaeological Survey of Burma 1913, 4) became a massive topic in 1918 — twenty years after the first incident — and according to the archival holdings of the *British Library* (“Spoliation of Sacred Edifices in Pagan [...]” 1900) negotiations were held in Great Britain on whether and how the Thomannian theft of terra-cotta relief plates from Buddhist pagodas in British Burma could help to end the First World War (“Spoliation of Sacred Edifices in Pagan [...]” 1900). What was not discussed in this juridical incident was the transformation of Buddhist artifacts and their related ritual functions — neither in the UK nor in British Burma, since it was not of any interest that this theft had disturbed religious rituals in British Burma for the actors living there — namely by “gutting” pagodas and thus rendering them ritually unusable. This issue was certainly not discussed from a legal or ethical standpoint regarding Buddhism. Still, nevertheless, the translocal interests of England and Germany led to the same translocal forms of upheaval, destruction, and dislocation of artifacts in British Burma.

The material cutting of the terracotta tiles is a technical means of making them usable for European museums — especially Berlin and Hamburg — where they were presented as a source of knowledge or art and as a reference to Buddha and Buddhism in Asia (fig. 5.13). The plates with Buddhist designs served Thomann as a connection to the foreign and exotic, and above all, it suited him to generate profit by selling these to museums. He hired assistants in British Burma, with

3. Gordon Hannington Luce — a prominent scholar of ancient Myanmar — argued in 1948 that “[i]n 1899 Burma suffered a still more ghastly ‘blitz’ of German vandalism. A pseudo-Doctor Thomann with at least six German assistants, came to devastate Pagan in the interests of the Hamburg Ethnographical Museum. [...] Thomann was at length detected and expelled, and part of his loot recovered and replaced on wrong pagodas. But most of the frescoes that he sawed seem to have perished; for very little is on show, either in the Hamburg Museum or in his book *Pagan which he had the impudence to publish, in Germany. When the war is won, I hope steps will be taken to recover for Burma this stolen property. The images and terracottas, at least, can easily be restored to their pagodas. Germans, alas, were not the only vandals, though they were the worst*” (Luce 1948, 85; emphasis added).

whose help he dismantled the plates and packed them into boxes. Thomann, the participating museums, the terra-cotta tiles, the political actors of England and Germany, and the Burmese in British Burma formed a complex and comprehensive network characterized by *translocation*. This incident represents a translocal one — politically and legally speaking — between the British Empire, the German Reich, British Burma, and the world public. This episode — from which the German Empire distanced itself very early on — was discussed in British government circles in 1918, six months before the actual end of the World War, connected with the higher aim of ending it (fig. 5.12) (“Burma. Removal of frescoes [...]” 1918).

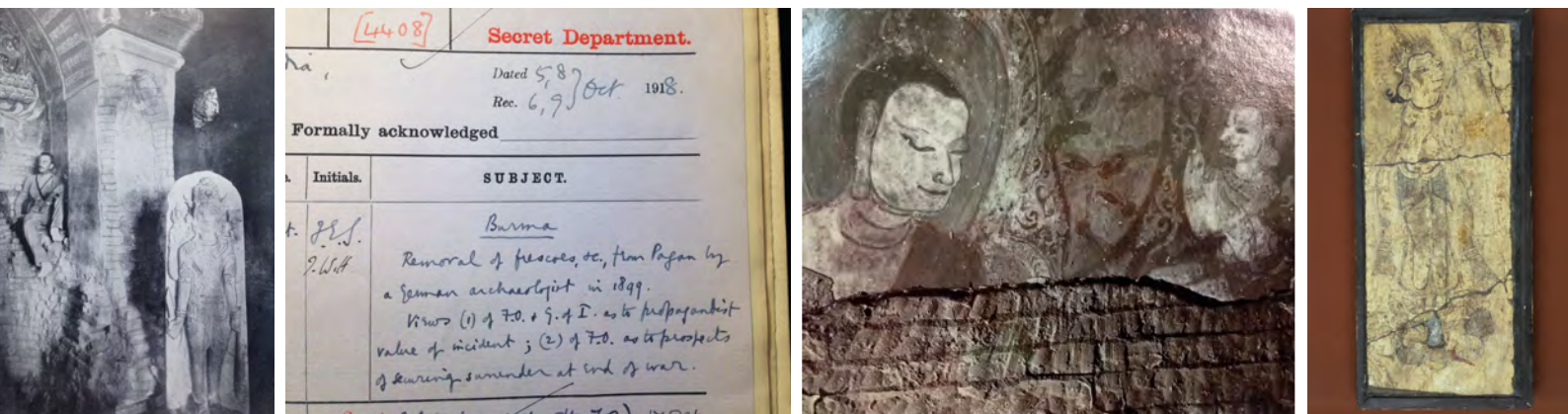


FIGURE 5.11. *Left*, Photograph showing Theodor Heinrich Thomann in “Mock-Tha-gu Paya” with cut-out Wall Relief.

FIGURE 5.12. *Second left*, British Secret Department’s documents (1918) on the removal of frescoes from Pagan, Myanmar in 1899 by a German archaeologist, i.e., Thomann, and how this might secure Germany’s surrender in World War I.

FIGURE 5.13. *Second right*, Cut out Buddhist frescoes in Burmese pagoda. Photographs in *British Library*, London (UK).

FIGURE 5.14. *Right*, Fragment of a wall painting of Marnat in the *Museum Of Ethnology* in Hamburg (Germany).

Kenneth J. Whitbread (1971)— already 50 years ago — analyzed the travel of these Burmese wall paintings from Pagan to Hamburg. The *Virtual Collection of Asian Masterpieces* tells the story of a specific wall painting of Marnat — measuring 52*22cm — which came into the possession of the *Museum of Ethnology* in Hamburg through Thomann, who removed it from the

Theinmazi pagoda in the Burmese city of Pagan (fig. 5.14).⁴ The legal case of restituting the wall painting back to Myanmar — suggested in the 1970s — was dropped by Myanmar since the German side was financially better equipped to preserve it well (“Wall Painting of Marnat [...]” 2013). Not much remains of this legal and political dispute since, from a museum visitor’s perspective, the relief was transferred from Myanmar to Germany without any transformations, political and juridical debates, or complicated translocal networks.

4.2.2. John Tradescant’s Buddha Figure and the Ashmolean Museum

Another case of law is illustrated in — parts of — the actual foundational collection of the *Ashmolean Museum*. In 1983, the former curator of the *Ashmolean Museum* in Oxford, Arthur MacGregor, published *Tradescant’s rarities*, wherein James C. Harle described an artistic object (fig. 5.15), which can be identified as one of the first Buddhist “things” that came to Britain (Harle 1983, 183–184). It is a 75cm (Berry 2011) high, lacquered, white marble figure of a sitting Burmese Buddha, who classically performs the earth-touching gesture — *padmasana* — with his right hand and performs *bhumisparsamudra* with his fingers pointing towards the ground (Harle 1983, 183–184), while his left hand rests on his lower leg or knee of the right leg. The pose shows the — supposed — moment of enlightenment, in which Gautama, after extended meditation, points down with his right hand to make the earth his witness. Along the front of the seat is a singular band of overlapping lotus buds (Bailey 1971, 219—220). The sitting pose is part of the so-called *vajrasana*, i.e., the erect soles of the feet, the hands in *bhumisparsa mudra*, or the earth-touching gesture. This is the most popular way to depict Buddha in Myanmar and symbolizes the supposed eve of enlightenment and the triumph over the suffering of the world (Bailey 1987, 79). The face was modeled, carved, and painted with lacquer; the short neck is characteristic of the so-called earlier

4. The museum’s website says: “The wall paintings in Pagan temples are quite different in artistic quality. According to the donor’s wealth, they ranged from simple and folk-like to very elaborate and refined. The one shown here is of medium quality, but is among the better ones in our collection. It is not included here for its beauty, which it certainly has, but also to commemorate the beauty of Pagan, which, due to acts of vandalism like Thomann’s, is now not complete any more. [...] This secco painting was applied to an inner wall of Theinmazi Pagoda in the 13th century. It probably shows the adversary of the Buddha, Mara, which in Burmese language is called Marat. It was probably the donation of a pious buddhist, meant to adorn the pagoda and accumulate good karma on the donor. In the early 20th Century, this fragment, together with many others, were removed from the wall and stolen by the German adventurer, Theodor Thomann. Back in Germany, he offered his acquisitions for sale via the dealer Umlauff, from whom our museum bought it [in 1907]. In the 1970s, a member of the German Bundestag (Parliament) suggested the restitution of Thomann’s looty [sic] to Burma. Talks between the foreign offices of both countries ensued. The Burmese representatives then decided to leave the pieces in the hands of our museum, since they were part of the permanent exhibition and had been preserved well, whereas in Pagan money to conserve the pagodas was then scarce” (“Wall Painting of Marnat [...]” 2013; emphasis added).

Pyu sculptures of Myanmar, the feet are shown in the lotus position, and the four fingers — except the thumb — are of the same length, which is considered part of the supernatural anatomy, and appear in Buddha images of the Pyu period and often — but not always — in Pagan. Other general characteristics of Pyu sculptures — which were also used in Pagan — are the Sarnath-Gupta-like transparent fabric in open mode, the short neck, the ear lobes that even touch the shoulders, and the beaded robe that touches the waist in front. The Buddha figure wears monastic clothing, and the cloth — *antaravasaka* — around the waist is completely covered by the robe — *uttarasanga* — which is worn openly and leaves the right shoulder free (Bailey 1971, 220—221).

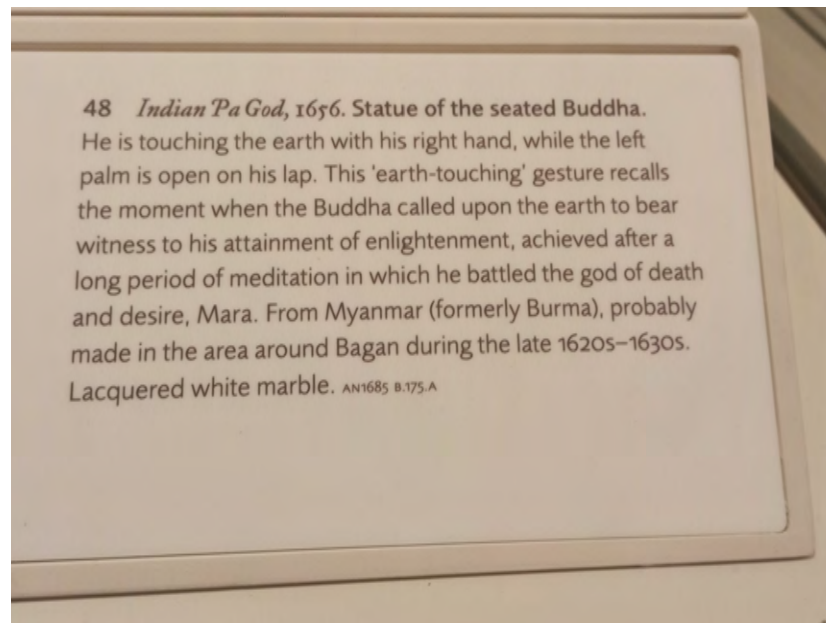


FIGURE 5.15. John Tradescant’s Buddha figure from the first half of the 17th century is now located in the *Ashmolean Museum* in Oxford (UK).

Today, this Buddha figure is part of the *Ashmolean Museum* — the oldest public museum and the first museum worldwide built for this purpose, founded in 1683 (Ovenell 1986) — in the so-called *Founding Collections* (Ashmolean Museum 2020). In 1677, Elias Ashmole — after whom

the *Ashmolean Museum* was named — donated a cabinet of curiosities⁵ to the University of Oxford (Bailey 1971, 221–222). This included a collection of rarities,⁶ which Ashmole acquired in 1659 through a deed of donation (Bailey 1971, 219, Josten 1966 Vol. II, 767–771).

The Buddha figure has been in England since at least 1656, the date on which it first appeared in the catalog of “The Ark” or the so-called *Musaeum Tradescantianum* in South Lambeth, published by John Tradescant Junior and sponsored amongst others by King George and Queen Mary (Tradescant 1656, 179–183, London 1983, 24). This catalog of 1656 describes the figure as an “Indian Pa God”⁷ (Tradescant 1656, 42), a term put on the label on the back of the image. According to Bailey (1971, 219), “pa god” means “pagod” or “pagoda,” a word used by European authors between the 15th and 19th centuries to denote Indian “idols” and not only “Buddhist” artifacts.

5. Tradescant distinguished two materials: *naturalia* — known and unknown — and *artificialia*. In an encyclopedic context, all the objects — including the Buddha figure — were of equal importance, i.e., of equal value to British collectors, whether *naturalia* or *artificialia*, real, imaginary, or mythological, as they were all considered part of universal knowledge. These “cabinets of curiosities” or “chambers of curiosities” were designed as an encyclopedic project to collect and preserve general knowledge. The earliest encyclopedic practices were set in a classical framework, with new observations and practical experiments being seen as a continuation of the works of Aristotle and Pliny the Elder. The cabinet, as a collection and exhibition site, was where the whole world and nature came together in a microcosm. Control of nature was the goal of early collecting practice and guided the ordering and cataloging of objects and artifacts. This collection’s organizing principle depended on the time’s philosophical questions. Collectors of the 16th and 17th centuries systematically categorized their possessions, and in most cases, they were recorded, exhibited, and organized. The collection allowed the collector to order nature, which gave him a unique power (Berry 2011).

6. The collection that formed the basis of the old *Ashmolean Museum* was initially compiled by a father (1570s-1638) and son (1608-1662), both gardeners and named John Tradescant (Allan 1964, Potter 2006), who had housed many artifacts in their residence in South Lambeth, which is today a part of London. This house was known as “The Ark,” referring to the Christian biblical ark of Noah. Although the Tradescants were typical collectors of their time, they differed in their claim to accessibility from their contemporaries. They were the earliest to recognize the value of their collection to the general public and opened their collection to all, regardless of status or gender, by paying an entrance fee (Berry 2011, MacGregor 1983b).

7. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (“Pagoda, n.” 2020) identifies “pagoda” as a loan word from Portuguese — and as a “distortion” of the word they found in India, which refers to “bhagavat,” the “sacred” or “divine” — and it gives numerous references and three primary meanings: (i) Hindu or Buddhist temples or religious buildings, usually multi-story towers, whose floors become smaller as they rise. This was first mentioned in 1582 by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda’s book — translated by Nicholas Lichefield — on the discovery and conquest of the East Indies: “[a]ll kings doe dye in one Pagode, which is the house of praiers to their Idolls” (34, “Pagoda, n.” 2020); (ii) a building that imitates such a temple, which was first used in 1789 (“Pagoda, n.” 2020); (iii) an image of a god, an “idol” or a decorative object made in the style of such an image. Today, this use is rare, but it was also first mentioned in 1582 by Castanheda: “And it is possible that for they causes the Pagodes will not aide nor helpe me as they have done before time” (140, “Pagoda, n.” 2020).

The second edition of the catalog of 1685 described the figure as “Deus aut Idolum indicum pae God vulgo (dictum)”⁸ (Harle 1983, 183–184). An earlier date for the collection is entirely possible — when it was compiled by John Tradescant the Elder, who died in 1638 — since art historian Jane Terry Bailey (1971, 221) assumes that the artifact was only made shortly before it came to England⁹. According to Bailey, it is likely that an officer or an official of the English *East India Company* in Ava received the marble Buddha as a gift and sent it to England as a curiosity. It is also possible that one of the two Tradescants bought it in England shortly after 1635. The earliest possible date would be just after 1647,¹⁰ but not much later, as it is listed in the inventory in 1652¹¹ (222). Bailey said all marble portraits came from the Pagán region between Natpallin and Myingyan (227).

4.2.3. Engelbert Kaempfer’s Two Kannon Figures and the British Museum

Two Japanese Kannon¹² figures (figs. 5.16–5.17) are part of London’s *British Museum*.

(i) The first figure — with the inventory number SLMisc.1837.a-b, where “SL” stands for “Sloane Library” — whose height is not indicated but visually appears twice as large as the second

8. The translation into English is: God or Idol from India, commonly called a “pae God.”

9. Until 1635 the capital of “Lower Burma” was Pegu — which was then moved to Ava — making it unlikely that the Buddha image could have come to Europe from “Upper Burma” before that date. It may be that the statue came to Europe shortly after that by Portuguese, Dutch, or British private traders, either directly or through the intermediary of Muslims trading between Burma and India. According to Bailey, however, it is improbable that a Buddha image would have been recognized as a commodity by 17th-century European merchants or Muslims because of their abhorrence of so-called “idols.” In 1647, the English *East India Company* — which had previously paid little attention to Burma — opened a factory in Syriam near Rangoon — now Yangon — with a subordinate station in Ava, both of which remained active until 1657 (Bailey 1971, 221–222).

10. In a description by the German travel writer and book collector Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach (1754), the figure is described as follows (Welch 1983, 66): “In a case, there was an Indian idol, or, as the custodian called it, Brachmanus, very well made. He also identified it as an unknown stone, *but it seemed to me to be a kind of soapstone from which the Indians commonly make their idols*, although it has red veins, which has never been seen before, and is very smooth. *The ridiculous fellow who showed us the things, who is a sub-custodian and scholar (then the custodian himself, Mr. Parray, cannot show the museum to strangers because he gorges and guzzles)* pretended in earnest that the material in this idol was made of boiled rice, and was thus colored” (Uffenbach 1754, 126–127; translated by author; emphasis added).

11. This inventory is mentioned in Josten 1966, Volume I, 91, and Volume II, 621–622.

12. A Kannon is a so-called bodhisattva, or more precisely: it is the 觀世音菩薩/Guanjin (觀世音菩薩)/Kannon. “Kannon” literally means “the holder of the Padma [lotus],” which is why he is the *bodhisattva* of compassion or mercy. Kannon appears very early in India and is known there as “Padmapani,” “Lokesvara,” and “Sadaksari”; it is also one of the two accompanying *bodhisattvas* of Buddha Amithaba, who usually stands on his left side and carries a lotus pedestal. In Sanskrit, he is called “Avalokiteśvara,” in Tibetan “Chenrezi,” in Chinese “Guanyin,” and in Japanese “Kannon” or “Kanzeon” (The British Museum 2020b).

figure, is made of bronze and gold, and lacquered and gilded wood. It is a collapsible, erectable, and portable oval travel altar in which the Kannon figure is placed. The right arm of this figure is holding its chest, while its hand is pointing upwards; the figure and the inner flap are gold-plated, it wears a black headdress, and around the whole figure is a black “halo,” it stands on a lotus flower. Under the figure, there is a pedestal decorated with different ornaments. At the lower end of the pedestal, the number “SL.1837” and next to it in the middle of the bottom, a “38” were put on. The base of the travel altar is modeled in black. The *British Museum* dates the figure to the 17th century and exhibits it in the building part “G1/fc19” (The British Museum 2020a and The British Museum 2020b).

(ii) The second travel altar — with the inventory number SLMisc.1078¹³ — is also made of varnished wood. With 8.5cm in height, this artifact is only half the size of the first artifact, with the inventory number SLMisc.1837.a-b. It also includes a Kannon figure, which is not gilded, but the travel altar inside is. The hands of the figure are folded in a gesture of prayer in front of the chest, and the fingers point upwards. It also stands on a pedestal with a golden halo around it; the figure is standing on a lotus flower, and below is a pedestal decorated with different ornaments. Unlike the other travel altar, no inventory numbers are attached to it. The travel altar also has a black base. The travel altar with the Kannon figure dates from before 1692 and is made of gold, black lacquer, and wood. The figure is also displayed in the *British Museum*’s room “G1/fc19”. The travel altar contrasts the golden background with the aureole and the carved, unpainted Kannon statue itself, whereby it thus combines “shintoistic tree cult” and Buddhism. The Bodhisattva Kannon is depicted as a “thousand-armed Kannon,” i.e., usually with 40 arms and nine or eleven heads (The British Museum 2020b and The British Museum 2020e).

Both Kannon figures were bequeathed to the *British Museum* through a contract by Sir Hans Sloane¹⁴ (1660-1753), the “Benefactor of the British Museum,” as a plaque at 4 Bloomsbury Place in London — only a few meters from the museum — says (fig. 5.18). The so-called *Sloane*

13. This artifact was on loan and exhibited in Berlin’s *Martin-Gropius-Bau* from September 12 to December 12, 1993, for the “Japan and Europe: 1543–1929” exhibition (The British Museum 2020b and The British Museum 2020e).

14. Sloane was a respected academic, intellectual, and collector, but he originally came from Ireland and was a trained physician who had studied in London and France. In 1712, he became the physician of Queen Anne and later also of George I and George II; in 1716, he was appointed knight, and between 1727 and 1741, Sloane was president of the *Royal Society* and thus the direct successor of Sir Isaac Newton. Sloane bequeathed his library, antique collections, works of art, and natural curiosities to the nation of Great Britain for the sum of 20,000 British pounds to be given to his daughters (The British Museum 2020c, MacGregor 1994).

Collections formed the primary basis of the original collection of the *British Museum*, although they were sold for a quarter of their value in the year of Sloane's death in 1753 (The British Museum 2020c, MacGregor 1994).

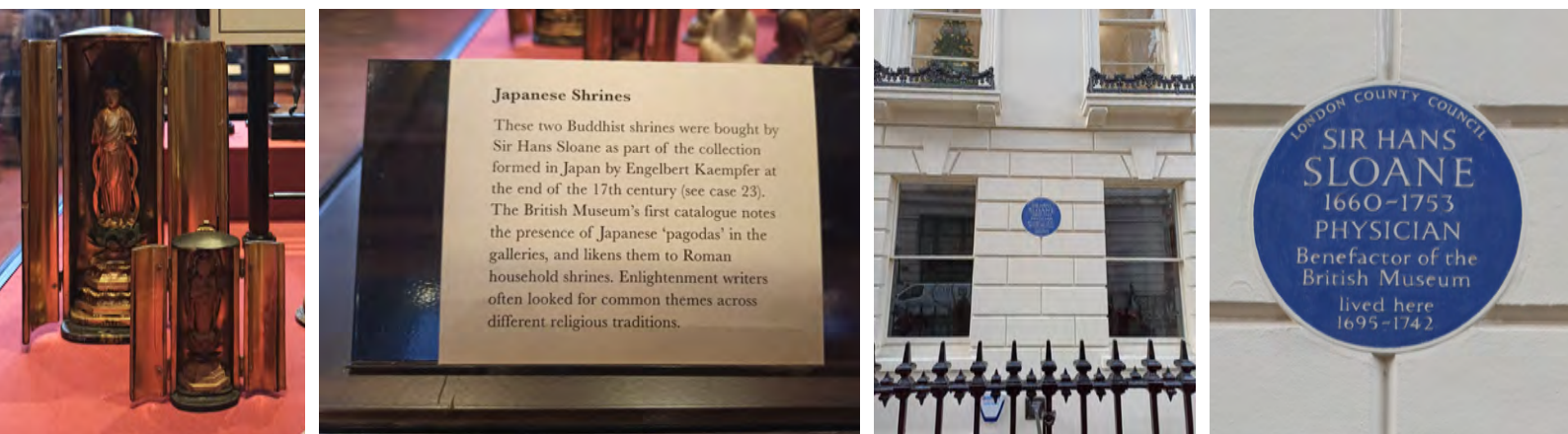


FIGURE 5.16. *Left*, Two Kannon figures in the *British Museum* in London (UK).

FIGURE 5.17. *Second left*, Description of two Kannon figures in the *British Museum* in London (UK).

FIGURE 5.18. *Second right and right*, House and plaque where Sir Hans Sloane lived between 1695 and 1742 at 4 Bloomsbury Place in London (UK).

Sloane was not the first owner of this collection¹⁵ but took it over after purchasing Engelbert Kaempfer's¹⁶ (1651–1716) collection. His remains — but not his library — were purchased by Sloane between 1723–1725. Kaempfer's notes, drawings, and collections were distributed to the *British Library* and the *British Museum* (The British Museum 2020d).

15. Sloane heard of Kaempfer's death and arranged a purchase through Kaempfer's widow and especially his nephew Johann Hermann Kaempfer, which is why subsequently — between 1723 and 1725 — all material was sent to Sloane's home address in London, which was published in 1727 by the *Royal Society* (The British Museum 2020e, The British Museum 2020b).

Sloane also bought the unpublished manuscript on the history of Japan, which was translated into English and printed by his librarian Johann Caspar Scheuchzer and published in two volumes in 1727 by the *Royal Society*, of which Sloane was president at the time. This work became the standard source of Western knowledge about Japan right into the 19th century (The British Museum 2020d).

16. There are various spellings of his name: i.e., Kaempfer, Kämpfer, Kämpffer, etc. Kaempfer — who had stayed in Batavia (today's Jakarta), Thailand, and Japan — was one of the first to understand that the so-called “idol worship” of the Thais and the Japanese would represent the same figure: Buddha (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 1). The notion that these “idols” represent the same person was probably already assumed by Marco Polo in 1290 (13—14) in *The Travels of Marco Polo*, written down by Rustichello da Pisa and published around 1300 (1982).

Kaempfer, in turn, was a famous doctor and explorer who had — among other places — traveled in Asia and Japan. Kaempfer was born in Lemgo (Germany) and joined the Swedish embassy in 1683. Between 1685 and 1688, he was employed by the Dutch *United East India Company* (*Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, short: *VOC*), with whom in 1690 he came to Nagasaki (Japan) and thereby was the first doctor in a Dutch station in Japan. In 1691 and 1692, he accompanied one embassy each to the shōgun in Edo (today's Tokyo) and returned to Amsterdam in 1693 and Lemgo in 1694 (The British Museum 2020d).

Kaempfer himself “acquired” the two Kannon figures directly in Japan: he took over the position of factory doctor at Dejima, the Dutch base of Nagasaki, on September 25, 1690, and did not know the Japanese language (Haberland 1993, 84). At this time, the import of Christian objects was strictly forbidden and punishable by law, as was the collection and export of information and objects from and about Japan. Since most Dutch people did not learn Japanese then, communication was handled through “mediators.” Due to various historical reasons¹⁷, only Dutch people were allowed to trade in Japan, albeit completely controlled by Japanese authorities. The *VOC* enjoyed the sole trading rights for Japan and, in 1641, moved to the Dutch *factorij* (factory) on Dejima island at Nagasaki, while the rest of Japan remained closed to them. No other port of call was allowed, and all goods and travelers were closely monitored (85). However, in the young Imamura Gen’emon Eisei, Kaempfer had a so-called “supervisor” or servant who stood by his side as a friend and helper. He was threatened with death if he was discovered, yet he obtained all the information and objects — like the two Kannon figures — Kaempfer asked him for. As a result, Kaempfer was one of the first Europeans to be able to conduct Japanese studies despite the strict prohibitions in Japan (85–86). Kaempfer collected information on Japanese medicine, botany, the local language, and religions, and he also drew maps and collected pictures and books (86). In terms of contact between Europe and Japan, Kaempfer can be considered one of the great European pioneers (93).

4.2.4. Advertising, Tattoos, and Bars in South-East Asia

The *VGastro.bar Buddha.bar* in Myanmar — the former colony of British Burma — tells a specific story of mediating and branding Buddha. The *New Zealand Herald* reported on April 6, 2015, that 32-year-old bar manager Philip Blackwood — a British and New Zealand national — had been arrested in Myanmar for using an image of Buddha to promote his bar in Yangon (formerly Rangoon). He was abandoned by the British Foreign Office (“Man Jailed [...]” 2015). The three defendants were arrested in December 2014 for “insulting religion” and disrespecting a public official. They were sentenced in March 2015 to two and a half years imprisonment with two years of hard labor, particularly for the “insult.” The bar in Yangon’s Bahan district had just opened in December 2014 and is closed today (“Tears flow [...]” 2016).

17. The situation was complicated after Portuguese missionaries tried to establish Catholic missions in Japan since the middle of the 16th century, which was initially accepted but was later increasingly suppressed. There was a shift among the European competitors for the Japanese monopoly: the Portuguese had spread Christianity there and had to leave the country in 1637 (Haberland 1993, 85).

The object of the dispute was an image of Buddha in bright colors with DJ headphones on his head, which was uploaded on *Facebook* (fig. 5.19), resulting in a storm of protest led by “devout Buddhists.” Blackwood was convicted, along with the Myanmar owner and another manager. However, they had “profusely” apologized for posting the picture, and all three — religious traditional Buddhists or not — received the same punishment. Human rights activists lamented the conditions at the notorious Insein prison, where Blackwood was to be sent. As a result, his role as a married father of a young daughter was repeatedly highlighted. There were also complaints that the British government did not support Blackwood, who lived in Middlesbrough until his family moved to New Zealand when he was four. Middlesbrough MP (member of parliament) Andy McDonald expressed compassion: “Philip Blackwood has been *unjustly* imprisoned for an *honest mistake*.” This local event soon became translocal and global in which the British Embassy in Yangon informed and supported the New Zealand government about Blackwood’s case (“Man Jailed [...]” 2015; emphasis added).

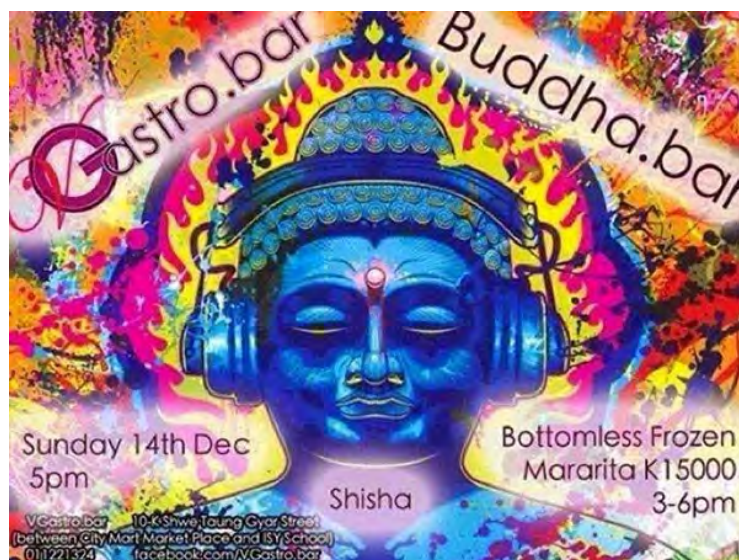


FIGURE 5.19. Advertising flyer for a Buddha bar at 10-K Shwe Taung Kyar Street, Yangon, Myanmar.

Blackwood was arrested with his two Myanmar business partners, Htut Ko Ko Lwin and Tun Thurein because they had violated a law that forbids the display of words and images that would be deliberately religiously offensive. The case was of an extremely “sensitive nature,” as Phil Robertson — Asia Director of New York-based *Human Rights Watch* — wrote that “[t]he practice and defense of religion has gone to a more extreme stage in Burma” and added that there is an “effective criminalization of expression of views that go against some of the more extreme forms of Buddhism” (Lesley 2014).

Only a few hours after the flyer appeared on the *Facebook* profile of *VGastro.bar*, the post was already shared thousands of times. However, the flyer was quickly removed by the three detainees and replaced by an apology. This incident led Alison Lesley to believe that Buddha is a popular decorative “ornament” in homes, gardens, clothing, and jewelry in the so-called “West,” while in Asian countries — like Myanmar — the same things are considered “offensive” or even “blasphemous” (Lesley 2014). On January 29, 2016, Blackwood was released after a presidential amnesty granted a pardon to 102 prisoners. Until then, Blackwood had spent thirteen months in Yangon’s Insein Prison, whereafter he returned to the capital of New Zealand — Wellington — to his daughter Sasha, now sixteen months old (“Tears flow [...]” 2016).

This case study is no exception: a Sri Lankan court had suspended jail terms for three French tourists “for wounding the religious feelings of Buddhists by taking pictures deemed insulting” because in these pictures, they pretended to kiss the Buddha figure (“Pictures: Kissing Buddha [...]” 2012). Another British tourist — Antony Ratcliffe — was “shocked” after he was deported from Sri Lanka for publicly showing a Buddha tattoo on his arm (fig. 5.20), which was understood as “allegedly showing a lack of respect for Buddhism” while for Ratcliffe the tattoo — which he got in Myanmar — was both “inoffensive” and “meant as a tribute” (“The British Tourist [...]” 2013).



FIGURE 5.20. *Left*, Antony Ratcliffe with Buddha tattoo on his arm.

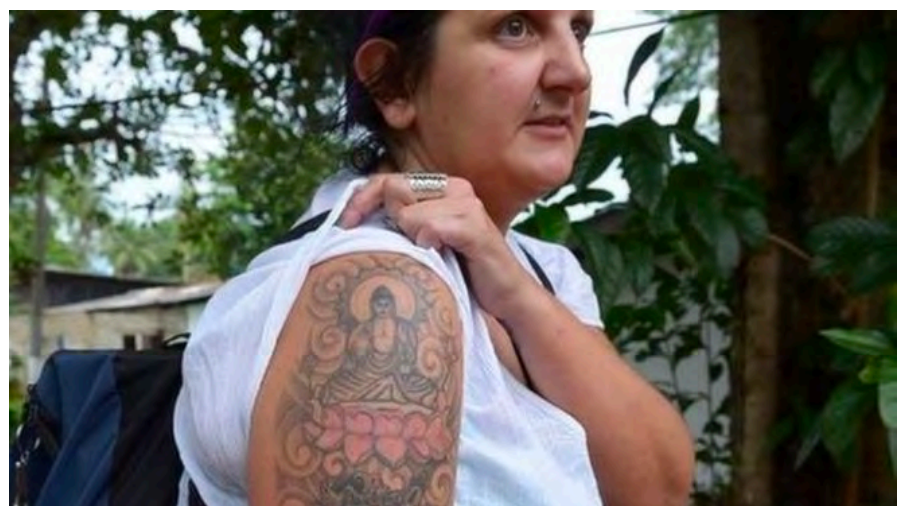


FIGURE 5.21. *Right*, Naomi Coleman with a Buddha tattoo on her arm.

Naomi Coleman was also deported from Sri Lanka for having a Buddha tattoo on her arm (fig. 5.21). However, she gained 800,000 Sri Lankan rupees in compensation — about \$5,374 — because she was detained for four days in April 2014. Sri Lanka’s Supreme Court said there was no “legal basis” for her arrest. In addition, her treatment there, especially by some officers, was “scandalous and horrifying.” One guard was “degrading,” having “made several lewd, obscene, and disparaging remarks of a sexually-explicit nature” towards her. Coleman said that she had practiced Buddhism and attended workshops and retreats in South-East Asian countries (“Buddha Tattoo Woman [...]” 2017). Some monks, like Venerable Walpola Piyananda (2014), shared sympathy for Coleman and even thanked her for wearing a tattoo on her upper arm.

These incidents happened even though 100,000 British citizens visited Sri Lanka in 2012 — accounting for 10% of all tourists — and the UK is Sri Lanka’s second-largest trading partner, after India (“The British Tourist [...]” 2013). However, due to these incidents, the government of the United Kingdom advised its inhabitants before traveling to Sri Lanka to cover their legs and shoulders, to take off hats and hoods when entering pagodas, not to have visible Buddha tattoos, and not to pose for photographs in front of Buddha statues (“Sri Lanka.”, n.d.).

The *Buddha Bar Sabah*¹⁸ changed its naming in Malaysia after the “Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia (YBAM) urged the City Hall to revoke its licence.” The naming was considered “blasphemous against the holy Buddha,” so the young owner Ethan Chung quickly renamed the bar *Peacock Garden* and apologized for the controversial name (Dangin 2013). The reactions to this incident were quite mixed, but there were some proponents of Buddha bars,¹⁹

18. The publicity bureau chief of the MCA — a political party in Malaysia that represents the Malaysian Chinese ethnic — Datuk Heng Seai Kie, commented on this case as follows: “*As a devout Buddhist, the name ‘Buddha Bar’ is not only disrespectful to the revered Buddha but even more detrimental to the holiness of Buddhism. By putting ‘Buddha’ in the bar’s title, they had placed Buddha next to the unhealthy substance, alcohol, linking the two as equals. Drinking alcohol is not only a violation of the Five Precepts of Buddhism, it also goes against five thousand years of Buddhist culture*” (Dangin 2013; emphasis added).

19. Proponents of Buddha bars are cited as follows: “Buddha Bars exist all over the world. And again..., only in Malaysia it will incur the wrath of a deity. There must be something else very wrong with the way Malaysia treats its religions, when it makes ALL gods so angry over minor, minor things” (Dangin 2013). “Leave them alone for God sake....why the politician always fuss something...there [are] a lot of crimes need to be taking care of...Just do your bloody attention to more important things instead of creating unnecessary issue... People do charity...they have their own way.....It’s not your family business...unless the person want to have under table share is it? *Buddha Bar is proper name...Sushi Bar...Burger Bar....Do those politicians understand or not the meaning of Bar...*” (Dangin 2013; emphasis added; mistakes unchanged).

In 2010, the French-owned *Buddha-Bar* chain opened one restaurant in Indonesia's capital Jakarta, which was "drawing protests from Buddhists who said the use of their religious symbols in a venue serving alcohol was an affront to their religion" (Schonhardt 2013). One hundred years ago, the specific building into which the bar moved was founded as the so-called *Netherlands-Indies Kunstkring* (Art Circle) gallery in former Batavia, which became a famous art institute, especially for high-ranking Europeans. Since then, it changed function several times, but in 2002 it was purchased by the city of Jakarta for 28 billion rupees — around \$2.3 million — and renovated for a further 6.1 billion rupees in 2015, both by governor Sutiyoso, under the promise of opening for public use. However, he then turned it over to his daughter, who used it to open the *Buddha-Bar*, which she also co-owned. Buddhists and anti-corruption activists then attacked the bar until it was closed by court order in 2010. Since 2013, the building has inhabited the *Kunstkring* again ("Buddhists to hold [...]" 2013, Siregar 2013). In July 2010, hundreds of Indonesian Buddhists protested against this local branch of the *Buddha-Bar*, in a protest organized by the *Anti Buddha Bar Forum (ABBF)*. Other Buddhist organizations critiqued the *ABBF*, but ultimately "a district court ruled that Buddha Bar offends followers of the faith," and they had to pay \$111,000 in fines ("Debasing the Buddha [...]" 2010).²⁰ On the one hand, record stores in Dubai "black out the image of the Buddha" on the *Buddha-Bar* CDs to avoid so-called "idolatry," while on the other hand, the restaurant itself was allowed to build a two-story Buddha figure within their building (Vora 2013, 46).²¹

4.3. RELIGION — Religious Buddhist Mediators in Marketing and Individualism

The term *homo religiosus* is Latin for a "religious person" and was coined by religious studies scholar Mircea Eliade — belonging to the phenomenology of religion — and it is thus increasingly problematic to use for so-called *cultural studies of religion*. According to Eliade, only a

20. On this specific *Buddha-Bar*, Anthony Deutsch from the *Financial Times* blog wrote ("Debasing the Buddha [...]" 2010): "Located in a beautifully renovated colonial building in the upscale Menteng neighborhood, Buddha-Bar draws affluent Jakartans to plush sofas and cocktails. However, its centrepiece, a giant Buddha statue, and the Buddha-Bar name itself have drawn protests from student groups in Indonesia who say such use of religious symbols is offensive. *Buddha-Bar has never been targeted elsewhere by international Buddhist groups and it's curious that the suit has been lodged in the world's largest Muslim-majority nation – where Buddhism is virtually non-existent*. The lawyer for the bar said the suit should not even have been filed in a civil court, but rather in a trade court" ("Debasing the Buddha [...]" 2010).

21. Two of the few Buddha-Bars that were closed and not located in South-East Asia are the *Buddha-Bar* in Washington D.C., which closed in 2012 — after it had just been founded in 2010 — because "it struggled after a poor critical reception," and the *Buddha-Bar* in New York City, which had to change its name "after a legal dispute with the parent company" (Frederick 2012) to *Ajna Bar* ("Debasing the Buddha [...]" 2010).

religious person is a true human being who can develop his whole “nature,” which is why his concept is heavily based on the dichotomy of *sacred-profane* — i.e., *religion vs. non-religion* — as well as an archaic ontology that would stand behind all phenomena (Saliba 1976). When the religious studies scholar and Egyptologist Jan Assmann, together with the religious studies scholar Harald Strohm recently published an anthology called *Homo Religiosus* (2019), in which this very concept is examined from different historical — and primarily theological — perspectives, and the question is addressed whether religion is a human disposition or not, for all variety that the volume certainly offers, the definition of *religion* on which it is based — not unlike Eliade’s — is one that (i) distinguishes between sacred and profane, (ii) refers to a classical understanding of religious traditions — Ancient Egypt, Christianity, and Islam — and (iii) excludes mediators, popular culture, branding, and consumption from religion.

However, as Kathryn Lofton (2011) has argued, if one does not examine culture — aka non-religion — and religion as sharply separated from each other, one would be less surprised by their constant mixing and “to study modern religion—to study the modern American economy—requires thinking of these categories as conjoined, and not distinct” (10). If Lofton’s religious “troika” (2011) or Prohl’s “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112) reaches all areas of popular and everyday life, religion runs through the dichotomy of *sacred vs. secular*. It leads to *transreligion*, where (i) the secular becomes something religious and (ii) religion becomes something completely ordinary (fig. 5.22, left). While Mircea Eliade defined *homo religiosus* on the difference between sacred and profane (fig. 5.22, right), the *homo religiosus reloaded* turns Eliade on his head. The difference between sacred and profane is broken up because profanity is itself religious by defining religion as (i) the message sent to specific actors, which converts and changes them totally, which is thus (ii) both Slavoj Žižek’s “living in the end times” (2010) as well as Bruno Latour’s “living in the end of time in time” (2015c) by fulfilling assumed “beyonds” in the present here and now (thus combining immanence and transcendence): secularism generates the end of time in time and converts people of assumed “beyonds” just as much as the so-called *sacred* does but *in this world*.

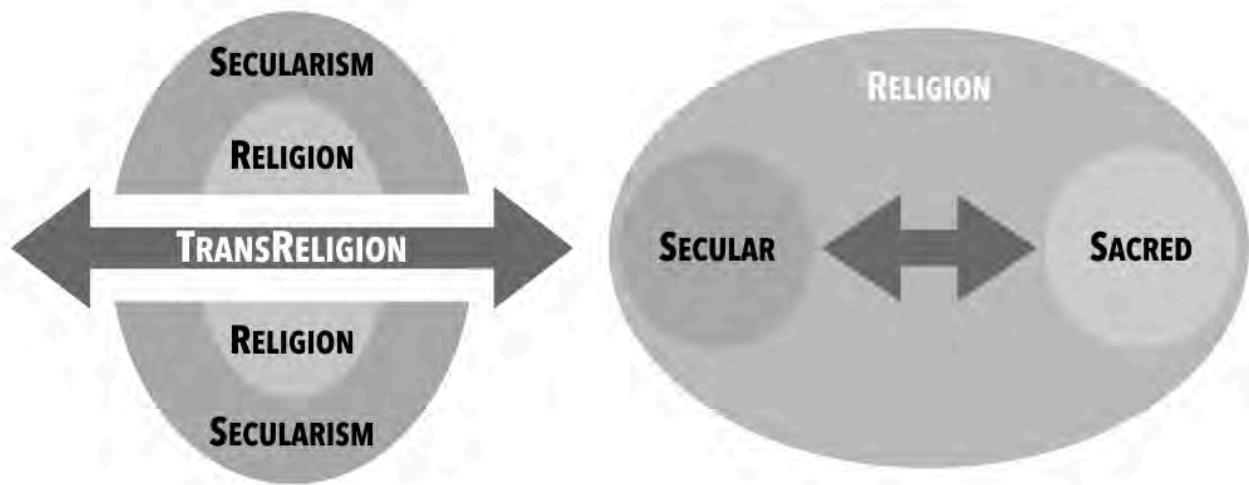


FIGURE 5.22. Diagram illustrating transreligion (left) and traditional secularity (right) in relation to religion and the secular.

Secularizing people means colonizing actors, their bodies and minds, and the worlds in which they live through multiple utopias, like Marlon Xavier’s work on the utopia of commodities and consumption has shown (2018, 332). The appearance of companies, brands, and products with Buddhist mediators, namings, aesthetics, or mindfulness moving into corporate structures points to modernist gaps. Buddhist mediators are often involved in temporarily filling and closing these gaps, but the gaps themselves more strongly relate to the actors and less to Buddhism. These actors are still nonmodern: they like to distinguish between knowledge-belief, rational-irrational, modern-nonmodern, and progressive-regressive.

At the core of these constructions of assumed “beyonds” lies the modern desire to distinguish between an old/bad self and a new/better self to live in a near-perfect world of facts and objectivity at the end of progress. When modernity has never happened — as Latour has famously argued — and should therefore more or less “not be eaten as hot as it is cooked,” actors, unlike their self-perception, act religiously in their aim for “beyonds” and their passion for conversions. This positively affects neoliberal mediations like branding, consumption, companies, and nation states. However, it also has adverse effects: widening the gap between rich and poor, greater individualism at the expense of collectivity, etc.

When the dichotomy of religious and non-religious, sacred and profane, is lost, religion also loses its status of something “special” and “extraordinary” and thus becomes something ordinary and everyday. It may be unusual for many actors to frame as “religious” when they walk past a smiling Buddha figure when buying soap from the pharmacist, be encouraged to live happier and

healthier lives or attend a yoga class in the evening. Not only visiting a church might be considered religious, but buying soap because the Buddha in the display case smiled nicely. Imagining everyday life and popular culture without religious conversions within neoliberal-consumerist and increasingly globalizing societies seems impossible.

This is why actors could be called “homo religiosus reloaded,” as everyday and popular cultural activities such as consumption, yoga classes, and visiting a *Buddha-Bar*. They both use mediated branding and create themselves as brands. Actors create assumed “beyonds,” e.g., by consuming their present self as optimizable and practicing physical or mental optimization. In all these practices, actors *act* religiously, which is essential because it turns Eliade on his head — across the “sacred vs. profane” or “religion vs. secularism” paradigm since the profane and the secular are also religious, as Latour has already recognized. When religion is no longer anything out of the ordinary, nothing out of every day, actors live in deeply religious worlds. Neoliberal and consumption-based lifestyles also seem to offer profoundly religious contexts in simulating new, ideal, and perfect worlds, as will be investigated in greater detail in chapter 6.2.2. “Simulations and the Homo Mediaticus.”

In contrast to non-neoliberal societies — as seen from the debate on the *VGastro bar* in Yangon (Myanmar) in chapter 4.2.4. “Advertising, Tattoos, and Bars in South-East Asia” — branding and consumption are not understood religiously and are even interpreted as a denigration of religion. Branding, consumption, neoliberalism, and traditional religious Buddhism are altogether very religious, which is the conflict between two different forms of religion in a kind of iconoclasm.

By identifying the secular actor as another kind of religious actor, one has to redefine what a religious actor means since there is no opposite, like a non-religious actor. First, actors can be identified as recycling and bricolaging religious, traditional resources for their neoliberal-consumerist needs. Second, it can also be determined that time and space do not develop linearly, which means that transtemporal and translocal practices are increasingly common in urban and cosmopolitan contexts. Third and finally, religion seems to be mediational: actors simulate other (better) worlds and relationships with other — human and non-human — actors and convert others and themselves to something new and transformed. This happens *within immanence* because religiously secular actors have immanentized transcendence, but this immanent non-religious space is trying to bring heaven on Earth and is thus inherently religious.

It is important to note that this *religiosity* has no non-religious counterpart: just as there is no non-mediation, there is no non-religion, and the same is valid for *secularism*. The idea that there is an *irreligious realm* next to the religious domain is a modern and secularist utopia, which was made necessary since the 16th century, when the power of the church was transferred to — something that may resemble — the state to prove which of the two realms is temporally and evolutionarily advanced, more modern and rational, and which is the exact opposite. This new state had the same functions as the church; the ordering towards a transcendent entity was kept alive but just changed names.

When actors are consuming things, buying identities, using brands, and becoming a brand themselves, this is *religious*, which is why religion is everywhere and quite ordinary. As Inken Prohl (2016) has noted, there is a state of “oversaturation with religion,” thus, religious phenomena are everywhere (2004b). However, religious oversaturation has probably been happening for a very long time — at least since the 16th century — which is why actors have tended to build religious worlds around them. Various forms of gods transcend human beings, although they are not restricted to a world that is beyond that of actors — heaven, karma, nirvāṇa, etc. — they have created a multitude of *things* that transcend them, like AI — or technology in general — which aims to reduce or even prevent diseases, death and finally suffering *within this world*. In other words, actors have created worlds in which they are surrounded by many *ends of times in time* or assumed “beyonds” (the neoliberal market, money, a happy and optimized self), messages that positively change their selves and lives.

Therefore, if actors have always been some “homo religiosus” — especially in the secular and political versions — the question arises whether the quantity of these *religions* is increasing and spreading in neoliberal and consumer-oriented societies. What does it mean for actors and collectives to seek religious environments in this world?

Does this mean that everything becomes religion and religion becomes “banal,” as some (Hjarvard 2008, Hjarvard 2010, Hjarvard 2016) have criticized? According to Timothy Fitzgerald (2017a), “[t]he problem then is that if everything is religion then nothing is” (171; emphasis added), but this thesis has tried to demonstrate that this is slightly more complicated. The *Religion* clothing store in London’s 154 Brick Lane — with which this study began in the introduction — underlines the presence of *Religion* that is not quite a religion but secularism that somehow needs this religious language, as well as its mediators and aesthetics, which again attracts people (fig. 5.23).



FIGURE 5.23. So-called *Religion* clothing store at 154 Brick Lane, London (UK).

Religion *simulates, mediates, and brands* any content — regardless of how it was created in the first place or where it “originated” — by transforming it into a new consumerist and neoliberal context. Religion also tends to dominate all other modes, like arguing that Buddhism is just religious, or when it is not religious, what parts of it are that wrong to be excluded from the category. However, the actual *need* for images, simulations, and mediators is rooted in — as Latour has explained — the old Western idea of iconicity vs. iconoclasm, which is, in its origin, nothing but the philosophy of *counter religions*: religion A fighting *against* religion B. This is why there are — at least — three answers to Fitzgerald’s claim:

- (i) The argument of saying “if A is everywhere, then A does not exist” ignores the fact that A might exist while simultaneously non-A is also to be considered as A, since — as Part I of this thesis aimed to show — many practices, which are usually not regarded as religious — for instance, mediators, neoliberalism and branding — fulfill religious functions.
- (ii) There are non-religious discursive contexts like the global warming catastrophe or Gaia, which this thesis has tried to identify in the introductory chapter 1.3.5.5. “The Secular as the Terrestrial: Gaia, or the Global Climate Crisis.”

(iii) Most importantly, Fitzgerald’s (2017b) claim that religion would then become “a useless abstraction” (436—437) ignores the issue that (a) publications on (i) and (ii) are still sporadic and (b) as Part II of this thesis tries to illustrate: there are plenty of other ways to describe and study phenomena like Buddha brands beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm. These different ways may *unchain* secularism, Buddhism, and other objects — or, to use the German term “Gegenstände,” which etymologically is something that “opposes” (coming from “gegenstehen”) — of study from the shackles of *religious vs. secular*, because this very paradigm transforms complex worlds in which actors live into simplified binaries that are easy to understand like a double-click.

Three characteristics of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm can thus be determined: (i) translations and movements from “religious” to “secular” can be understood better as moving from *religion A* to *religion B*, (ii) the religious and the secular thus cannot be distinguished in the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, and (iii) Buddhism, consumerism as well as religious studies — and many more — should not accept that they are *frozen*²² on the religious or secular “side,” but that (a) they can be *secular and religious* at the same time, and they (b) are closer to each other — within a flattened network of associations and compositions — when one starts to accept that this secular-religious divide has never happened, and actors rather live in a compositionist world, in which multiplicity should be protected, instead of choosing — somewhat strange — sides. The relations between the religious and secular — or various secularisms A and B — (fig. 5.24) are manifold, primarily when one uses a definition of religion that extends beyond “world religions” and includes culture, nature, capitalism, brands, mediators, neoliberalism, science²³, etc.: (i) secularism is a religion in itself, and religion has no opposite, (ii) religion-secular is a mediatory performance, which means that the gap between the supposed *two* is more of a flat network character than a dichotomy and reprise secularism again and again; and finally, (iii) the post-secular is defined as a plurality of various templates — political, scientific, transformative, religious — that are all equally true.

22. On this topic, see, for instance, Latour 2005b.

23. For instance, Silke Gülker has investigated formations of transcendence or religion within science for a decade (2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c).

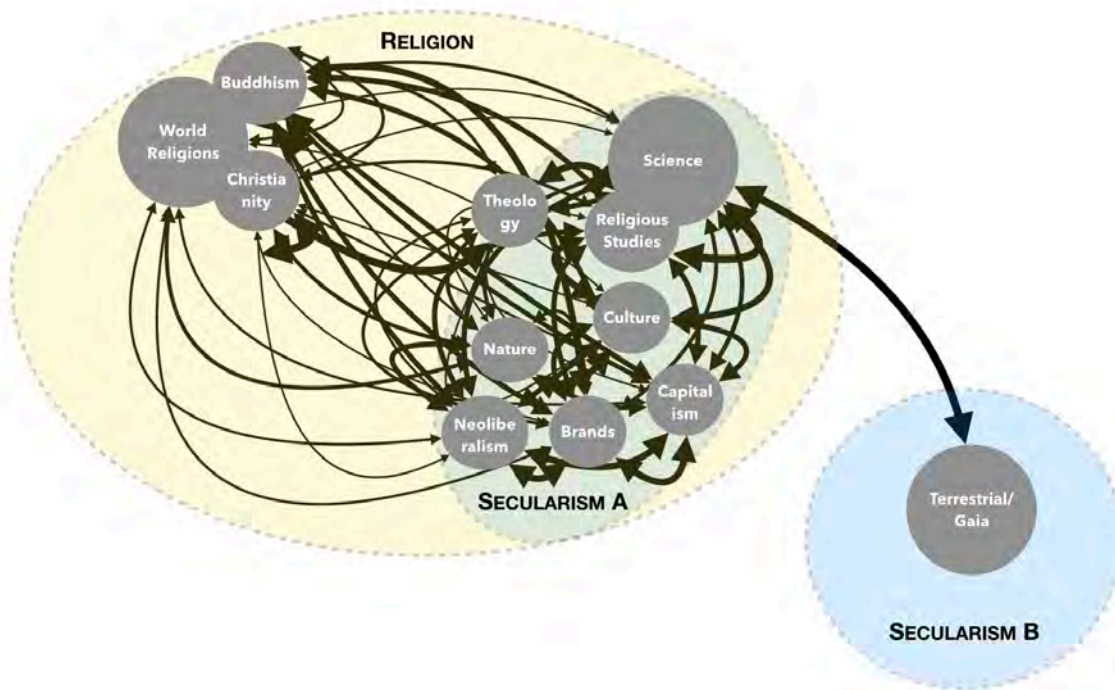


FIGURE 5.24. Diagram illustrating religious studies and theology concerning religion, secularism A and secularism B.

The dichotomy of *secular vs. religious* — which Latour has called the *secularization front* — creates a distinction between (i) the states of *belief* and *knowledge* — which is a category mistake because religion is reduced to the irrational — as well as (ii) a *before* and *after*, and (iii) it (de)values every other collective according to this paradigm. This thesis has found that to sustain the *knowledge* state for *secularism*, it is necessary to *secularize* — or make *knowledge-able* — religious, non-secular, or belief-like matters of concern through three modes: (i) the gathering of actants (humans and non-humans), (ii) the assembling, bricolaging, and mixing, and (iii) the mediating, gaps, voids, and empty signifiers. This translation process, which in this thesis is called *secularization* and which is not to be mistaken with the general assumption of a retreat or even loss of religion, while — as this study has tried to show — precisely the opposite is the case allows that exists from various *religions* and *beliefs* — or counter-religions — can be transferred and transformed to the *knowledge* sphere, which supposedly is more advanced and progressive. Thus, *secularization* makes Buddhism, Buddhist mediators, branding, consumerism, and neoliberalism apparent as knowledge and belief (figs. 5.25–5.26).

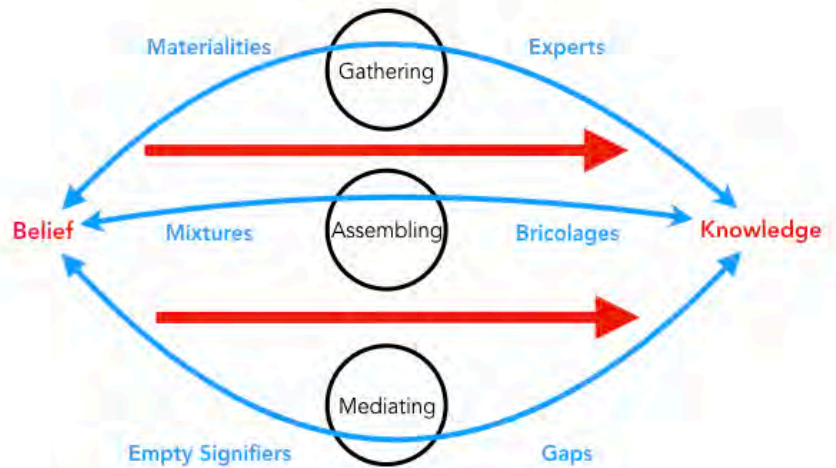
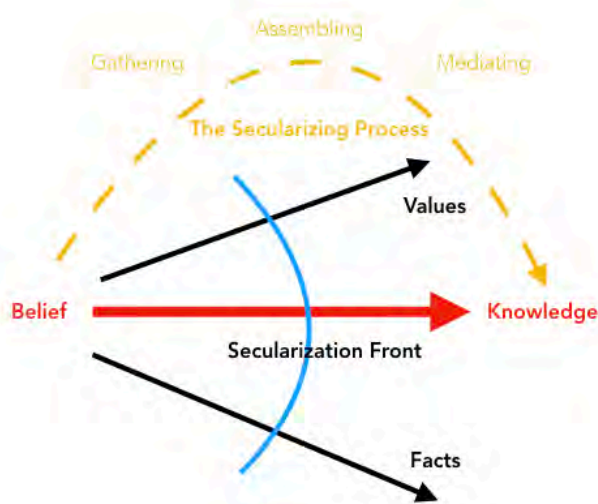


FIGURE 5.25. *Left*, Diagram showing the secularizing process from belief to knowledge through the *secularization front*.

FIGURE 5.26. *Right*, Diagram showing the secularizing process from belief to knowledge gathering materialities and experts, assembling mixtures and bricolages, and mediating empty signifiers and gaps.

This thesis will try to illustrate that the line between religion and secularism has always been more a “theorized entity” than a “practiced thing.” Actors have always surrounded themselves with secular things. At the same time, they seem to be religiously obsessed with them by idolizing and transforming them — for instance — into museum artifacts, company names, shopping windows, handbags, and anything else that one can think of. These very *objects* human actors create are religiously embedded with them: (i) *objects* or *things* are messages to change, transform and convert actors, and (ii) these *things* go beyond the subjects who have created them in complex networks in the first place.

In this thesis, religion is investigated not as Buddhist traditions alone, but — as Latour has defined “religion” — as these situations where agents are converted or transformed into new, completely different people than they were before, which is — for instance — the case in branded mediators and neoliberalism. Actors consume Buddhist mediators everywhere, which offer them improvements, and optimizations, all of which take place in the here and now. No outside of this world is necessary because AI, yoga, beauty and health products, environmental awareness, and much more are all possible in the present. However, not immediately, but “sometime,” which is the same “beyond” as it is present in the so-called “religious traditions” like the assumptions of heaven, karma, nirvāṇa, or the Yggdrasil world ash.

4.3.1. Branding

Many users of Buddhist mediators assume that commodities and brands that they use or sell are perfectly secular and have nothing to do with “Buddhism” and “religion.” However, this chapter will argue that branding²⁴ is a religious project, which will be illustrated by following the definition of religion as practices that fulfill two essential functions: they (i) distribute a message to convert, transform and change actors, and (ii) combine transcendent and immanent endeavors by promoting “the end of time” — the assumed “beyond” — in time, here and now, while no outside world is necessary.

Following Kathryn Lofton’s religious “troika” (2011) and Inken Prohl’s “triple religion” (2016, 2020a, 112), one can identify three fundamental structures of the religiosity of branding: branding religion (i) in popular culture, (ii) as popular culture, and (iii) with popular cultural mediators involving processes of (a) secularizing, (b) sacralizing and (c) re-sacralizing.

Branding *secularizes* and *sacralizes* certain symbols and representations, which makes it thus (i) immanent and transcendent at the same time, (ii) converting actors to become other, better or improved, but in the here and now. Many authors have pointed out the connection between religion and marketing or branding. One of the most prominent is probably Martin Lindstrom (2007). He made ten connections in his “Religion: Inspiration For Brands”: a sense of belonging, a clear vision, power from the enemy, authenticity, consistency, perfection, symbols, mystery, rituals, and sensory appeal. Carla Stock made a video with these ten connections. She called it *The 10 Commandments of Branding Religion*, a project of ten commandments: myth, mission, enemies, identification, symbols, reach, rituals, sensory, history, and vision.²⁵

In 2017, Katia Pallini published several videos and a brochure named *Brand Religion* for *Insites Consulting* (InSitesConsulting 2017, InSitesConsulting 2018), in which she distinguished three types of religion: (i) penetration, (ii) influencer, and (iii) relationship. She also argued that the

24. Teri Silvio (2019) analyzed puppets, gods, and brands and created an innovative animation theory from examples in Taiwan. Martin Lindstrom has published *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy* (2010a), *Brand Senses: Sensory Secrets Behind the Stuff We Buy* (2010b), and *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy* (2011).

According to the sociologist Luigi Gentili (“The Future of Marketing [...]” 2020), brands are replacing goods so that consumers would not primarily buy products themselves but symbols and representations — i.e., *parts of brands*. Gentili has argued that there are various “non-conventional” marketing strategies: (i) viral marketing, (ii) advertainment, (iii) experiential, and (iv) guerrilla marketing (“The Future of Marketing [...]” 2020).

25. Stock describes the ten commandments of “branding religion” as follows: “A religion is the believe in one god or many gods and in its related cults and life forms. ≈ A brand is the believe in one product or many products and in its qualities and related cults” (Stock, n.d.).

average lifespan of a company is fifteen years (3), which is why she advises that brands choose and follow a “religion” to “guide them in everything they do and follow this with great devotion” (Pallini 2017, 4). For Pallini, religion is a “pursuit or interest followed with great devotion” (5). These three types of religion are supposed to challenge the basic marketing principles set up by Philip Kotler: segmentation, targeting, and positioning (STP). According to Pallini, all three brand religions differ and contradict in some aspects, although there is no right or wrong, but rather dependency on the brand’s “focus, life stage, vision and view” (42).

4.3.1.1. Influencing Branding

This first form of branding — i.e., influencing branding and marketing²⁶ — has been discussed in works like Jennifer Aaker’s, Andy Smith’s, and Carlye Adler’s *Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change* (2010).

26. Many have helped define influencer marketing, including *Influencer Agency*, who understand it this way: “Without question influencer marketing has delivered significant results for brands. In many cases, people trust the people they follow, and when people they trust tell them to check out or buy something, often they will. For brands, getting that kind of response from potential consumers is considerably more difficult than it is for influencers. [...] *Influencers influence consumers*. Consumers love the fact that influencers are sharing valuable information and products recommendations with them. *Influencers are perceived as real, honest, authentic and knowledgeable. Consumers believe that influencers don’t lie about products just to make money. They are trusted.* This is exactly the reason *influencers are able to add real value to your brand*” (“This is why Influencers add Value to Your Brand,” n.d.; emphasis added). Since influencer marketing is more storytelling and less advertising, *IMA* has defined influencer marketing in the following way: “An influencer, as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is someone who affects or changes the way other people behave. Influencer Marketing is not a new phenomenon. Influencer marketing works because people are influenced by people, and find word-of-mouth to be the most trusted source for recommendations. Today more than ever, consumers are choosing to listen to each other over brands. That’s why influencers are so powerful. They are trusted individuals with loyal followings across digital platforms. Influencers start conversations and make it easier for brands to target their audiences on a big scale. It all comes down to: [...] *Influencer brand match + Content strategy = Engagement.* [...] When an influencer and brand are a natural fit, then the message resonates. *They create authentic content - together - and share it online across social media and other channels.* Reaching the right people at the right time to achieve measurable goals: *Generate brand awareness — Increase conversions — Drive traffic — Increase media value*” (IMA 2020a; emphasis added).

One can distinguish nine types of influencer marketing, which are all about the idea “that influencers have a large following, and it is easy for brands to tap into their audience” (“5 Types of Influencer Marketing”, n.d. and “4 More Types of Influencer Marketing”, n.d.): (i) giveaway campaigns after followers have liked, commented, followed or shared the brand’s social media account; (ii) influencers taking over brand’s social media account and sharing content in it; (iii) affiliate marketing when influencers are paid by brands, when they generate sales or leads, for instance with discount codes; (iv) sponsored content by paying influencers to share content that promotes a product, creates brand awareness or realizes any other companies’ goal; (v) gifts for influencers to create positive publicity (“5 Types of Influencer Marketing”, n.d.); (vi) sponsored posts on blogs mentioning brands or products; (vii) paying influencers for guest blogging, either the brand publishing on the influencer’s blog or the influencer publishing on the brands blog and then sharing it on their network; (viii) influencers being paid as brand ambassadors, attaching “their name and image to a brand” (4 More Types of Influencer Marketing”, n.d.); and finally, (ix) events where influencers first experience the brand before committing to any collaboration (“4 More Types of Influencer Marketing”, n.d.).

Another way to understand how this kind of branding works is to look at the world's top influencer agencies like *The Influencer Marketing Agency (IMA)*.²⁷ According to *IMA*, they — relying on articles in the *Harvard Business Review* and the *McKinsey Company* (Francis and Hoefel 2018) — “have gone through a distinct shift in the way people interact with brands” through the rise of the internet and social media. The result is that many believed that advertising and branding could circumvent traditional and mainstream media (IMA 2020b, 2). *IMA* underlines the importance of social media like *Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, Spotify*, podcasts (IMA 2020a), *Tumblr, Snapchat, Pinterest*, and blogs. The Los Angeles and Amsterdam-based *Influencer Agency* explained “influencer”²⁸ as “someone who affects the character, development, or behavior of someone or something” (Influencer Agency 2020).

According to *IMA*, Gen Z²⁹ — born between the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2010s — is heavily changing and redefining brand relationships (IMA 2020a). Influencers have no difficulties within social media cultures because they embrace and represent it (IMA 2020b, 8). Critical concerns for brands to reach Gen Z are: (i) pulling, not pushing, (ii) being “real” and creating “real

27. *IMA* is headquartered in London, New York, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, and Singapore. Their clients include *Google, Microsoft, Amazon, and Starbucks*, and they have over 40,000 influencer relationships, over 19 million influencers in their database, and more than 1,000 niches (IMA 2020a).

28. The charge of influencers varies from \$5 to \$1 million per post, varying in shapes, sizes, and levels of influence. The essential idea behind influencer branding is that the power not being in the hands of the brand but in the hands of the consumer. Of course, finding the perfect influencer for the respective brand is necessary (Influencer Agency 2020).

29. The *Concordia University St. Paul's* has shown that (i) 48 % of Gen-Zers are non-Caucasian, (ii) they are defined by “privacy, cautiousness, practicality, and mindfulness of the future,” (iii) they are digital natives (96% own a smartphone and more than half spend at least 10 hours a day on electronic devices), but (iv) they also “crave real-life connection.” They would be “cautious (but reasonable) consumers.” They have pragmatic prospects in their workspace, feel responsible for their career, understand technology as a tool, and are fans of face-to-face (“Generation Z in the Workforce.”, 2017). Brittany Hodak (2018) wrote about how Gen Z is reshaping the social media landscape and how marketers need to be open to change. The spending power of the 13- to 24-year-old group is estimated between 29-143 billion US dollars. In 2019, Gen-Zers represented 32% of the global economy (Miller and Lu 2018), and this figure will be 40% in 2020 (“Generation Z in the Workforce.” n.d.).

According to *IMA*, Gen-Zers (i) have an undefined ID (they aim to be true to themselves, avoid labels, can be gender fluid, and experiment with different ways of being themselves), (ii) are “communaholics” (by connecting with peoples of other “truths” and embracing inclusivity), (iii) are “dialoguers” (aiming for equality in LGBTQ, as well as for diversity, sustainability, waste production, and global warming), and (iv) look for the truth behind everything, they are realistic, analytical and pragmatic, because they were born in a time of global economic stress (IMA 2020b, 6–15). In sum, “Gen-Zers rely on creativity, imagination, inventiveness, and innovation to confront challenges.” They want to create characters for themselves because they strive to be “authentic” (IMA 2020b, 6–7). Gen-Zers “are not only lucrative, influential and aspirational, they are also changing how everyone interacts with the world and how society is currently shaped” (IMA 2020b, 6). They are also the “true generation” (McKinsey & Company 2018) since they look for authenticity and sincerity and want to express their truths and understand and connect with other truths. They want to “unveil the truth behind all things” (IMA 2020b, 6).

value” (IMA 2020b, 19), and — since “Gen Z is here to bring innovation” — (iii) delivering innovation and not just tapping into trends (IMA 2020b, 21).³⁰

According to Pallini (2017), influencer branding³¹ and influencer religion gained momentum with the rise of social media. They are practiced by influencer marketing and word-of-mouth marketing between consumers and potential consumers (21). Following Pallini, eight steps have to be fulfilled by companies using influencing branding: (i) all actions should generate conversations, (ii) pushing and pulling, (iii) based on the “influence” of influencers, (iv) belief in the so-called “ripple effect,” whereby the retention of consumers would lead to the acquisition of new consumers, (v) conversations are the only growth path, (vi) conversations must be purposeful, (vii) seeking and creating disciples, and (viii) conversations must aim for positive five-star recommendations, for instance on platforms like *Tripadvisor* (22—31).

(i) Central for influencing branding/religion is word-of-mouth marketing, where the influencer begins a discussion or a talk on a specific product. The influenced passes this on to the not-yet-influenced, continuing the *snowball effect*. This takes place with apps actors talk about with friends (like the *Karma* or *Headspace* apps), as well as in videos or any posts on social media (like Jessica Skye and her *Fat Buddha Yoga*), which initiate word-of-mouth marketing. Jessica Skye (2020) is the founder of *Fat Buddha Yoga*, DJ, music maker, and yoga trainer for *Nike* (233m followers, August 10, 2022) and *Apple* (Apple Fitness+ Preview 2021) with 39,200 followers (August 10, 2022) on *Instagram*. She offers special corporate yoga courses and yoga for women, and she advertises for other companies like *@asos* (figs. 5.27–5.28) (Skye 2020). Skye’s *Instagram* account *@fatbuddhayoga* has 16,600 followers (August 10, 2022) and says in its bio: “A *modern approach* to the *ancient art + science of yoga* for the *nxt generation* of yogis.” They offer “nxt yoga” for the next generation, including the image of “nxt Buddha”: a pink Buddha figure sitting in the bathtub, which — like the entire bathroom — is also pink (fig. 5.29). The motto is: “do something new, be bold, and start your own trend” (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020c; emphasis added).

30. Every generation was shaped by the contexts they were born in: (i) *Baby Boomers* (1940—1959) because of a post-war context being collectivist, idealist, revolutionary, and consumptionist, (ii) *Gen X* (1960—1979) due to flourishing capitalism being materialistic, individualistic and competitive, and (iii) *millennials* or *Gen Y* (1980—1994) because of economic stability being “me,” questioning, self-oriented and globalist (IMA 2020b, 6), followed by (iv) *Gen Z* (1995—2010) and (v) *Gen Alpha* (birthdates starting from the early 2010s). Based on Bloomberg analysis Gen Z would have outnumbered millennials in 2019 (Miller and Lu 2018).

31. For a general introduction to influencer branding and marketing, there is the handbook *Influencer Marketing For Dummies* (2016) by Kristy Sammis, Cat Lincoln, Stefanie Pomponi, Jenny Ng, Edita Gassmann Rodriguez, and Judy Zhou.

(ii) Influencer branding combines two central elements of mass and relationship branding since it both pushes (content to the consumer) and pulls (consumers to the content). It does not have to decide between the two but instead invests in both. The influencer pushes information on products themselves, directly or indirectly pulling customers to the product, the brand, or the company.

(iii) This branding is based on the importance of influencers, meaning people who are very prominent in social media. With 238,000 followers in March 2020³², the *TikTok* account @buddhababiii has had a considerable influence and reach (Buddhababiii 2020) (fig. 5.30).

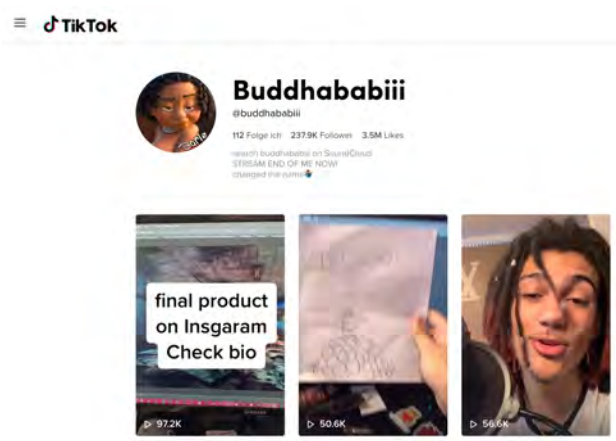
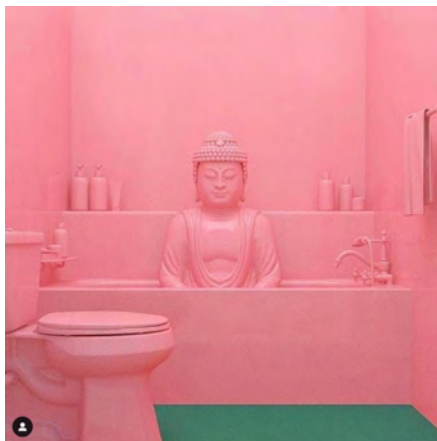


FIGURE 5.27. Top left, Instagram post by *Fat Buddha Yoga*'s Jessica Skye doing sports for *Nikewomen*.

FIGURE 5.28. Top right, Instagram post by *Fat Buddha Yoga*'s Jessica Skye for *Asos*.

FIGURE 5.29. Bottom left, Pink Buddha in a pink bathroom. Instagram post by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

FIGURE 5.30. Bottom right, Title page of @buddhababiii's *TikTok* profile.

32. In August 2022, the number of followers decreased to 94.

There are various people on *Instagram* using Buddhist-inspired names like *buddha_mama* (2020) selling jewelry, *brandbuddhagram* (2020), *buddhabrandSCO* (2020) including *Thirsty Buddha* and *Hungry Buddha*, *Siena and Buddha* (cutieandthebeast 2020) where “Buddha” is a dog who passed on June 7, 2020, or musician *dieserbuddha* (2020). On *Facebook*, there are also “Buddhified” accounts posting daily quotes and insights like *Tiny Buddha* (2020), with 5.1 million followers in August 2022.

Investing in influencers as “brand ambassadors” like Russell Brand³³, Radhi Devlukia-Shetty, Jay Shetty³⁴, and Nimai Delgado³⁵ by companies like *Omnom* rests on the outreach of these influencers. These “ambassadors” should represent the values of the company and “spread the word” (figs. 5.31–5.33). Both internet and social media personalities Radhi Devlukia-Shetty and Jay Shetty appear in *Omnom*’s trailer video (fig. 5.33) (*Omnom* 2020).



FIGURE 5.31. Russell Brand (left) and Nimai Delgado (right) as “Brand Ambassadors” of *Omnom*.

33. On *Omnom*’s website, comedian, actor, radio host, writer, activist, and internet personality Russell Brand —with 5.85 million *YouTube* subscribers, 2.9 million *Instagram* followers, 11.1 million *Twitter* followers, and 5.4 million *Facebook* followers as of August 2022 is quoted as saying the following on *Omnom*: “I think that *Omnom* is a wonderful project. The idea that every time a meal is sold, another meal will be provided to someone who needs it and is unable to pay for it, is beautiful” (*Omnom* 2020).

34. Internet personality, storyteller, podcaster, and former monk Jay Shetty — 11.5 million *Instagram* subscribers, 4.45 million *YouTube* subscribers, 28 million *Facebook* followers, 344,000 *Twitter* followers, 248,000 million *Pinterest* followers, and 5,100 *Medium* followers as of August 2022 — says that: “*Omnom* is a place where communities can be built. It will host yoga, meditation, book clubs, kirtan and wisdom workshops. There is such a need in the world right now where people can feel at home and find likeminded friends and new family” (*Omnom* 2020).

35. Internet personality Nimai Delgado — with 671,000 *Instagram* subscribers, 90,100 *YouTube* subscribers, 22,300 *Twitter* followers, and 321,000 *Facebook* followers as of August 2022 — is quoted as saying: “*Omnom*’s concept is absolutely brilliant. *It puts a modern touch on ancient eastern practices that not only feed the body, but also the mind and soul.* It will provide a space where busy people can reconnect with themselves and others. Not only that, but customers will also be directly contributing and affecting those who are less fortunate” (*Omnom* 2020; emphasis added).

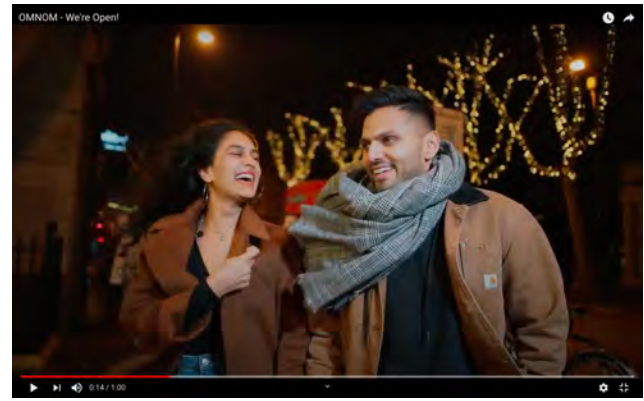


FIGURE 5.32. *Left and center*, Radhi Devlukia-Shetty, and Jay Shetty as “Brand Ambassadors” of *Omnom*.

FIGURE 5.33. *Right*, Radhi Devlukia-Shetty, and Jay Shetty in an advertising video for *Omnom*.

Another case is *@kodomakeup*, an *Instagram* influencer with 73,700 followers (August 10, 2022). According to his *Instagram* bio, he is a make-up artist and a Buddhist monk. He was shot for the *Tokyo Voice* as well as the “Under One Sun” project by *Alfa Romeo* (figs. 5.34–5.35) (Kodomakeup 2020).

(iv) Instead of deciding between retention or acquisition of customers, influencer branding believes that retention leads to acquisition via the so-called “ripple effect.” (v) Key to this type of branding is a conversation because it is believed to be the only growth path since each conversation starts a new one and so on. The following *Instagram* account perfectly illustrates this with perhaps the most followers — 3.6 million (August 10, 2022) — with Buddhified naming: *@moistbuddha* essentially posts memes, which are reposted again and again (fig. 5.36) (Moistbuddha 2020). (vi) Influencer branding takes it very seriously to create purposeful conversation, for instance, on climate change or gender and payment inequalities. *Omnom* is part of the dining and meditating discourse, which makes any conversation on *Omnom* a purposeful conversation: how to eat, how to live, how to be happy, how to be conscious, which is why their slogan is called “join the conscious revolution” (fig. 5.37) (Omnom 2020). (vii) Influencer branding/religion also focuses on looking for disciples because customers are not seen as actors who buy stuff but as people who believe in their products. (viii) Finally, influencing branding aims for positive recommendations and many *likes* to videos or any posts on social media because only these increase both the ripple and the *snowball effects*.



FIGURE 5.34. Top left, @Kodomakeup on Tokyo Voice, Instagram post.

FIGURE 5.35. Top right, @Kodomakeup barefoot in a monk's dress on the beach, Instagram post.

FIGURE 5.36. Bottom left, @Moistbuddha's Instagram post on "Make America Greek Again."

FIGURE 5.37. Bottom right, "Join the Conscious Revolution" slogan by Omnom.

There are many other case studies like the branding agency *Brand Buddha*, which is specialized in influencer marketing (Scrivano 2019), or the artist Metis Atash, famous for her *Punkbuddha* series, who gifted the "Karma is a Bitch" *Punkbuddha* to pop music celebrity (and not least influencer) Boy George (fig. 5.38) (Atash 2020b).



FIGURE 5.38. *Punkbuddha* “Karma is a Bitch” by Metis Atash. 46*23*13cm. Present for Boy George.

Branding as influencing religion is wholly focused on social and personal connections to *pull* respective consumers: much more than traditional penetration or mass branding/religion and even relationship branding/religion. Following the definition of religion used in this thesis, influencing branding puts the religious interaction at the center: (i) the influencer becomes the message of change and improvement brands spread to convert consumers since these mediated Buddhist brands not only sell commodities but identities and selves; and (ii) influencers are immanent and transcendent at the same time by acting as the assumed “beyond” for the relationship between customer and company, and since this interaction — led by influencers — happens in the here and now.

4.3.1.2. Mass Branding

The second form of branding aims for mass marketing by pushing the brand to the consumer. According to *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency*, companies must aggressively and innovatively “penetrate” the field to acquire new consumers. All consumers are equals, and no customer is targeted or segmented. This branding does not use positioning and differentiating; instead, it is about simplification: there is no interest in building a relationship between customers and the brand. Successful mass branding generates a large customer base on an international scale due to its “unique and simple message” as well as its universal appeal (Little Buddha Brand Design

Agency 2019a, 3). Since mass branding actors — like *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* — do not believe neither in customer loyalty — and call it “one of the biggest myth[s] in marketing” — nor brand commitment, they instead focus on attracting new and occasional customers and do not want to increase the frequency of acquisition (4).

This branding is inspired by Byron Sharp’s *How Brands Grow: What Marketers Don’t Know* (2010) and *How Brands Grow: Part 2: Emerging Markets, Services, Durables, New and Luxury Brands* (2015) (Pallini 2017, 9). While Pallini identifies five rules for mass branding ((i) penetration is the only path to growth, (ii) acquisition instead of retention, (iii) all buyers should be treated equal, (iv) everything should be repeated again and again, (v) the brand has to be everywhere on TV and newspaper advertising, as well as physically on the streets (Pallini 2017, 10–19)), according to Sharp there are seven rules that are key to growth by building “market-based assets” ((i) brand’s constantly attaining of all consumers of a specific category through communication and distribution, (ii) physical availability — maximizing distribution — and easiness to buy the brand by showing how the brand fits to consumers’ lives, (iii) brand’s getting noticed, grabbing attention and focusing on its reputation by using clear and distinctive branding, (iv) refreshing and creating “memory structures” by using existing associations, and by designing assets like colors, packaging, logos and designs that are easy to recognize, (v) creating distinctive brand characteristics using sensory cues and triggers by activating specific terms, logos or aesthetics, (vi) show consistency by avoiding not necessary changes, and (vii) staying competitive by keeping the brand accessible) (Little Buddha Brand Design Agency 2019a, 5—6).

Buddhist mass branding/religion that “penetrates” the public is typical of traditional, classic, and — one might say — conservative branding. Following Byron Sharp’s definition of mass branding, (i) *Kentucky Fried Chicken*’s campaign — created by *Mother London* — has used mass marketing by addressing a massive public through TV advertising or videos on websites and thus attained consumers of a specific category through communication and distribution (figs. 5.40–5.41). (ii) Mass brands invest in accessibility and availability through gifts, events, and any extra; for instance, *Buddha-Bar* offers cocktails, sushi, and saki masterclasses, private hire for up to 450 diners, and chauffeur cars. (iii) Mass brands are everywhere, but in the more traditional way and not necessarily on social media like the other two branding types: they appear in TV advertising, on websites, in newspapers as well physically — like the cosmetic company *Lancôme* — on the streets of London. *Lancôme*’s advertising campaign — just before Christmas 2019 — in London’s St. Pancras station on Euston Road displayed a rose-colored replica of the Eiffel Tower in Paris built

from perfume bottles with a red ribbon around it saying “Happiness is Here” (fig. 5.43). The tower’s base is protected by plexiglass, while the building itself is completely illuminated and contains some piled-up rose-colored gifts at the bottom since it is just before Christmas. At the top of the tower is the letter “ô” of *Lancôme*. Next to it, there are more displays with the slogan “La vie est belle,” a photo of the actress Julia Roberts and the Eiffel Tower, perfume, and a gift, all held very much in pink. (iv) Branding is sensory trigger-based by using Buddhist terms, logos, or aesthetics; for instance, *KFChill*’s piled-up fried chicken on sand — generating waves — strongly reminds of Zen stones, gardens, and mediators in general (fig. 5.39). (v) *True Religion*’s webshop is just about pushing content, aesthetics, materialities, and mediators and will thus be noticed by potential new consumers (fig. 5.42).

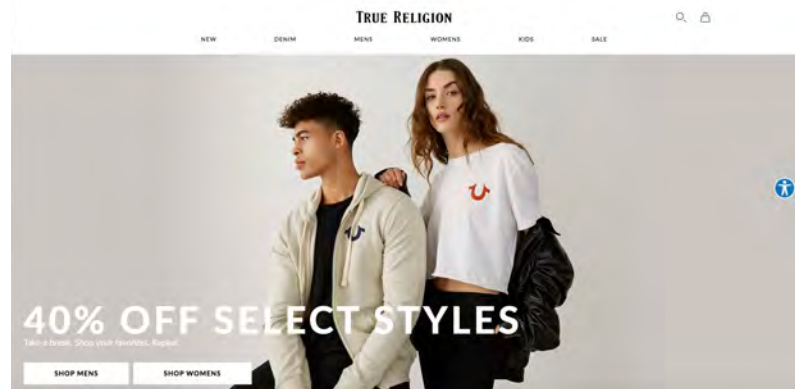
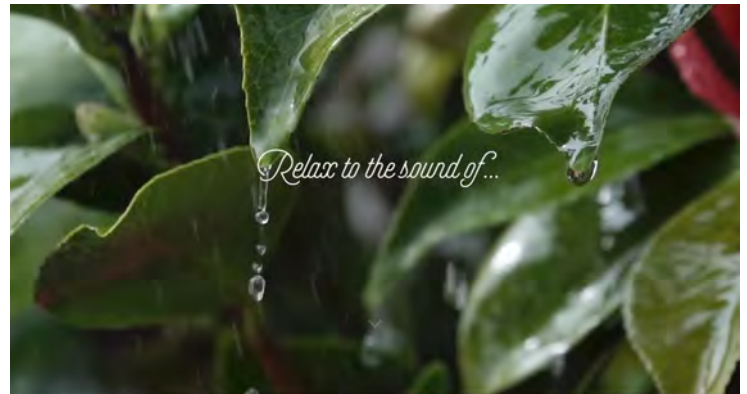


FIGURE 5.39. Top left, “Finger Licking Good Vibes” slogan in the *KFChill* advertising campaign by *Mother London*.

FIGURE 5.40. Top right, The “Relax to the Sound of ...” slogan in the *KFChill* advertising campaign by *Mother London*.

FIGURE 5.41. Bottom left, “Relax to the Sound of ... Frying Chicken” slogan in the *KFChill* advertising campaign by *Mother London*.

FIGURE 5.42. Bottom right, Screenshot of the website and webshop of *True Religion*.

(vi) *KFC* and *True Religion* do not seek a deeper relationship or connection with their customers. Still, it is just about the consistent acquisition of new ones — again and again — because customer retention is believed to be useless. Within mass branding, all consumers are equals since there is no particular relation to the brand — *KFC*, *Rituals*, etc. — or an influencer.

(vii) All of these mass brands are competitive and appear omnipresent; for instance, by repeating their message repeatedly, which is incredibly distinct in one-hour videos by *KFChill* repeating the same sentences, sounds, and mediators hundreds of times.



FIGURE 5.43. Replica of the Eiffel Tower with “Happiness Is Here” slogan and *Lancôme* advertising boards at St. Pancras International Station, Euston Road in London (UK).

Mediated Buddhist brands are usually perceived as secular. Still, their secularity is manufactured through secularizing or transforming for non-religious functions a toolbox of Buddhist traditions and discourses, like the happiness industry. This is the case with mass brandings like *Kentucky Fried Chicken*’s *KFChill*, *True Religion*, or *Rituals*’ “Ritual of Happy Buddha” campaigns. Mass branding is, therefore, religious because (i) it aims to convert, change and optimize actors and companies, and (ii) it is both immanent and transcendent through aiming for always new customers as “beyonds” and offering solutions to consumerist problems within time, in the here and now.

4.3.1.3. Relationship Branding

The third form of branding is relationship branding,³⁶ inspired by Joeri van den Bergh's and Mattias Behrer's *How Cool Brands Stay Hot: Branding to Generation Y* (2011) and *How Cool Brands Stay Hot: Branding to Generation Y and Z* (2016). According to Katia Pallini (2017), relationship branding focuses on building relationships between the consumer, brand, and company (33). Pallini has distinguished five types of relationship religion: (i) emotions are central; (ii) building relationships with consumers, which is why it aims to pull consumers to the brand, and this branding/religion also believes that retention of consumers is a long-term investment, which does not need to acquire new consumers, since consumers will identify with their brands like *Apple* or *Starbucks* consumers do; (iii) companies have to create a brand DNA — characteristics which only this specific brand has — which is why consumers will need to purchase its content only; (iv) everything that is built in relationship branding is built to last, whereby commodities have to have long-term use and value; and (v) companies have to work for their love, the commodity and the relation to their consumers (34–41).

*Satori: Analytics Agency*³⁷ is an agency using Buddhist mediators aiming “to give clarity in decision making through data analytics” by automating, analyzing, and optimizing data with the help of data scientists, analysts, and software engineers (Satori: Analytics Agency 2020). When it is about understanding what drives customer engagement, *Satori: Analytics Agency* believes in retaining customers and building long-term and loyal relationships between the company and

36. The New York-based brand agency *BrandTuitive* identifies as the key to relationship branding the notion that “[w]e reveal what your customers love – to capture more customers who will love it too,” which is why brands should also “ignite human emotion.” The customer and company share an entangled emotional experience, the situation when something is purchased, the “Buy Moment” (BrandTuitive 2020). Marketing brands in relationship branding is also very much about telling the brand's story (BrandTuitive 2020).

37. For *British Airways*, *Satori: Analytics Agency* created machine learning automation to prevent customer churn and boost brand engagement. Since *British Airways* grew and increasingly had problems understanding customer behavior, it became necessary to “build a coherent customer retention strategy.” *British Airways* analyzed how significant churn was and how it varied between different customers with various characteristics — tenure, gender, balance, and product preferences — but they did not conduct an “in depth analysis of what drives churn” and how to prevent it (Satori: Analytics Agency 2020). They had various customers like airlines, agencies, telcos, defense, fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), and finance like *British Airways*, *Allianz*, *L'Oréal Paris*, *Iberia*, *Piraeus Bank*, *Royal Navy*, the *University of Thessaly* (Greece), *Vodafone*, *Nestle* and many more. For instance, the airline *Iberia* needed to restructure its pricing and wanted to explore how alternative pricing scenarios would result in profitability. Accordingly, *Satori: Analytics Agency* built a multi-layered machine learning model and believes in the slogan “[d]ata is at the heart of good marketing,” which is why companies have to understand that data is the key to marketing, which would make the average return on investment 224 percent. This is why data-driven personalization is the “holy grail of marketing and advertising,” which delivers “the right message to the right people at the right time.” According to *Forrester Research*, it would cost five times as much to acquire a new customer than to retain an existing one. *Harvard Business School* has argued that a five percent increase in customer retention can lead to a rise in profits of between 25 and 95 percent (Satori: Analytics Agency 2020).

customer (Satori: Analytics Agency 2020). The “branding content production company” *Karma* — housed at London’s *Twickenham Studios* — defines successful branded content as entertaining, engaging, and focusing on the specific brand’s values. For *Karma*, branding is about telling a personal story, connecting with a particular audience, and being shareable across diverse platforms like social media channels, apps, websites, in-store screens, and special events. This is why “your digital content must be creative, inspiring and memorable if you want to excite your audience,” which would then result in “[m]ore *brand recognition*, more *traffic*, more *links* and *digital content that goes viral*” (Karma 2020a; emphasis added).

Central for relationship branding/religion — using Buddhist mediators — are (i) the centrality of emotions, which is why the video production company *Karma* instantly “attacks” its users and potential customers with videos showing celebrities in emotional states of joy on its website, and (ii) the insight that every marketing step is based on building a relationship between the company and the customer. *Zendesk* — a Buddhified brand — directly addresses its customers by showing interest in them through its slogan, “we’re all about the customer” (fig. 5.44). This is why the strategy of relationship branding is primarily to pull the customers to the company and the product through stars like Mo Farah, Rihanna, or Daniel Craig (figs. 5.45—5.47).

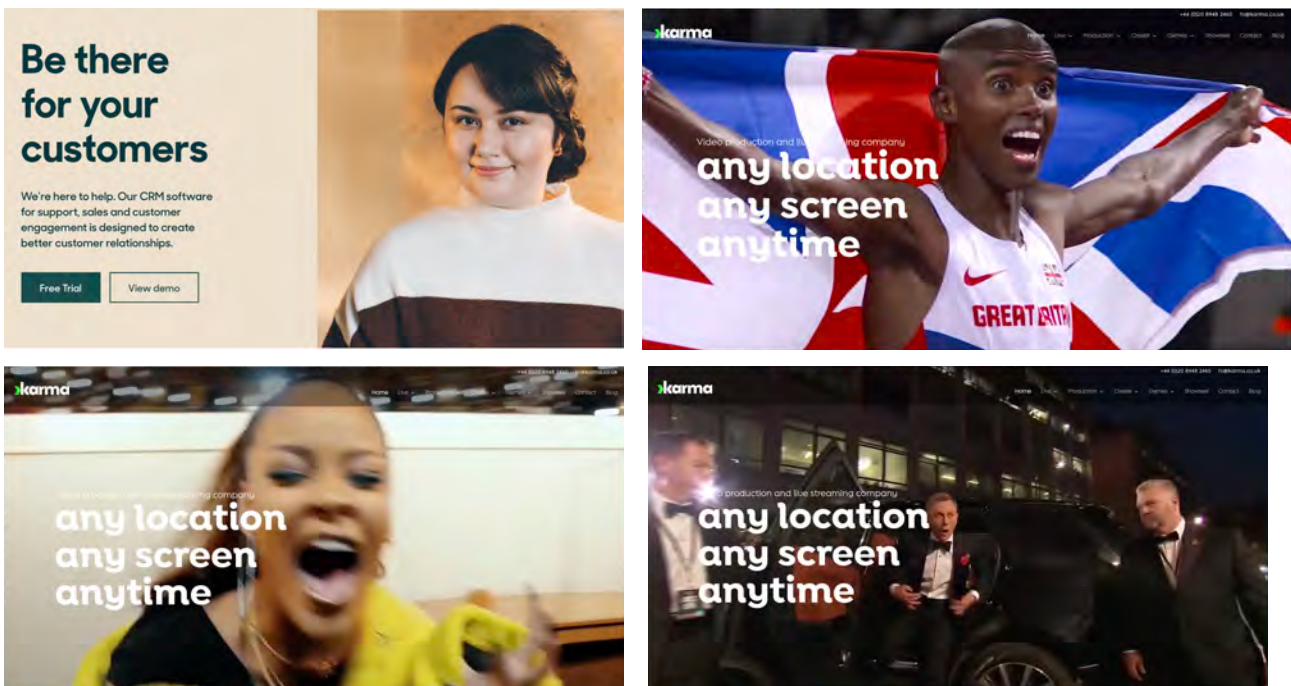


FIGURE 5.44. Top left, Slogan by *Zendesk* saying, “Be there for your Customers.”

FIGURE 5.45. Top right, Mo Farah, in an advertising video by *Karma*.

FIGURE 5.46. Bottom left, Rihanna in an advertising video by *Karma*.

FIGURE 5.47. Bottom right, Daniel Craig in an advertising video by *Karma*.

Relationship brands do not focus on acquiring new customers but aim to create customer retention as a long-term investment. They are also built for customers to identify with the brand and the company; for instance, *Fat Buddha Yoga* is advertising many slogans and memes to identify with something relevant (fig. 5.48).



FIGURE 5.48. Instagram post on bodies, churches, wine, bread, and guilt by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

(iii) Relationship branding creates its DNA by delivering the experience of being something unique and different; for instance, London’s *Buddha-Bar* has been awarded “Winner of Outstanding Achievement at London Club & Bar Rewards 2017” (fig. 5.49). Many companies like *Fat Buddha Yoga* have shaped a specific DNA that is their own, which naturally attracts customers. (iv) Relationship branding is built to last: the relationships between customers, companies, content, and brands should last. Since it is not about acquiring new customers but rather retention, the appearance and goal of this branding seem *timeless*. This is why relationship branding involves long-term commitment and often a promise for the future, like *Zenzic*’s acceleration of a self-driving revolution involving a roadmap to 2030 (Zenzic 2020), and *Zero Emissions Network* — abbreviated “ZEN” — is built to last, since it aims to change the society in which actors live, now and in the years to come. (v) Finally, relationship branding means that customers and companies must work together for their beloved brand. This makes the brand deeply emotional, not only “there” or just something being sold. It is something the company loves, which shares some of this love with the consumers. For instance, *Karmarama* presents itself as “the home of good works” (fig. 5.50) (Karmarama 2020a), and other — non-Buddhified — brands like the gin company *Monkey 47* connect London, Loßburg in the Black Forest, and the world. The Loßburg-based

company relies on a retro look, British style, and monkeys for its eye-catching brand (fig. 5.51). Emotionally, *Monkey 47* triggers happiness and sensually activates all five senses.

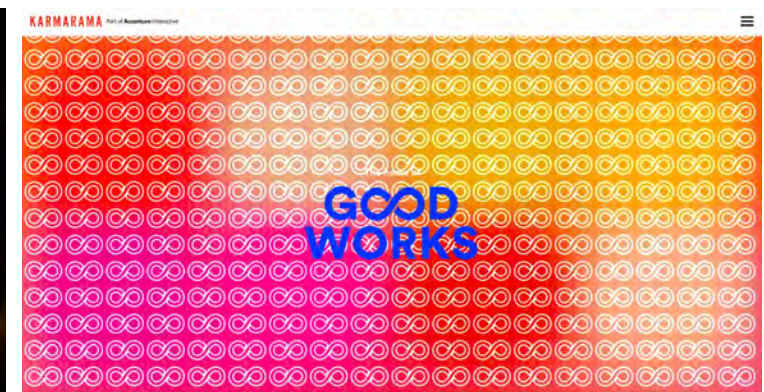
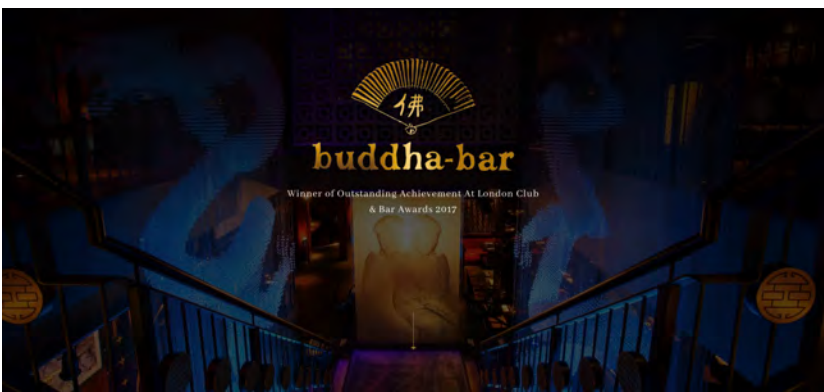


FIGURE 5.49. *Top left*, Advertising by *Buddha-Bar* saying “Winner of Outstanding Achievement at London Club & Bar Awards 2017”.

FIGURE 5.50. *Top right*, Slogan by *Karmarama* saying “The Home of Good Works,” London (UK).

FIGURE 5.51. *Bottom*, Shop window advertising for *Monkey 47* in *Amathus*, 113-117 Wardour Street, Soho in London (UK).

Relationship branding is much more sociable than traditional mass branding. Similar to influencing branding, it puts the customer at the center of religious interaction. Assumably, this secular practice of branding using Buddhist mediators is performed religiously. This is the case because (i) this branding sells and converts messages to change and transform actors, and (ii) the customer-company relationship is perceived as a “beyond,” which could be achieved within the present time.

Brands are based on selling commodities, products, or content in general. These are shaped and packaged in specific ways, often highly creative and innovative in using Buddhist mediators. The number of things companies sell and people buy and the reuse and transformation of Buddhist mediators for neoliberal-consumerist discourses hint at the entanglement between human and non-human actors, people, and products. As secular as this might seem, secularist branding does *not* demarcate a sharp separation between *secular and religious* because branding *acts* religiously. Of course, this strongly depends heavily on what "religion" means. If one does not simply mean "religious traditions" but follows a Latourian sense, then one might be able to identify religious functions within supposedly secular entities, i.e., Buddhist mediators. To *prove* that secularism is *religious* — and not only "quasi-religious" — one needs to identify two religious key functions in any of these three — influencer, mass, and relationship — brandings: (i) branding "reaches out" and distributes a message — a specific content, which aims to — to convert, transform and change people to "make" them consumers, which can be achieved very differently by mass marketing, the introduction of extraordinary actors — i.e., influencers — or through the search for building relationships; and (ii) advertising, selling and promoting the "the end of time" — which is the assumed "beyond" and can also vary (being the consumer, the market, the self, the relation between the company and consumer, etc.) — but not sometime beyond life, but in time, here and now without an outside world, and thus to combine transcendent and immanent endeavors.

4.3.2. Neoliberalism — Individualism, Subjectivity, Optimization, and Enhancement

The second part of this chapter will argue that neoliberalism³⁸ is a religious project, which is aimed to illustrate by demonstrating that it fulfills two essential functions: it (i) distributes a message to convert, transform and change actors and (ii) combines transcendent and immanent endeavors by promoting and selling "the end of time" — the assumed "beyond" — in time, here and now without creating an outside world.

As previous chapters have tried to illustrate, Buddhist mediators are not God-given but constructed by consumers and companies within space- and time-specific discourses. Today's *name of the game* is consumerist neoliberalism. Transforming Buddhist mediators into contemporary

38. According to historian Susan Richter (2019), the concept of freedom has historically always depended on the relationship between the individual and the collective — or society — which, following Stefanie Duttweiler, has — not least of all — led to the increase of self-optimization strategies in neoliberal societies (2016). Similarly, Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen (2013a, 10–11) have shown that in a neoliberal market society of supply and demand, the "path of subjectivation" includes marketing techniques that increasingly rely on "brand image management" and "lifestyle advertising," which provide production with immaterial qualities such as attitudes, values, feelings, and meanings.

societies can only be understood by analyzing how neoliberalism is performed and normalized by actors living in it. For instance, the *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* defines the goal of a corporate identity as creating a brand's specific personality "that is consistent in all media" (Little Buddha Brand Design Agency 2020a). Neoliberal self-optimization discourses³⁹ use Buddhist mediators by offering better and happier selves, lives, jobs, or careers. These strategies continue endlessly without anyone regulating these processes and their effects.⁴⁰ "Modify yourself — Enhance yourself — Be a better self!" Neoliberal slogans of enhancing and optimizing selves, bodies, minds, and emotions have been a dominant discourse for a few decades. It is often associated with Buddhist mediators and branding as a supposedly secular phenomenon. These findings fit both (i) Stefanie Duttweiler's argument (2016) that neoliberal societies include everyday (self-)optimizing strategies and (ii) Latour's definition of "modernization" as "the seemingly unstoppable progress of a line" that "clearly distinguishes the past from the future" as well as differentiating facts, values, rationality and the future from confusions, the irrational and the past (Latour 2013c; "Modernization Front"). This means that every optimization is about modernization: distinguishing the past from the future, the rational from the irrational, but today it is not primarily about other societies or the so-called "West" and the rest. Rather, discourses of optimization and improvement within neoliberal and consumerist societies are affecting selves and companies (*Tribe SEO*), properties, finances (*Credit Karma*), jobs (*ZenEducate*), bodies (*Fat Buddha Yoga*), minds (*Optimal Living*), or humanity and the planet (*Karma* app and the *Zero Emissions Network*) as a whole. Optimizing oneself or things, in general, is undoubtedly valued as rational, while not doing this (standing still or going back) is irrational. The modernizing processes within optimization are the same as 400 years ago when the mega project of modernization began.

Optimization is also an ethical endeavor to define and create general well-being. Latour has restricted the *optimum* as central to ethics⁴¹, which allows for determining the sovereign good.

39. Self-optimizing strategies — similar to philosopher Janina Loh's argument referring to transhumanist ideologies (2018) — act out control by (i) oversimplifying the drive for self-enhancement, (ii) passivating actors into mere objects of enhancement and (iii) generating a category mistake in the way of promising an assumed "beyond" of optimization in the present here and now, which is de facto unreachable.

40. Emma Grey Ellis (2019) has discussed the so-called "optimization smackdown" between "hustle porn" — a term coined by Alexis Ohanian — and "zen porn" in the style of Marie Kondo. The first tends to "maximize efficiency," while the latter aims to "minimize clutter." Ellis (2019) defines self-optimization as being ultimately about control.

41. For a further investigation of ethics, see chapter 5.3. "ETHICS — Moral Buddhist Mediators in Scruples, "Good and Bad," "True and False.""

While calculating how this optimization could be achieved, ethical hesitation, experiences, and behavior come in (Latour 2013c). Due to the attributed positivity of Buddhist mediators, it is used to help flatten these very ethical hesitations, which is why Buddhified self-optimization can be achieved by mindfulness practices or living advice services to “awaken your capacity of wellbeing” (Optimal Living 2020), “enhance wellbeing,” “perform better,” “enjoy life more” (Cultivate Mindfulness 2020) or “increase effectiveness” (Clarizen 2020). There are many optimization services with and without Buddhist mediators: the AI company *Humu* (2020) — led by *Google* veterans like Lazlo Bock — is optimizing work by aiming to make employees happy and by advertising with cute little comic figures (fig. 5.52), *Optimize Yourself* (2020), *Zen of Business* (2020) who “believe business can create a better world,” the *Breathing Space* (2020), which helps people with addictions, stress, depression, anxieties, and pain, and the *Zen Hypnosis* (2020) associated with the *West London Buddhist Centre*.



FIGURE 5.52. Cute comic figures illustrating the happiness of (productive) work by *Humu*.

4.3.2.1. Mindful Self-Enhancement

Many mindful self-enhancement services are associated with Buddhist mediators and language. For instance, *Optimal Living* was founded in 2007 to provide mindfulness “to both the general public and the private sector” (Optimal Living 2020). Their website quotes various social and cultural research studies on (stress) management, cognition, decision-making, problem-solving, creativity, emotional intelligence, and behavioral analyses. Since neoliberal societies are — supposed to be — filled with stress, companies offering relief are omnipresent and designed to help practically anyone, like *MBSR*⁴². This is why *Optimal Living* — and other enhancement companies

42. *Optimal Living* uses *MBSR* (*Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction*), which was co-developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn over 30 years ago. He conceptualized this approach with colleagues at the University of Massachusetts Medical School to deal with stress illnesses. *MBCT* (*Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy*) is based on *MBSR* but was adapted and transformed by John Teasdale, Mark Williams, and Zindel Segal. It is recognized as an intervention for depression (Optimal Living 2020).

— are about empowerment, taking charge, and mindfulness. *Optimal Living*'s slogan, "Awaken Your Capacity of Wellbeing," is explained with the importance of mindfulness, which is also displayed through meditating people (fig. 5.53) (Optimal Living 2020).

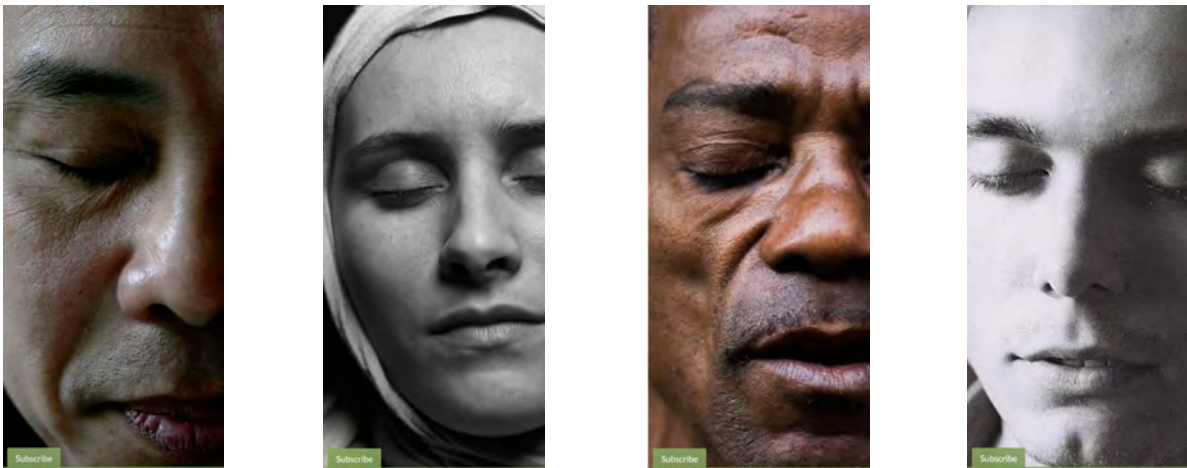


FIGURE 5.53. Four meditating actors and *Optimal Living*'s slogan, "Awaken Your Capacity of Wellbeing."

Corporal customers of *Optimal Living* include the *Royal College of Physicians, NHS England, DAIWA Capital Markets, Allianz*, and many more. Mindfulness meditation and mindfulness yoga are becoming increasingly popular in companies and organizations. William George — board member of finance company *Goldman Sachs* — is quoted on *Optimal Living*'s website as stating that mediation makes one "more effective as a leader," being "fully present on the job," making "better decisions," and working "better with other people" (Optimal Living 2020). Similarly, *Cultivate Mindfulness* (fig. 5.54) offers *MBCT* and *Mindfulness for Life* courses, which are designed to help people to "[e]nhance [w]ellbeing," find more balance in life, "feel calmer," "perform better," "enjoy life more" (Cultivate Mindfulness 2020).

A related project that aims to bring mindfulness to the education system is the *Mindfulness in Schools Project*, seeking to enhance and optimize schoolchildren to "empower a generation" (fig. 5.55) (Mindfulness in Schools Project 2020).



FIGURE 5.54. Left, Diagram following *Cultivate Mindfulness*' slogan "Why Mindfulness?"

FIGURE 5.55. Right, *Mindfulness in Schools Project*'s slogan saying "A Million Minds Matter."

Omnom — a “new plant-based restaurant and wellness space for a healthy mind, body and soul” in London — (*Omnom 2020*) offers mindful meditation, *kundalini* yoga, *jiva mukti*, so-called “omplates,” “omfeasts,” “omburger[s],” and “ombites,” which combine food, meditation, and wellbeing events — or dining and yoga classes (fig. 5.56) — (*Omnom 2020*) and ultimately “goes beyond food” (*Omnom 2020*). *Omnom*’s approach of being a “restaurant and wellbeing hub” makes it unique as well as a perfect “modern-day approach” — through the use of ancient Eastern “philosophies” and traditions and the avoidance of the term “religion” — “to bring you that divine lifestyle” within modern, urban contexts (*Omnom 2020*):

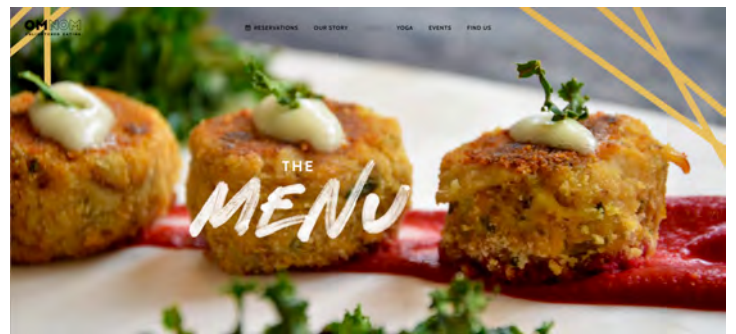
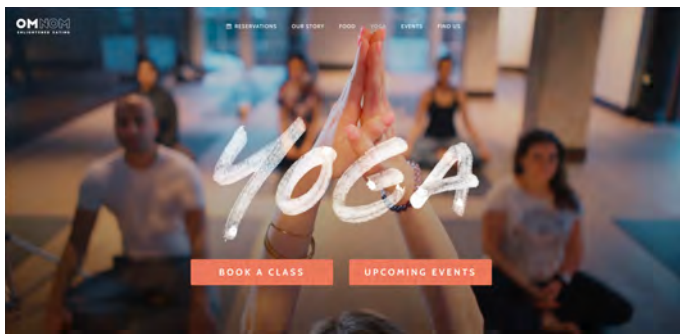


FIGURE 5.56. *Omnom* combines yoga and dining on its website.

4.3.2.2. Company Optimization

Tribe SEO — which is still registered under the naming of *Zen Optimise* and has hundreds of clients like *AOL*, the *British Government*, *Sky*, *Harrods*, the *University of Bath*, *Mitsubishi*, and many more (*Tribe SEO 2020*) — is focused on “search engine optimisation” for companies to achieve the best rankings in *Google*, which means “to climb to the top of ‘Mount Google’” (figs. 5.57–5.58). Therefore, the three core values of *Tribe SEO* are curiosity, clarity, and courage (*Tribe SEO 2020*).

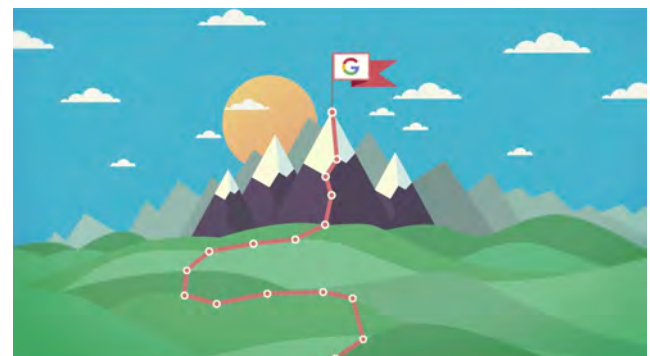


FIGURE 5.57. Left, Diagram by *Tribe SEO* showing an individual success path.

FIGURE 5.58. Right, Diagram by *Tribe SEO* showing the climbing of “Mount Google.”

4.3.2.3. Job Improvement

Enhancing one’s job is also crucial in neoliberal societies. For this purpose, *ZenEducate* is an app that matches teachers with “daily supply and long-term roles in London, Manchester, and Birmingham” (fig. 5.59) and aims for their higher pay and smarter matching, which puts them into control by allowing them to set their schedule (ZenEducate 2020).

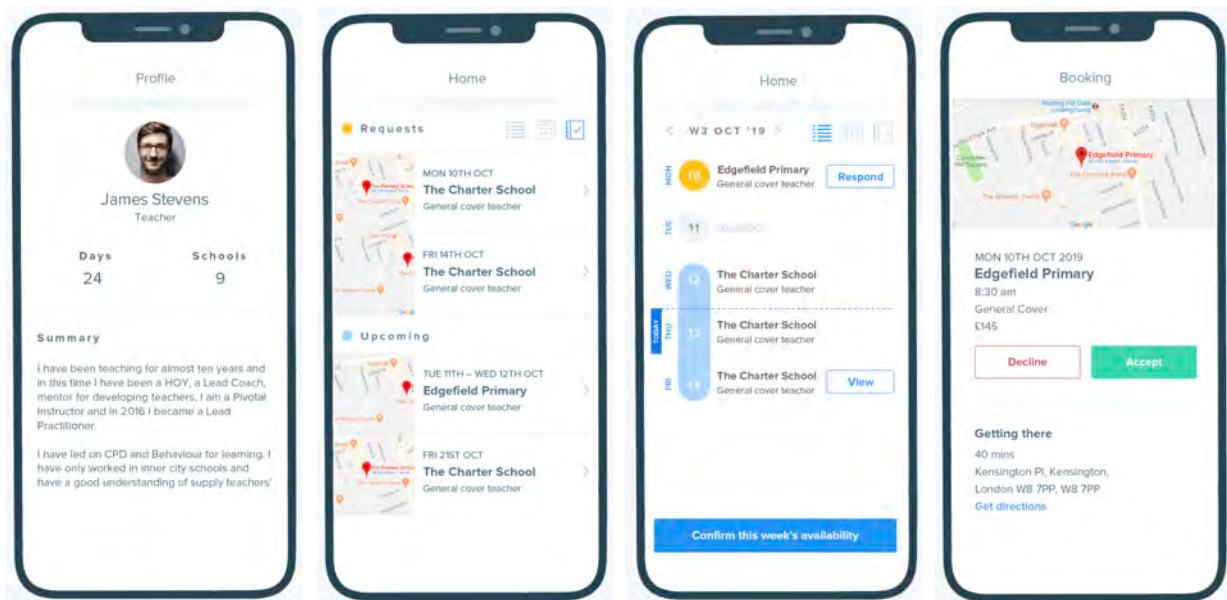


FIGURE 5.59. App to “get matched with a teaching job you love” by *ZenEducate*.

4.3.2.4. Metis Atash’s Punkbuddhas

The so-called *Punkbuddha* titled “Catch Me If You Can” (fig. 5.60) by artist Metis Atash measures 46*23*13cm and is the largest out of three, which are all together inspired by Moschino’s *Resort 2015 Dollar-Dress* and feature more than 35,000 genuine Swarovski crystals (Atash 2020a).

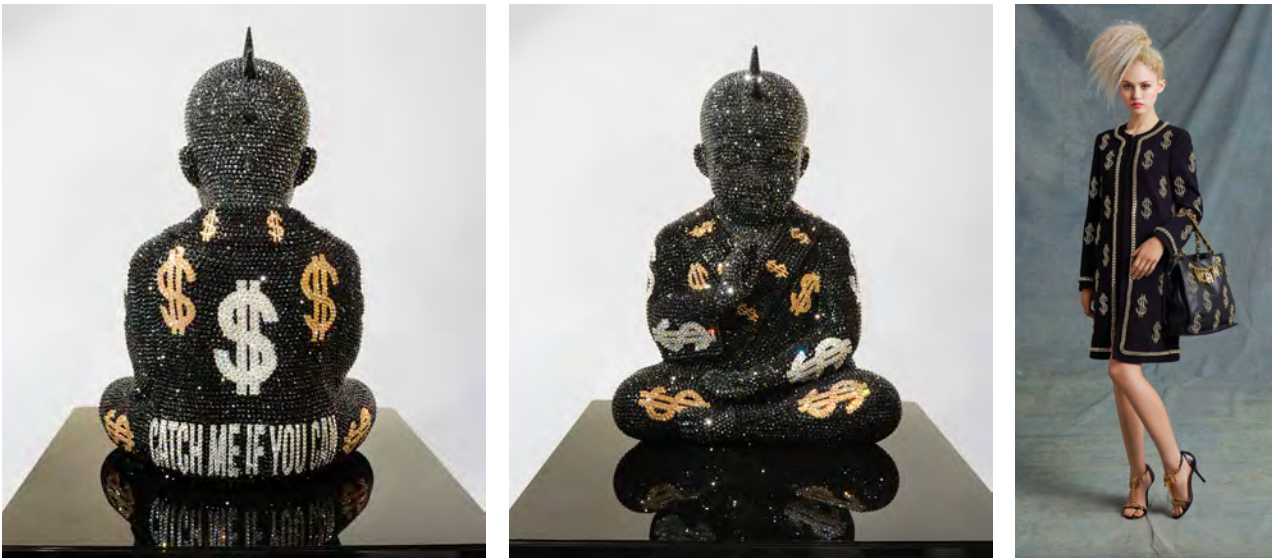


FIGURE 5.60. *Punkbuddha* “Catch Me If You Can” by Metis Atash featuring Moschino’s *Resort 2015 Dollar-Dress*. 46*23*13cm.

Material artifacts like Metis Atash’s *Punkbuddhas* hint at several issues: (a) the easiness of consuming Buddhist mediators, (b) the “more and more” idealism of consumerism, and (c) the neoliberal individualism packed in and as Buddhist mediators, which are consumable and purchasable, but also stand for a better and optimized “self.” This stands at the core of neoliberal experience: (i) it aims to realize an assumed “beyond,” which is not the traditionally religious “beyond” of transcending this world, but it is about a “beyond” happening within the world and one’s lifetime. (ii) The religious message of conversion and transformation, this little “catch me if you can” tells actors that one has to consume and live a neoliberal life, and sometimes nobody can catch one again!

Atash has created two kinds of *Punkbuddhas*: (i) These are making references to various famous artists like Andy Warhol — with his infamous soup cans — (fig. 5.61), Damien Hirst, Keith Haring, Gerhard Richter, Banksy (fig. 5.62) — showing a girl with balloons shaped as hearts and a text saying “Life ... is beautiful — There is always hope ...” — as well as Pablo Picasso, Yayoi Kusama, Bruce Gray or Piet Mondrian.



FIGURE 5.61. *Left pair, Punkbuddha “Recipe for Love” by Metis Atash featuring Warhol. 46*36*30cm.*

FIGURE 5.62. *Right pair, Punkbuddha “Hope for the Future” by Metis Atash featuring Banksy. 46*36*30cm.*

(ii) Especially interesting for the personalization of mediators are Atash’s Buddha figures with aesthetics inspired by haute couture fashion brands — which were already shown with the “Catch Me If You Can” *Punkbuddha* — like *Chanel*, *Basquiat*, *Balmain* (fig. 5.63), *Burberry* (fig. 5.65), *Missoni*, *Christian Dior*, *Roberto Cavalli*, *Alexander McQueen*, *Dolce & Gabbana* (fig. 5.64), *Versace*, *Louis Vuitton* (fig. 5.66), *Valentino* and *Dior* (Atash 2020a).



FIGURE 5.63. *Left pair, Punkbuddha “The Afterparty” by Metis Atash featuring Balmain’s Spring 2015 Ready-to-wear collection. 46*36*30cm.*

FIGURE 5.64. *Right pair, Punkbuddha “Get Lost” by Metis Atash featuring Dolce & Gabbana’s Fall/Winter 2014 Collection. 46*23*13cm.*

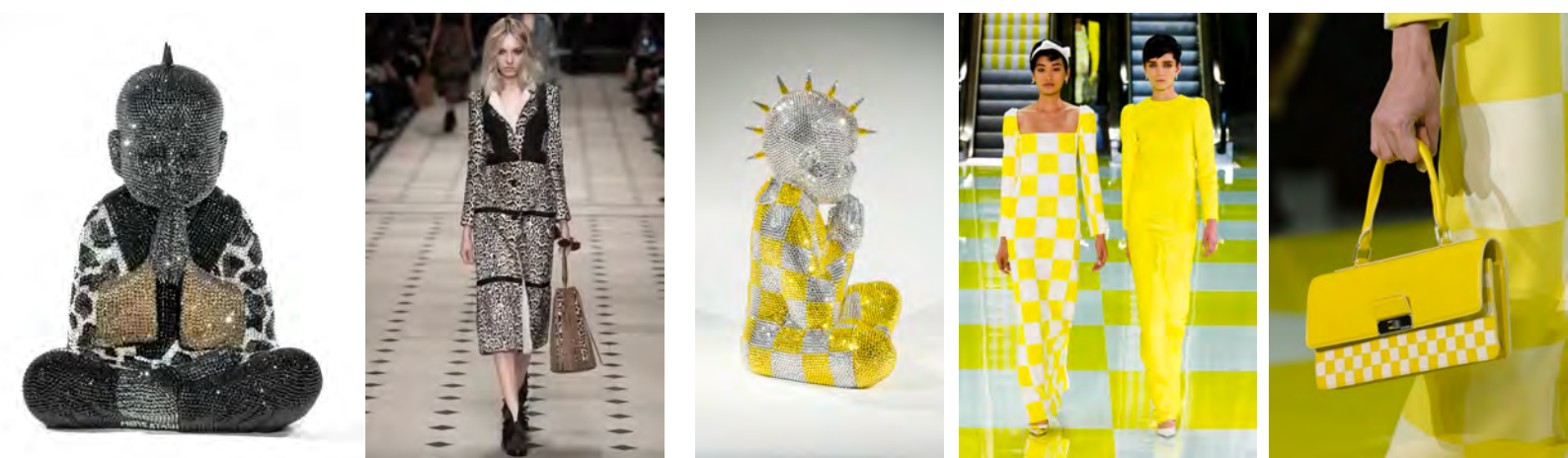


FIGURE 5.65. *Left pair, Punkbuddha “Into the Wild 3” by Metis Atash featuring Burberry’s Fall 2015 — Ready-to-wear collection. 46*36*30cm.*

FIGURE 5.66. *Right triple pair, Punkbuddha “Yellow Checks” by Metis Atash featuring Louis Vuitton’s Spring/Summer 2014 Checkerboard collection. 46*36*30cm.*

Fat Buddha Yoga has designed a Buddha figure with bright green pants and a green top, worn openly, which is why his thick belly is visible. The Buddha has angled his right leg, on which lies his right hand with a wreath of pearls. The left leg is bent, and on it lies his left hand. Buddha wears a chain around his neck and smiles, and his earlobes are long and thick. The representation of this Buddha is reminiscent of Chinese Buddhas. The figure is sitting in front of a bright background of green, yellow, and purple, reminding one of a comic strip (fig. 5.67). Above the Buddha’s head, one can read the slogan “you are Buddhaful,” a combination of “Buddha” and “you are beautiful.” This graphic illustration — like Metis Atash’s *Punkbuddha* series — underlines the neoliberal paradigms of individualism and self-optimization.

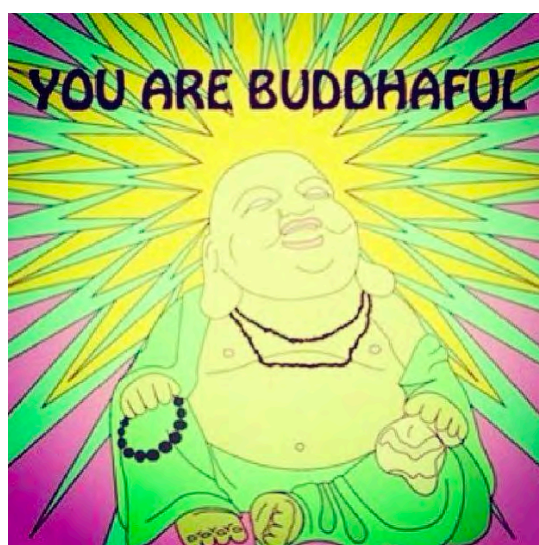


FIGURE 5.67. Bright and colorful Buddha figure with the slogan “you are Buddhaful” by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

4.3.2.5. Target Audiences and Identity Politics

The work by artist Metis Atash perfectly fits the *neoliberal suit*, which explains her statement in an *Instagram* post that “[y]ou must be selfish enough to revel in what feels good, before you have anything to give to others!” The post was accompanied by the image of several meditating Buddha figures in both gold and white colors, as well as one singular black-colored Buddha who is laughing and showing one of his middle fingers (fig. 5.68) (Atash 2020b).⁴³



FIGURE 5.68. Black-colored Buddha shows his middle finger in “Buddha Army” by Metis Atash.

In 2019, the *Gütersloher Verlagshaus* — belonging to *Penguin Random House Verlagsgruppe* — introduced *Buddha to go*, a book series that combines “modern psychology” with so-called “Far Eastern wisdom.” To date, three German volumes have been published in this series, all edited by Carolin Müller and Nadim Mekki, which are translated into English: *Being alone makes you strong*, *Finding meaning at last*, and *Back to happiness* (2019a—c). All books have either an orange, purple, or mint-colored standing Buddha figure on the cover. This series connects Buddhist mediators and ideas with neoliberal values like individualism, optimization, and happiness (fig. 5.69).

43. The Belgian psychologist and psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe wrote in 2014 that actors live in an economy that rewards psychopathic personality traits and has changed people’s ethics and personalities because “a changed economy reflects changed ethics and brings about changed identity. The current economic system is bringing out the worst in us”.

Others have connected religion and consumerism (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, Gauthier and Martikainen 2013b, Gauthier 2018a, Gauthier and Martikainen 2018b). Gintarė Kriaučiūnaitė-Lazauskienė and Rima Žitkienė have worked on the effects of symbols — and icons — on consumer behavior (2019b), as well as the relationship between religious symbols and the so-called cultural values theory (2019c).



FIGURE 5.69. *Buddha to go* books by Carolin Müller and Nadim Mekki. 2019.

Neoliberal consumption also involves the activation of specific *target audiences* by focusing on attributes or niches like (i) generation, (ii) ethnicity and diversity, and (iii) gender and sexuality.

(i) Branding using Buddhist mediators shows a significant age gap: the parents of these generations consuming Buddhist mediators would not consume these same commodities, brands, and emotions at all or in the same way (Francis and Hoefel 2018). Different generations need different mediators, brands, and advertising; they consume differently, and the relationship between mediators, consumers, brands, and companies changes each time. For instance, branding for generations Y — the millennials — and Z can be found in the alternative punk and metal band *The Buddha Pests* from London, which was founded in 2006 and combines age-specific music with Buddhist mediators in their naming. Similarly, formed in 2008, the progressive metal band *Aeon Zen* released its fifth studio album, “Inveritas,” in October 2019 (figs. 5.70—5.71). Finally, the company *Black Buddha* uses the slogan “[n]othing is lost: there’s millions of possibilities” (fig. 5.72), which fits them selling a “video-led travel guide for *today’s millennial-minded urban explorer*” for many global cities like Bangkok, Beijing, Hawaii, Hong Kong, Los Angeles, San Miguel, Seoul, Shanghai, Taipei, Tokyo, and Tulum (fig. 5.73). They name eight fundamental values: quality, trust, innovation, style, access, authenticity, wisdom, and happiness (Black Buddha 2020; emphasis added). *Wholefood Heaven’s Buddha Bowl Van* targets a young food blogging niche: street food with organic and sometimes vegan ingredients (fig. 5.74) (Wholefood Heaven 2020).



FIGURE 5.70. Top left and center, Advertising with Buddhist monks. Facebook post by *The Buddha Pests*.

FIGURE 5.71. Top right, Album cover by *Aeon Zen* named “Inveritas.”

FIGURE 5.72. Bottom left, Video still with the slogan “Nothing is lost: There’s millions of possibilities” by *Black Buddha*.

FIGURE 5.73. Bottom right, City guide overview by *Black Buddha*.



FIGURE 5.74. *Buddha Bowl Van* in London (UK) by *Wholefood Heaven*.

(ii) There is also an awareness of mediating and branding ethnically and culturally diverse like *Buddha Sista* supporting “black British beauty” (fig. 5.75) (Buddha Sista 2020). This niche targets black women, which is why they wrote a testament of “Buddhasistahood” (fig. 5.76) (Buddha Sista 2020).



FIGURE 5.75. Left, Advertising on the website with “Supporting Black British Beauty” by *Buddha Sista*.



FIGURE 5.76. Right, “Buddhasistahood” advertising banner by *Buddha Sista*.

Services like the *Nirvana Day Centre Hillingdon* in West London address not only the “seniors” but they offer day care for in a “melting pot” context — many people with an Asian background live in Hillingdon — which means that employees speak at least one Asian language like Punjabi, Hindi or Urdu besides English (fig. 5.77) (Nirvana Day Centre 2020).

Another example is the *Religion* clothing store, situated in London’s Shoreditch, a rather multicultural and “melting pot”-like area, where alternative people of all kinds meet. *Karmarama* also created the *CBeebies Campaign* (fig. 5.78) on inclusiveness in childhood experiences with “an overwhelmingly positive impact for *CBeebies* and the BBC as a whole” because it should “inspire the world to think differently about difference.” The short film received 55 million *Facebook* views, more than 102 million global reach, and 2.5 million engagements (Karmarama 2020a).⁴⁴

44. *CBeebies* describe themselves in the following way: “*CBeebies* believes in positive childhoods and promotes cultural richness, inclusiveness and kindness and wanted to celebrate this with a piece of content that could be broadcast on their television and social channels [...]. The driving insight for the campaign is that children aren’t born with prejudice; it is something that is learnt through living in and observing a society where prejudice exists. So, we created a short film that celebrates this in a beautifully simple way, featuring the unscripted responses of real pairs of friends struggling to find something to say when asked about what makes them different. The final line of the film sums up the idea: ‘When it comes to difference, children see things differently’” (Karmarama 2020a; emphasis added).



FIGURE 5.77. *Top*, Older people are dining together at *Nirvana Day Centre Hillingdon* (UK).

FIGURE 5.78. *Bottom*, Campaign with children by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

(iii) This chapter has tried identifying another trending target audience for branding with Buddhist mediators, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, which companies like *Karmarama* address. In 2018, “UK’s most progressive creative agency,” *Karmarama*, worked with Gok Wan, *Gay Times*, and LGBTQ rights charity *All Out for Pride in London* (fig. 5.79) (Karmarama 2020a). *Karmarama* produced a video for #GlobalPrideMakeover in which Gok — who is on the left in fig. 5.79 — mentions events in Chechnya in 2017 where the police detained LGBTQ people, confiscated their mobile phones, used their contacts to trick their friends, and put them in “concentration camps.” At *Istanbul Pride* in 2017 and 2018, police fired rubber bullets into the crowd; in 2016, *Ugandan Pride* LGBTQ people were detained by the police and then sexually assaulted by them; and in 2018, in Indonesia, the police rounded up trans people

to cut their hair forcibly. While Gok tells these stories, heavy and sad music is played in the background (Karmarama 2020a).⁴⁵



FIGURE 5.79. Video on #GlobalPrideMakeover by *Karmarama*, London (UK).

Then there is “MindfulMates,” a London-based group for gay men on the online platform *Meetup* because “consciousness is the new sexy” (fig. 5.80). On *Meetup*, this public group comprises 427 people as of September 2022 and is organized by someone called “Bodhi,” the Buddhist term for “awakening” (MindfulMATES gay London Meetup 2020).⁴⁶

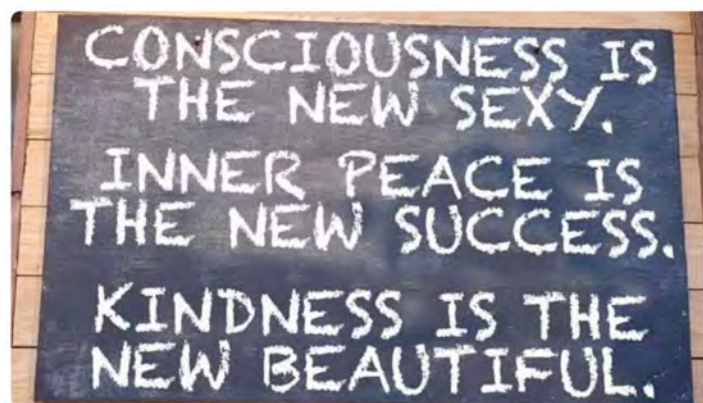


FIGURE 5.80. Advertising banner promoting consciousness, inner peace, and kindness by *MindfulMates*.

45. The video ends with Gok saying: “The truth is here in the UK we’re lucky. Some people may say fortunate. There’s no pride must-have item because we’re legally free to wear what we want to and be the people we want to be. But in some parts of the world that’s just not the case. And what these countries need is for us to stand next to them. [...] Your vital support and help will give the world the Global Pride Makeover we so desperately need. Please stay safe this pride season” (Karmarama 2020a).

46. MindfulMATES gay London Meetup describe themselves in the following way: “*MindfulMATES* inspires people to make meaningful connections every day. A meeting space with activities and events for gay men who want to live their happiest, healthiest lives—and connect with others who feel the same. A Community based Meetup created for people who share values like health and wellness, mindfulness, and fitness. Our simple focus and purpose to help make authentic connections based on what’s inside, meaningful and of deeper value - rather than just another ‘swipe’. This is an adventure into the unknown, into being met just as you are - simple” (MindfulMATES gay London Meetup 2020; emphasis added).

This chapter has tried to identify religious functions within the supposedly secular entity of neoliberalism. (i) Neoliberal practices of individualism and subjectivity promote the message of changing, optimizing, and enhancing selves — and thus religiously transforming them — in various contexts, simply for themselves or companies and jobs. Metis Atash’s *Punkbuddhas* have illustrated how art can mirror this transformational and religious message of hyper-individualistic attitudes towards others. This chapter has shown the multitude of market industries and target audiences — i.e., identity politics — for whom these Buddhified messages of optimization and change are conceptualized. (ii) Neoliberalism is also religious because it aims to achieve “the end of time” — an assumed “beyond” — in the present world and thus seeks the transcendent within the immanent realm: a closeness between corporation and state, a growing financial sector, a collective of hyper-individuals, etc. Material content, products, architecture, and packaging are used to access these two religious projects of neoliberalism.

Religionizing processes — mass marketing, relationship, and influencing religion — show that Buddhist mediators are inherently religious since it is about “converting actors” of a specific message. All three religionizing processes are religious since they all “reach out” and try to transform actors into “their” customers to make them loyal buyers that trust “their” Buddhist-mediated brand. Buddhist mediators seek relationships with consumers and introduce notable actors — i.e., influencers — who act like lobbyists for specific mediators, purposes, brands, or interests. All three religionizing processes try to convert other actors to the rightness or authenticity of *their* commodity by selling distinct but different “beyonds.” Buddhist mediators sell assumed “beyonds” like the market, consumption, money, neoliberalism, selves, emotions, and AI.

However, as previous chapters have shown, Buddhist mediators are not only religious but pluralistically the reverse non-religious. This is why one can say that Buddhist mediators as *gathering* — beyond the *secular and religious* — heavily support the neoliberal idea of individualism and increasingly invests in personalizing mediators and brands — for instance, (i) in the clothing industry that promises individuals a hyper-individualistic haute couture, (ii) the yoga company that promises consumers to be “Buddhahful,” the (iii) “Buddha to go” self-optimization and self-help books, and many more. Actors do not just buy mediators, products, and brands. Still, personalities and selves — and finally, actors — become mediators, products, and brands, because companies advertise and sell emotionalized identities and create specific brand personalities. Thus, neoliberal mediators and brands appear highly personalized, activating consumer niches and focusing on each actor’s individuality within neoliberal and consumerist communities.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to illustrate that Buddhism-as-mediators — beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm — is *subjectivized* in modes of politics, law, and religion.

(i) Buddhist mediators are *politicized* through the building of groups, i.e., collectivizations. These appear in classical political and governmental discourses and tribalist and orientalist practices.

(ii) Buddhist mediators are *legalized* through museums, artifacts, and leisure activities. This chapter has followed the relations of museums, artifacts, collectors, and legal disputes on advertising and tattoos displaying Buddhist motifs.

(iii) Besides the classical world religion narrative, Buddhist mediators are *religionized* in two other major religions: branding and neoliberalism. This chapter has tried to distinguish three kinds of branding, which are *religionizing* in quite different but similar ways. Neoliberalism and its cult of self- and company optimization are perfectly adapted by companies using Buddhist mediators in building their target audience politics.

This Buddhism-as-mediators can either be something consumable in a restaurant — eventually even leading to lawsuits and detention — something to admire in a museum or something to govern a specific political collective or something religious to optimize, improve, change, and convert. These examples all share the notion that actants — not only human actors but also Buddhist mediators, products, events, and much more — come together. These encounters would traditionally not be framed as “Buddhism,” but they *gather* all actants and create *new* and *subjective* Buddhism-as-mediators. This new “thing” could be identified as a *compositionist* engagement protecting multiplicity, form, or practice with and of Buddhist mediators, including political, juridical, and religionist discourses.

Chapter 5

Economical Buddhism-as-Mediators

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are *gathering* beyond the *secular and religious* divide in an *economized* way through (i) attachment, love, and passion to globalization, cosmopolitanism, and urbanization, (ii) organization, as well as (iii) ethics about living responsible and “green” lives to generate something *new* — a composition — out of Buddhist traditions, some hybrids of Buddhist mediators, brands, consumerism, and neoliberalism.

5.1. PASSION — Lovable Buddhist Mediators in the Economy, Commodities, and Architecture

According to Latour, innovation or fiction is about the triple shifting of time, space, and actor, as well as the making of something to hold up to, make believe or cause to fail and lose. It institutes dispatches, figurations, forms, and works of art, and it essentially alternates in the multiplication of worlds (Latour 2013a, 488–489). Neoliberal products and commodities are centered on material “things” — like art, packaging, or interior and exterior architecture — hinting at the material entanglement between human and nonhuman actors. Brands and corporations — such as restaurants and shops — usually have an architectural building with interiors and exteriors, which can be decorated and designed with material Buddhist mediators. What do these look like, and what purposes are behind mediatizing and aestheticizing corporate interiors and exteriors? Actors are attached to, in love with, and very passionate about Buddhist mediators and the materiality of their content since commodification processes are inherently material, ranging from products to services, including material and sensual events. For instance, corporate interiors are essential for brands. They can even act as a communicative and differentiating weapon because one should understand — quoting *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* — “physical spaces as mediums or channels to translate messages to users” (Little Buddha Brand Design Agency 2020a).

5.1.1. Products and Packaging

Buddhist mediators and brands can be identified in material “things” like packaging, because “perception is everything to shoppers” (Little Buddha Brand Design Agency 2020). The packaging of cannabis seeds — whose sale, but not cultivation, is legal in the UK — is designed creatively using Buddhist mediators combined with popular cultural references. *Big Buddha Seeds* has created several Buddha figures like the Buddha on a unicorn, Buddha in front of a lemon cake, a Buddha head in a cannabis flower, several Buddhas in a rock band, a mechanic gear wheel Buddha, a purple haze Buddha, a Buddha on an Oreo, so-called *BadAzz* and *Cheesus* Buddhas, a *Silver Surfer* Buddha, a *Buddha Tahoe*, a Moby Dick Buddha, a LA Buddha, a California Buddha as well as a Buddha performing a “bro fist” (figs. 6.1–6.8) (Big Buddha Seeds 2020).



FIGURE 6.1. Top left, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha on a unicorn by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.2. Top center, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha in a rock band by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.3. Top right, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha on a bitten Oreo by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.4. Bottom left, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha in “badazz cheese” pose by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.5. Bottom center, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha riding Moby Dick by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.6. Bottom right, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha and “brofist” by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

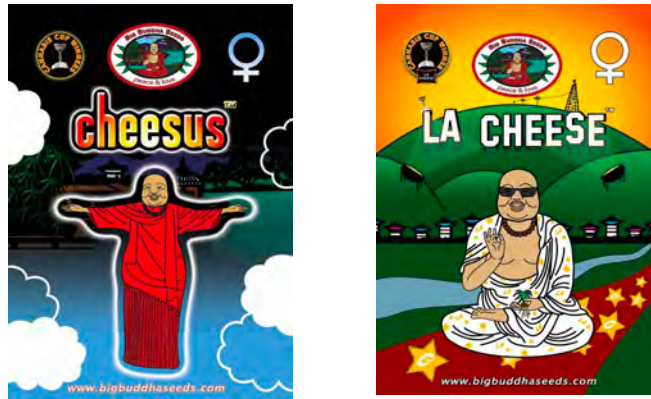


FIGURE 6.7. *Left*, Advertising for cannabis seeds with Buddha standing like Jesus, named “Cheesus” by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

FIGURE 6.8. *Right*, Advertising for cannabis seeds Buddha sitting in Hollywood for “LA cheese” by *Big Buddha Seeds*.

5.1.2. Interior and Exterior Architecture

Architectural buildings and corporations always have an outside and an inside, which can be decorated with Buddhist mediators that are part of a corporate design. (i) Corporate interiors range from Buddha figures in hotel entrances — like the *Mandarin Oriental* hotel at Hyde Park, London — (fig. 6.9) to various Buddha figures, statues, or wall hangings in entrances of bars and restaurants, frequently found in *Buddha-Bar London* (figs. 6.10–6.13). When entering the *Buddha-Bar* in London’s Knightsbridge, one feels like entering a temple. The Buddha silhouettes as wall hangings comprise dozens of small golden Buddhas in the lotus seat (fig 6.11), but the core of the *Buddha-Bar* is often a very large — sometimes multi-story — Buddha figure. Here in London, this signature Buddha is made of fine wire and is not massive: illuminated by lamps, it casts shadows on the wall, which is why the employees call it “shadow Buddha” (fig. 6.13).

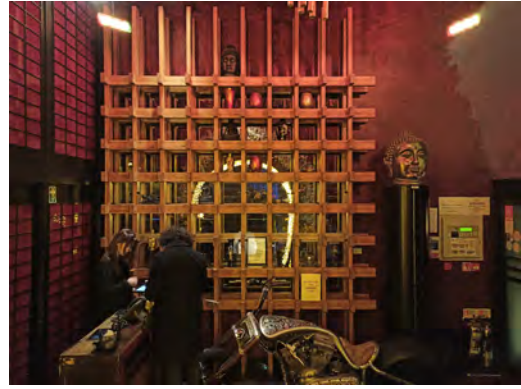


FIGURE 6.9. *Top left*, Buddha figure in the *Mandarin Oriental* hotel at Hyde Park at 66 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.10. *Top right*, Buddha figures at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.11. *Bottom left*, Buddha silhouettes as wall hangings at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.12. *Bottom right*, Buddha figure beside Christmas decoration at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

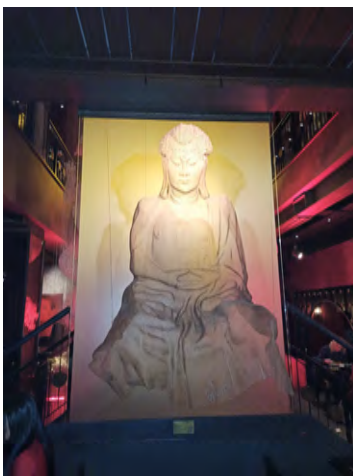


FIGURE 6.13. So-called “shadow Buddha” at *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

(ii) Corporate exteriors include signboards on the outside of the building, at London's *Buddha-Bar* and the *Religion* clothing store (figs. 6.14–6.15) or an advertising banner for “weekly wellbeing workshops” and “meditation, open yoga & mindfulness” (fig. 6.16) at Cambridge's *St. Paul's* church. The latter example displays that the so-called “mindfulness train” has also arrived at Christian churches.



FIGURE 6.14. *Top left*, Signboard of *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.15. *Top right*, Signboard of *Religion* clothing store at 154 Brick Lane, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.16. *Bottom*, Advertising banner for meditation, mindfulness, and yoga classes at St Paul's in Cambridge (UK).

Corporations' architecture — inside and outside — is shaped according to the brand's style and narrative. Corporate exteriors and interiors build on the first material encounters, where the user — if not online — meets the brands on diverse levels sensually and emotionally. It could be assumed that actors depend on material things¹, which in turn depend on things and other actors: the things actors eat, see and consume in *Buddha-Bar* or *Big Buddha Seeds*, as well as the things actors see, hear, and feel in locations like *Fat Buddha Yoga*, are all things that “speak” emotionally, things that require physical and embodied human beings.

5.2. ORGANIZATION — Organizational Buddhist Mediators in Scripts

Organization is about the production, following, mastering, or losing of scripts from view, and it institutes framings, organizations, and empires by changing the size or extension of frames (Latour 2013a, 488–489). The following chapter investigates how (1) Buddha brands are always bound to corporations: neoliberally mediated branding often involves the control of corporations and companies and a relatively uninvolved state. The increasing power of corporations and corporate identities leads to many effects like (a) corporate wellness, (b) power-sharing between companies and governments, which means that a strict separation between state and companies is no longer a given; (c-d) an escalating growth of franchises and financial sectors; (e) the corporate landscape being consolidated — by merging and acquiring smaller competitors — leading to a lack of small business development and a low survival rate for small businesses for an average of 2–3 years²; and (f) the market instability leading to an increase of changing brands' naming again and again, following the motto: “your company needs a naming that is selling most; if it does not provide, change it!” (2) Finally this chapter tries to show that the diversity and spreading of markets — perhaps *the* neoliberal key segment — is increasing so much that there is no non-marketed space anymore where Buddha brands cannot be found.

1. Based on research in the field of material religion, this chapter has followed British archaeologist Ian Hodder who has written extensively on human relationships with things; for example, in *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (2012). Hodder's works are thus loosely connected with the *ANT* approach of Bruno Latour. In 1993, he already spoke of a “Parliament of Things” in which natural objects, social objects, and discourses on both are not seen as separate things but as hybrids. All “actants” — humans and things — are attached to or passionate with other actants, which means that there is no autonomy or emancipation without passion, love, or attachment since it “occupies agents” through words like “consumption, desire, purchase, sale, production - in short the relationship between people and goods” (Latour 2013c; “Attachment”).

2. These estimations follow the research on Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist branding in London, based on Companies House 2020 and CompanyCheck 2020.

5.2.1. Neoliberal Corporations

5.2.1.1. Corporate Wellness

Fat Buddha Yoga has dedicated itself to “corporate wellness,” i.e., wellness services specially designed for companies. They offer one-time, weekly, biweekly, and monthly yoga classes “to give your team some much-needed zen and good vibes.” *Fat Buddha Yoga* even comes to the company's headquarters. They have a considerable number of quite “big players” as their customers, including *Accenture*, *Airbnb*, *Adobe*, *AKQA*, *Amazon*, *Asos*, *Dr. Hauschka*, *Elle*, *Eve*, *Glacéau Smartwater*, *Groupm*, *Google*, *Innocent*, *New Look*, *Nike*, *Soho House*, *Wilderness* and *Women's Health* (fig. 6.17) (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020e). *Karma Cans* delivers homemade food to companies as large as *Google* and *Nike* (fig. 6.18) (Karma Cans 2020).

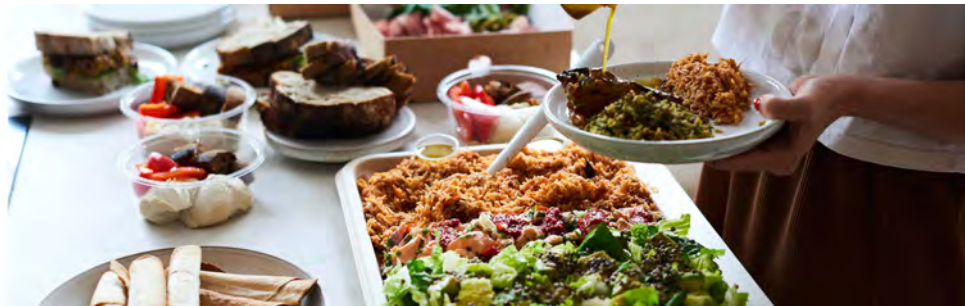


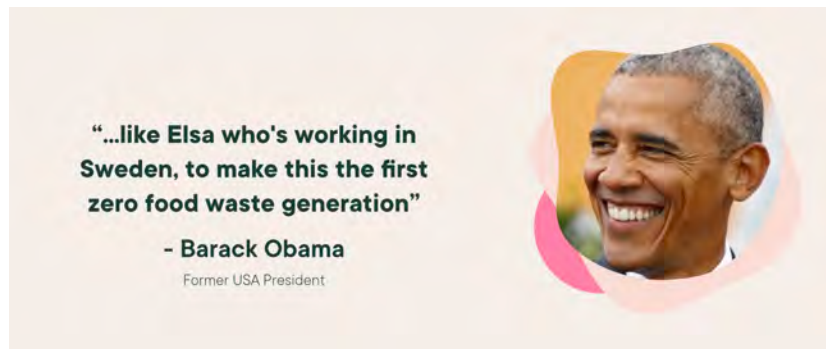
FIGURE 6.17. Top, Client range by *Fat Buddha Yoga*, London (UK).

FIGURE 6.18. Bottom, Homemade food for delivery or collection by *Karma Cans*.

5.2.1.2. Power Sharing Between Governments and Corporations

One may identify power sharing between governments and companies. *Zero Emissions Network* and the app *Karma* sometimes move directly toward municipal or government offices and then display the respective cooperation on their websites. For instance, *Karma* is linking itself with the former president of the United States, Barack Obama, by showing a — hardly verifiable — quotation by him on their website (fig. 6.19) (Karma 2020b), and the *Zero Emissions Network* proudly announces on their website that they are now working together with the Mayor of London

(fig. 6.20) (Zero Emissions Network 2020). At the same time, corporations increasingly try to consolidate the corporate landscape by merging and acquiring other corporations. For instance, the automotive company *Lotus*, for example, was founded in 1948 and has its headquarters in Hethel, Norwich. In May 2017, it was sold to the Chinese multinational *Geely*, while the cars are still “handmade” and manufactured in Hethel (fig. 6.21).



HANDMADE IN HETHEL



Handmade in Hethel is a unique experience giving all Lotus customers the opportunity to visit the Hethel Headquarters and receive their new Lotus directly from the factory.

FIGURE 6.19. Top, Quotation by former president of the United States Barack Obama, quoted by the *Karma* app.

FIGURE 6.20. Bottom left, “Supported by Mayor of London” slogan, used by *Zero Emissions Network*.

FIGURE 6.21. Bottom right, “Handmade in Hethel” slogan, used by *Lotus*.

5.2.1.3. Franchises

Other Buddhified companies open franchise stores like the *Buddha-Bar*, which is a franchising chain that connects London with various other capitals like Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates), Baku (Azerbaijan), Beirut (Lebanon), Belgrade (Serbia), Budapest (Hungary), Cairo (Egypt), Caracas (Venezuela), Dubai (Emirate of Dubai), Kyiv (Ukraine), London (UK), Manila (Philippines), Marrakesh (Morocco), Mexico City (Mexico), Monte Carlo (Monaco), Moscow (Russia), Paris (France), Prague (Czech Republic) and Tbilisi (Georgia). Closed or renamed capital

locations were Washington D.C. (US), New York (US), and Jakarta (Indonesia). Besides capitals, *Buddha-Bar* is located in metropolises like Flic en Flac (Mauritius), Saint Petersburg (Russia), as well as Mykonos and Santorini (both Greece).

5.2.1.4. Growing Financial Sector

One may also witness the escalating growth of financial sectors in Buddhist mediations — some financial or capitalist “Buddhism” — like *Credit Karma*, *Kensho*³, *Zen Assets*, *Zen Capital*., *Zen Wealth LLP*, *Smartkarma*⁴, *Fat Buddha Finance*, *Zen Financial Services*, *Z/Yen*⁵, *Nirvana Capital* or *Zen Wealth*, as well as slogans like “Achieving Finance Nirvana” (2018) by *Hayne Solutions*, “Zen and the art of Financial Planning” by *Zen Wealth* (2020) or “zest for enlightenment” by *Z/Yen*. These samples demonstrate the superabundance and flood of financial offers in the field of Buddhist mediators.



FIGURE 6.22. Headquarters of Z/Yen at 41 Lothbury, London (UK).

3. In 2018, *Kensho* was acquired by *S&P Global* for 550 million dollars, making it “the largest AI acquisition in history to date.” *Kensho* was initially “[f]ounded out of Harvard and MIT in 2013” and “received backing by Google Ventures, leading financial institutions such as Goldman Sachs, Bank of America Merrill Lynch, JPMorgan Chase and S&P Global, and the *venture capital arm of the CIA*, In-Q-Tel” (*Kensho* 2020; emphasis added). This means that the AI and machine learning company *Kensho*’s “team members come from veteran positions at Google, Apple, Facebook, the U.S. Intelligence Community, Wall Street and from academia” (*Kensho* 2020).

Kensho also created the so-called “New Economies Indices,” which would represent the foundations of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and “the essence of 21st Century Sectors” (fig. 6.23). Due to developments in AI, automation, 3D printing, robotics, genetics, bio-, and nanotechnology as well as increasing connectedness “have laid the foundation for seismic changes across all facets of our lives,” they have applied a new “entirely systematic, rules-based” methodology, which would scan all public companies, filter the companies matching with the new economy and organize companies organized by impact (fig. 6.24). *Kensho* aims for the “democratization of infrastructure” in “banking, computing resources” or power generation. According to *Kensho*, this new “family of New Economy” — propelling the Fourth Industrial Revolution — could only be illustrated and methodologically grasped by inventing new classification schemes (*Kensho Indices* 2020).

4. *Smartkarma* is “the global investment research network,” which “unites the fragmented investment industry, connecting institutional investors, independent research providers, and corporates within a single network.” The latter has several “big” clients like *Reuters*, *Bloomberg*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Société Générale*, one of France’s most influential investment banks (*Smartkarma* 2020).

5. *Z/Yen* (fig. 6.22) calls itself a “commercial think tank” focused on reward enhancement, risk reduction, and certainty increase (*Z/Yen* 2020).

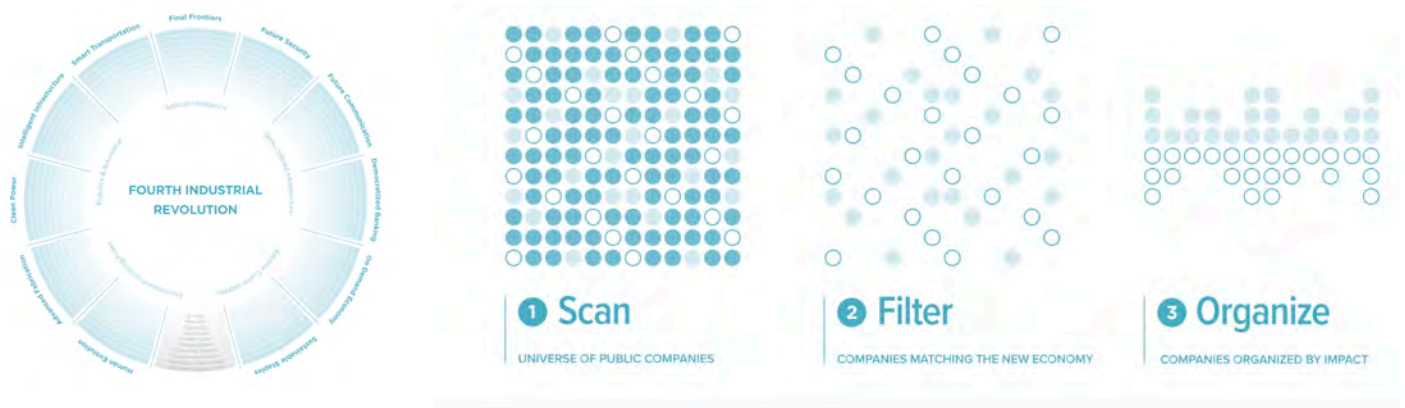


FIGURE 6.23. *Left*, Diagram of “Fourth Industrial Revolution” by *Kensho*.

FIGURE 6.24. *Right*, A new economy methodology by *Kensho*.

5.2.1.5. The Lack of Entrepreneurial and Small Business Development

Corporatocracy — the rule of corporations — goes along with the lack of entrepreneurial and small business development. Only a minority of many small businesses in London survive for more than five years⁶. Some of these now “dead” companies include *Big Buddha Yoga* (2016—2019), *Blvck Buddha* (2016—2018), *Buddha Gin* (2016—2018), *Buddhafly London* (2010-2015) (fig. 6.25), *The Raving Buddha* (2010—2014) (fig. 6.26) and *Buddha Bar of London* (2001—2014) (Companies House 2020).



FIGURE 6.25. *Left*, “Buddhafly Movement” advertisement by *Buddhafly London*.

FIGURE 6.26. *Right*, Advertisement at *Greene King* by *Raving Buddha*.

6. This estimation is based on research on Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist branding in London, resting upon Companies House 2020 and CompanyCheck 2020.

5.2.1.6. Changing Company Naming

Evidence suggests that companies repeatedly change their naming when sales with the current one need to be increased. For instance, *Red Heritage Distributors* (2018—2019) was founded and lasted two months with the naming *Buddha Jerk Shop* but was then renamed and is nonetheless dissolved today. Another example is the *Buzzing Buddha*, founded in 2019 as *Terra Love*. However, one of the most dynamic renaming processes can be identified at a company founded in 2005, *Trocadero Studio*, which kept that naming until 2018. That year, it was renamed *Dreamerdoer Studio* for three months and then *Studio Montmartre* for one year. In July 2019, *Buddha Sushi Bar* was renamed for four months, only to be renamed back to *Studio Montmartre* again for two and a half months. Since the beginning of February 2020, the today-still-existing company is now called *Rocks & Waves Cinema*. The nature of their business has de facto never changed but always remained “motion picture production activities” (Companies House 2020). It can also be identified that companies are trading under a different naming than they are registered with: for instance, the company registered as *Zen Optimise* uses *Tribe SEO* as its official trading name. The company was founded in 2010 in Consett, Durham, as *SEO Training* and was known for this naming until 2013, when they changed the naming to *Zen Optimise*. In 2018, they changed their naming to *Tribe SEO* and their contact address to London (Companies House 2020, Tribe SEO 2020).

5.2.2. Markets

At the center of the neoliberal belief system lies the market or, instead, the marketization of society, which today is vastly increasing.⁷ Market areas covered by brands using Buddhist mediators reach every aspect of daily life. The author of this study’s research in London has shown that these branded mediations involve sixteen different market sectors or industries, such as the health and beauty, clothing, foods and drinks, finances, or service industries. Each of these industries can be documented by an endless number of case studies in branded Buddhist mediators, which is why some are presented here as representative examples for others.

7. Several authors have connected the market with Buddhism, religion, and many other issues: Linn Vaddhaka (2015) has analyzed the “Buddha on Wall Street” and asked “Whats Wrong with Capitalism and What We Can Do about It,” Tuomas Martikainen and François Gauthier have written on religion in the neoliberal age (2013), and the marketization of religion (2018b), and François Gauthier (2020) quite recently wrote about moving from nation states to the market. The *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* has defined marketing as the “visibility at the point of sale” because this “is the place where the decision to buy is made in most cases” (Little Buddha Brand Design Agency 2020a).

(i) The health industry comprises companies that offer various specific services such as dental care (*Karma Dental Care*, *The Zen Clinic*, *Buddha Dental Tree*), massages and therapies (*Native Karma*, *Spanu Massage*), pharmacies (*Zen: Pharmacy — Beauty — Health Centre*), health shops (*Epic Zen*, *Nirvana Health*), yoga (*Fat Buddha Yoga*), sports (*MB Zen Sports*), tea (*Buddha Leaf*, *Buddha Teas*) and skin care (*Zen Skin Clinic*). The *Zen* pharmacy advertises the “fusion of pharmacy, beauty and wellness center” on its website and displays a meditating woman in a yoga pose (fig. 6.27).

(ii) The food and drinks industry comprises case studies like fancy dining (*Buddha-Bar*), fast food (Kentucky Fried Chicken’s *KFChill*, *Karma Burger*), bakers (*Karma Bread*), breweries (Kew Pagoda Beer), cola producers (*Karma Cola*) and gin distilleries (*Cubical*, *Buddha Gins*). The figures on the *Karma Cola* bottle (fig. 6.28) remind of angels with halos and devils, with the company logo in between, which is why the company’s message is that *Karma Cola* is both good and evil.

(iii) The clothing industry can be identified by offering several specialties such as clothing products (*Religion* and *True Religion* in London or *Pink Buddha* in Vienna (Austria)), yoga supplies (*Fat Buddha Yoga*, *Chocolate Buddha: British Yoga Clothing*), beachwear (*Buddha Beachwear*), sleepwear (*Lama’s Pyjamas*), bags (*Paradise Row London - The Buddha & The Buddha Satchel*) and jewelry (*Buddha to Buddha*, *Buddha & Boomi*). For instance, *Paradise Row London*’s “The Buddha” is a ladies’ handbag valued at around \$437, and with “personalization” even \$470 (fig. 6.29). The handbag is made of “[f]orest green vegetable-tanned leather,” “[t]welve carat gold plated fittings and focal charm,” and it “comes with a black passport holder and a story card” (*Paradise Row London* 2020). The bag is named after the golden pendant showing a Buddha figure in a sitting pose, one arm on the lap and one arm pointing toward the ground. It carries a bud-shaped bulge on its head and a pagoda-shaped frame around the figure. The company describes the product as bringing harmony and color to anyone’s wardrobe, and the “Buddha charm echoes this mood of serenity and mindfulness” offered by the *London Buddhist Centre* (*Paradise Row London* 2020).

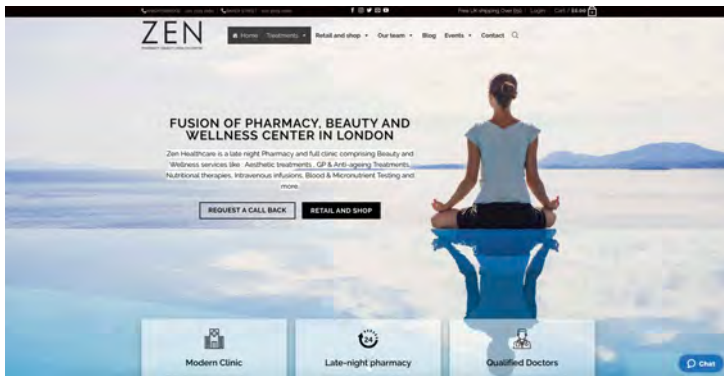


FIGURE 6.27. Top left, “Fusion of Pharmacy, Beauty and Wellness Center in London” slogan on the website of *Zen: Pharmacy — Beauty — Health Center*.

FIGURE 6.28. Top right, Colorful cola bottle by *Karma Cola*.

FIGURE 6.29. Bottom, “The Buddha” leather handbag by *Paradise Row London*.

(iv) The finance industry uses Buddhist mediators in industries like investment research networks (*Smartkarma*), financial planning (*Zen Wealth*, “Zen and the art of Financial Planning”), crypto investment funds (*Nirvana Capital*), finances (*Zen Protocol*, *Fat Buddha Finance*, *Zen Financial Services* in Crewe, Cheshire (UK)) and assets (*Zen Asset 2020*). For instance, *Nirvana Capital* is a “blockchain focused fund” whose founders also are early supporters of *Ethereum* — founded in 2015 — which is the second-largest cryptocurrency behind *Bitcoin*. *Nirvana Capital* is based in San Francisco, Beijing, and London (fig. 6.30). It aims to “bring together ecosystems that revolutionize the social productions and labor relations with the communities underneath” (*Nirvana Capital 2017*).

(v) The information and communication technology (ICT) industry can be identified in business sectors such as internet access (*Zen Internet* in the UK), edge cloud service providers (*ZenLayer* in London), mobile networks (*Zen Networks* in Casablanca (Morocco)), cable and satellite channels (*Tara Television* in the UK, 1996–2002), press (*Tara Press UK* in London, *Tara: India Research Press* in New Delhi (India)), computer consulting (*Gautama Digital* in London), computer services (*Zen Computer Shop* in London, and *Zen Computer Services* in Manchester

(UK)), property licensing with AI (*Kamma* in London), IT infrastructure staffing solutions (*Zentech Talent* in London), telecommunications (*Zencom Telecommunications* and *Karma Telecom* in London, and *Karma Telecom* in Ludhiana (India)), retail sale of mobile phones (*Gold Buddha* in London), emotive speech (*DeepZen* in London), industrial Internet of Things (*Samsara* in London, San Francisco, San Jose and Atlanta in the US) and self-driving (*Zenzic* in London). *Zenlayer* has its headquarters in Los Angeles and has more than 150 global data centers (fig. 6.32) (ZenLayer 2019).

(vi) The realty industry using Buddhist mediators comprises segments such as realty investment (*ZenProp* in London, Sandton, South Africa, Double Bay, NSW, Australia, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, *Zen Property Investors* in London, *Karma Developers* in Paralimni, Cyprus), realty and property management (*Zen Properties* in London), realty agencies (*CityZen Properties* in London) and property developers (*Nirvana Homes* in London, *Nirvana Homes* in Brampton, ON, Canada). For instance, *ZenProp* has offices in London, Sandton (South Africa), Double Bay (Australia), and Frankfurt am Main (Germany). In Germany, *ZenProp* has invested in *Leonardo Hotels*, *Real hypermarkets retail*, *Netto retail*, and *Edeka supermarkets retail* (fig. 6.31). They say that “Zenprop UK seeks to identify and secure outstanding realty investment and development opportunities in the UK and continental Europe” by “innovation with excellence” (ZenProp 2020).



FIGURE 6.30. Top left, *Nirvana Capital* company headquarters in San Francisco, CA.

FIGURE 6.31. Top right, *Edeka* supermarkets retail in Germany by *ZenProp*.

FIGURE 6.32. Bottom, Global map and the slogan “Extend Your Global Reach” by *ZenLayer*.

(vii) The construction industry comprises home fittings (*Zen Architectural Fittings* in London), windows and doors (*Zen Windows* in Bangalore (India)), construction (*Zen Builders* in London) (fig. 6.33), and carpets (*Karma Carpentry* in London).

(viii) The manufacturing industry offers sound production (*Wisebuddah* in London), creative production (*Nirvana Creative Production House* in London), films (*Buddha Being Films*, *Dharma Films*, and *Pagoda Kiss Kiss Films* in London), yoga clothing (*The Mindful Cat* in London), yoga nutrition (*Yoga Nutrition* in London), video production (*Nirvana Studios* in London), brand agencies (*Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* in Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, Cambridge, and Porto), brand developers (*Pink Buddha* in London), creative agencies (*Karmarama* in London (2020a) and designers (*The Karma Creative* and *Gautama Payment* in London). For the launch of *Prada's* fragrance *Prada Candy*, London-based *Nirvana Creative Production House* developed press kits for journalists and consumers (fig. 6.34) (*Nirvana Creative Production House* 2020).

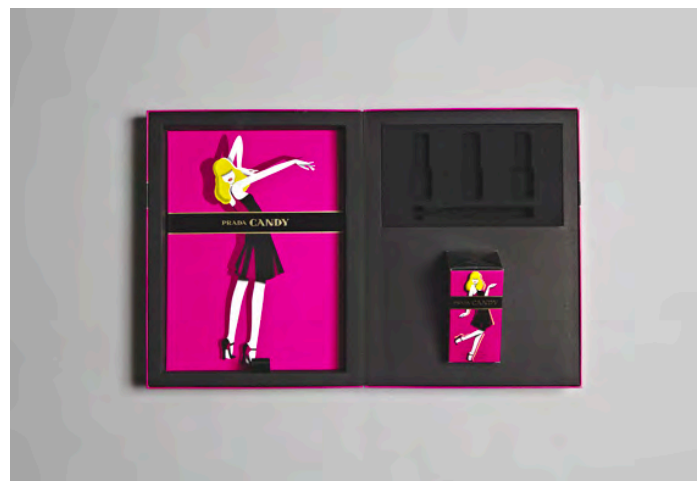
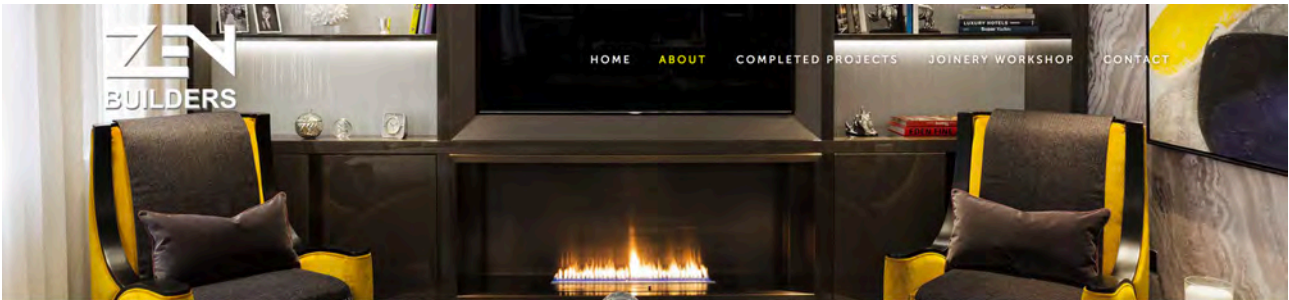


FIGURE 6.33. *Top*, Interior design on the main page of *Zen Builders'* website.

FIGURE 6.34. *Bottom*, *Prada Candy* press kits made by *Nirvana Creative Production House*.

(ix) The transportation industry using Buddhist mediators offers supply chain services (*Zencargo* in London, Geneva, Bengal, Valencia, and Quarry Bay), sailing (*Tara Sail* in London), limo services (*Karma Kabs/Karma Kabs* and *Lotus Limousines* in London and *Lotus Limousines* in Singapore, Singapore) as well as chauffeur cars and private jet catering (*Buddha-Bar* in London).

For instance, the car fleet of *Karma Kabs/Karma Kabs* (fig. 6.35) is based on the *Morris Oxford* from the 1950s and the “lifestyle guru” Tobias Moss, who started the concept 10 years ago (*Karma Kabs/Karma Cars* 2020a).

Each car has been individually and lovingly styled to Moss’ ethical craftsmanship principles. Both bumpers are festooned with flowers, and the interiors are bedecked with rich sequined and beaded fabrics. This prompts the statement: “A jaw-dropping entrance guaranteed every time!” (*Karma Kabs/Karma Cars* 2020a). The *Buddha-Bar London* provides chauffeur cars ranging from \$133/h for *Mercedes-Benz S-Class* to \$402/h for *Rolls-Royce Phantom* and private jet catering without mentioning the prices (figs. 6.36—6.37) (*Buddha-Bar* 2020a).

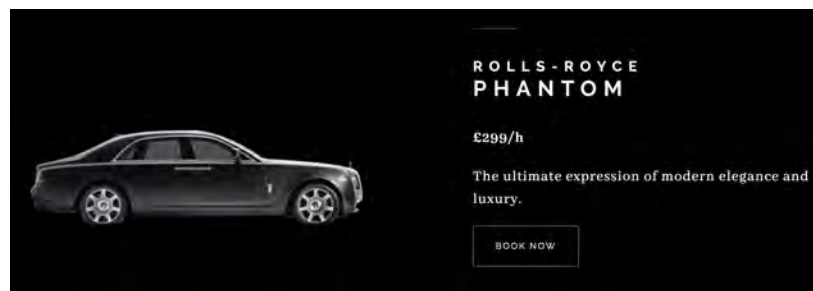


FIGURE 6.35. *Top left*, Colorful car fleet by *Karma Kabs/Karma Kars* in London (UK).

FIGURE 6.36. *Top right*, Luxury chauffeur cars by *Buddha-Bar* in London (UK).

FIGURE 6.37. *Bottom*, Private jet catering by *Buddha-Bar* in London (UK).

(x) The service industry is very diverse and offers a wide range of services such as music publishing (*Karma Artists* in London), property management (*Zenhomes* in Berlin (Germany)), electrical solutions (*Zen Electrical Solutions* in London), meetings and events (*Zen Meetings & Events* in London), nails (*Zen Nails & Beauty* in London), property licensing (*Kamma* in London), sound production (*Wisebuddah* in London and Newark (UK)), marketing (*Zendo Marketing* in

London), management, publishing, booking, labeling and consulting (*Karmarama* in Vienna (Austria) (2020b)), dry cleaners (*Tara Dry Cleaners* in London), family centers (*Nirvana Family Centre* in London, dissolved), libraries (*Nirvana Library* in London, dissolved, and *Nirvana Library* in Polokwane (South Africa)), kindergartens (*Tara Kindergartens* in London), mindfulness (*Mindfulness in Schools Project* in Tonbridge (UK), *The Mindfulness Project* in London, and *The Mindfulness Initiative* in Sheffield), sound labs (*Dharma Sound Lab* in London), creative agencies (*Karmarama* in London (2020a)), alternative cultural centers (*Nirvana Studios* in Barcarena (Portugal)), consulting (*Lotus Global Solutions Inc.* in Tucker, GA (US)), collaborative work management solutions (*Clarizen* in San Mateo, CA (US) and London), design consulting (*Karma Creative* in London), designers (*The Karma Creative* and *Gautama Payment* in London), brand agencies (*Little Buddha Brand Design Agency* in Barcelona, Madrid, Paris, Cambridge and Porto), brand developers (*Pink Buddha* in London) emission reduction (*Zero Emissions Network* in London) home “smartification” (*Lotus Smart Homes* in London) and traveling (*The Lotus Group* in London).

Today, it seems insufficient to be “just” an electrician: with hundreds of competitors — especially in megacities like London — *Zen Electrical Solutions* has set itself apart from the others by adding “Zen” to it (fig. 6.38). The London-based *The Lotus Group* — established in 1980 — with assets of \$107 million and an annual turnover of \$423 million says that “[t]he Lotus Group is one of the UK’s most successful and inspiring private companies.” Its primary brands include *DialAFlight*, the ski and golf specialist *Supertravel*, and *Corporate Travel* (The Lotus Group 2020).

(xi) The energy and water industry using Buddhist mediators provides market sectors like water (*Nirvana Nemesis U.K.* in Tonyrefail, Porth; dissolved), solar and lighting (*Lotus Energy* as *Lotus Solar* and *Lotus Lighting* in Hudson, NY (US) and Kathmandu (Nepal)), solar, batteries and LED lights (*Lotus Energy* in Melbourne, VIC (Australia)), solar and battery storage (*Zen Energy* in Adelaide, SA (Australia)), general energy (*Lotus Energy UK* in New Malden, Surrey (UK)) and energy service, compliance, performance and freedom (*Zenergi* in Southampton, Colchester, Manchester and Stourbridge, all UK). *Lotus Energy* in Melbourne (Australia) advertises on its website with a lotus flower (fig. 6.39) and a focus on solar energy (Lotus Energy 2018).



FIGURE 6.38. Left, Zen logo with light bulb and power cord by *Zen Electrical Solutions*.

FIGURE 6.39. Right, Label with lotus flower by *Lotus Energy*, Melbourne, VIC (Australia).

(xii) The accommodation industry uses Buddhist mediators in various branches like apartments (*Zen Apartments* in London and *Karma Boutique Apartments* in Budapest (Hungary)), hotels (*London Olympus Hotel Nirvana* and *Copthorne Tara Hotel* in London, *Lak Nirvana* in Athens (Greece)), accommodation (*Karma Estate* in Pokolbin, NSW (Australia)) and estates, resorts, royal residences, sanctums, and retreats worldwide (*Karma Group* 2020). For instance, the *Karma Group* (fig. 6.40) offers *Karma Resorts* in Bali, Germany, Australia, and Italy, and *Karma Retreats* in Thailand, Vietnam, India, Bali, Indonesia, Greece, France, *Karma Royal* in Goa, Thailand, Bali, *Karma Royal Residences* in Goa, Indonesia, Germany, *Karma Estate* in Greece, France, Bali, and *Karma Sanctum* in England (*Karma Group* 2020).

(xiii) The mining industry includes the mining of non-ferrous metal ores (*Lotus China* in London, dissolved) as well as oil and gas (*Dana Petroleum* in the UK, the Netherlands, and Egypt). *Dana Petroleum* is an oil and gas company — founded in 1994, headquartered in Aberdeen (UK), and acquired by the *Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC)* in 2010 — with operations in the UK, the Netherlands, and Egypt. In 2018, its revenues were \$1.27 billion, while owning four so-called FPSOs (“floating production, storage and offloading vessel”), two in the UK and two in the Netherlands (fig. 6.41) (*Dana Petroleum* 2020).

(xiv) The administration industry includes shipping, tracking, and returns (*ZenKraft* in London and Newark, DE (US)). *ZenKraft* offers services for retail and commerce, healthcare, manufacturing, logistics, consumer goods, and financial and legal sectors. Their apps support over 60 carriers like *UPS*, *FedEx*, or *DHL* (fig. 6.42), and they have over 1,000 customers like *Walt Disney*, *Tesla*, *Lenovo*, and *Samsung*. According to *ZenKraft*, “[c]ustomers are saving 1,000s of hours using Zenkraft to automate their shipping operations in the Cloud” (*ZenKraft* 2020).

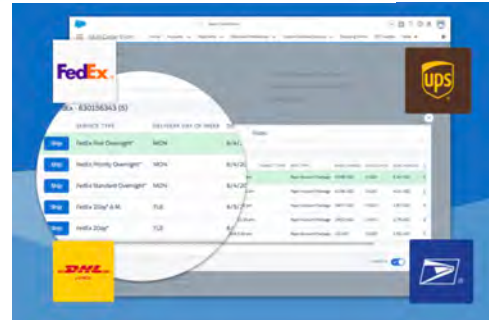
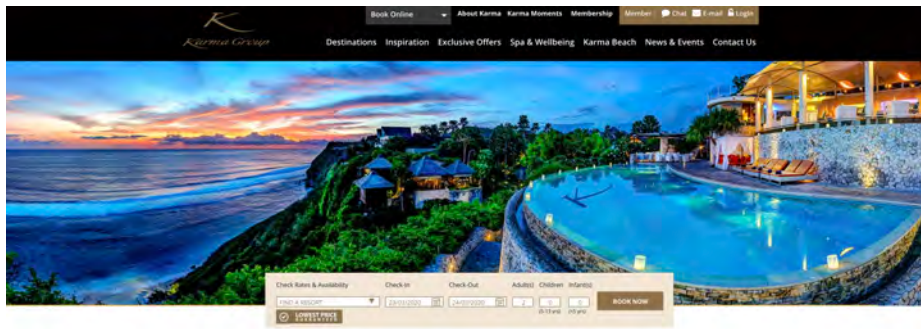


FIGURE 6.40. Top, The website of *Karma Group* displays a luxury hotel, landscape, and swimming pool.

FIGURE 6.41. Bottom left, Western Isles FPO is a working place of *Dana Petroleum*.

FIGURE 6.42. Bottom right, Shipping, tracking, and returns in salesforce displayed by *ZenKraft*.

(xv) The art industry uses Buddhist mediators like street art (Banksy) and artworks (Gonkar Gyatso, Metis Atash, Wang Zi Won). Banksy introduced the “Injured Buddha” (fig. 6.43) in 2008 at *The Cans Festival* in London’s Leake Street, known as the *Banksy Tunnel*. Banksy has displayed the Buddha sitting in a lotus position, the left arm on the right foot, the right arm bent, and his palm facing the viewer. The Buddha — wearing a kind of halo around his head — has a black eye, a bloody nose, a neck brace, and a bandaged left hand. There is much speculation about Banksy’s intentions: (a) Buddhists expelling Muslims from Burma, (b) the conflict between China and Tibet, or (c) a criticism of “Western culture.” At the same time, there is a massive market for posters, cushions, and other articles with this motif (“What does r/buddhism think of Banksy’s Injured Buddha?” 2013).

(xvi) Finally, the retail industry uses Buddhist mediators in supermarkets (*Karma Supermarket* in London and *Karma Mart V/I* in Lagos (Nigeria)), tourist shops (*Kew Pagoda* shop, *Zen Chinese Giftshop*, and *The Chinese Gift Shop* in London), and stores (*Urban Buddha* and *Buddha on a Bicycle* in London). For instance, the *Historic Royal Palaces* shop sells a “Pagoda watercolour luxury cushion” (fig. 6.44) on their website (“Pagoda watercolour luxury cushion,” n.d.).



FIGURE 6.43. Left, “Injured Buddha,” former graffiti street art by Banksy as a print on metal.



FIGURE 6.44. Right, Pagoda watercolor luxury cushion by the *Historic Royal Palaces* shop.

5.3. ETHICS — Moral Buddhist Mediators in Scruples, “Good and Bad,” “True and False”

According to Latour, ethics — or morality — is about exploring the links between ends and means. It repeatedly renews calculations and suspension of scruples, and ethics tries to calculate the “impossible optimum” (Latour 2013a, 488–489). Actors are in an ethical dilemma in which they consume things in various discourses like the impact of AI⁸, animal welfare (Battersea by *Karmarama* (2021)) or health care⁹. Two other dilemmas will be discussed here: (i) the capitalist dilemma, which circles the question of rich against poor, and (ii) the ecological dilemma dealing with the — adverse — human effects on “nature” and how to avoid it. Ultimately, both dilemmas can be commodified in a consumerist and neoliberal society, like Che Guevara, who started as a rebel and ended up on a consumable T-shirt.

8. The AI tech company *DeepMind* — which *Google* acquired in 2014 — has an “Ethics & Society” (2021a) as well as a “Safety & Ethics” blog (2021b).

9. In 2016, the health department of *DeepMind* announced a partnership with *Moorfields Eye Hospital*, “one of the world’s leading eye hospitals.” In 2020 *AlphaFold* was used by *DeepMind* for scientific discovery, “bringing together experts from the fields of structural biology, physics, and machine learning to apply cutting-edge techniques to predict the 3D structure of a protein based solely on its genetic sequence” (2020b). *Google* also has a health department (2021) with the slogan “Live your healthiest life,” which is interested in AI research in breast cancer screening and has even launched *Google Health Studies*, available on *Google Play*.

5.3.1. The “Feeling Good” Ethics

According to Žižek (2014), companies like *Starbucks* — for instance — sell a so-called “feel-good ideology.” Can anyone consume anything and be anything? What is allowed and what is not? How can one consume and “feel good”? He has argued that, following economic theorist Jeremy Rifkin, since the early 2000s, there has been a shift in marketing, “a new stage of commodification” that could be called “cultural capitalism”: commodities are thus not bought because of their utility or as a status symbol, but “to get the experience provided by them, we consume them in order to make our life pleasurable and meaningful.” According to Žižek, an exemplary case for Rifkin’s understanding of “cultural capitalism” is *Starbucks*’¹⁰ advertising campaign “It’s not just what you’re buying. It’s what you’re buying into” (fig. 6.45): it is about “buying into a coffee ethic” and a “good coffee karma.”¹¹ This explains that the price is higher than its competitors. However, people are not only buying coffee, but coffee ethics, which includes “care for the environment, social responsibility towards the producers, plus a place where you yourself can participate in communal life” (Žižek 2014).

This ethical “feel-good ideology” appears — for instance — in the *Karma* app (fig. 6.46), which was founded in Sweden in 2016 and now exists in 225 cities in Sweden, the UK, and France. After downloading the app, one can choose the food and pick it up for half the price before it is

10. Žižek repeatedly refers to the example of *Starbucks*, which he first took up in the British-Irish documentary film *The Pervert’s Guide to Ideology* (2013): “Let’s turn to the high point of our consumerism. Let me take a drink. Starbucks coffee. I’m regularly drinking it, I must admit it. But are we aware, that when we buy a cappuccino from Starbucks, we also buy quite a lot of ideology? Which ideology? You know, when you enter a Starbucks store, it’s usually always displayed in some posters, their message, which is: “Yes, our cappuccino is more expensive than others,” but, then comes the story. “We give 1% all our income to some Guatemalan children to keep them healthy, for the water supply for some Saharan farmer, or to save the forest, to enable organic growing for coffee, or whatever or whatever.” Now, I admire the ingenuity of this solution. *In the old days of pure, simple consumerism, you bought a product, and then you felt bad. “My God, I’m just a consumerist, while people are starving in Africa . . .” So the idea is that you had to do something to counteract your pure, destructive consumerism.* For example, I don’t know, you contribute to charity and so on. *What Starbucks enables you, is to be a consumerist, without any bad conscience, because the price for the countermeasure, for fighting consumerism, is already included into the price of a commodity. Like, you pay a little bit more, and you’re not just a consumerist, but you do also your duty towards the environment, the poor, starving people in Africa, and so on and so on. It’s, I think, the ultimate form of consumerism”* (Žižek 2013, 55.37–57.42; transcribed by author; emphasis added).

11. In 2014, Žižek explained the coffee ethics of *Starbucks* in the following way: “After celebrating the quality of the coffee itself, the ad goes on: “But, when you buy Starbucks, whether you realise it or not, you’re buying into something bigger than a cup of coffee. *You’re buying into a coffee ethic.* Through our Starbucks Shared Planet programme, we purchase more Fair Trade coffee than any company in the world, ensuring that the farmers who grow the beans receive a fair price for their hard work. And, we invest in and improve coffee-growing practices and communities around the globe. *It’s good coffee karma. . . . Oh, and a little bit of the price of a cup of Starbucks coffee helps furnish the place with comfy chairs, good music, and the right atmosphere to dream, work and chat in. We all need places like that these days. When you choose Starbucks, you are buying a cup of coffee from a company that cares. No wonder it tastes so good”*” (Žižek 2014; emphasis added).

thrown away. The app promotes the slogan “Good for the wallet, good for the planet.” By their own account, they have saved 900 tons of food, two million dishes, and 1,300 tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂). The app was elected “Startup of the Year” and had 7,500 partners and 1,100,000 users. Then there is *Omnom*, which combines a restaurant, a yoga place, and a charity (fig. 6.47).¹²

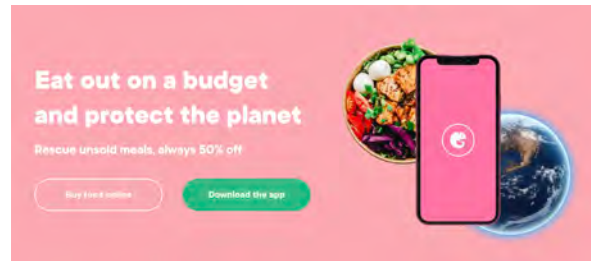


FIGURE 6.45. Left, Advertising campaign with Starbucks’ slogan, images, and text.

FIGURE 6.46. Center, Advertising for the Karma app to eat out ethically.

FIGURE 6.47. Right, Omnom charity campaign for eating out ethically.

5.3.2. The Ethics of Green and Ecological Lives

One of the most challenging topics for the next few decades will be ecology and “nature.” Ecological scientists have warned of an environmental and ecological catastrophe for several decades. However, only when a Swedish girl named Greta Thunberg started a protest triggered a mass movement with millions of global followers. However, even before this, there were multitudes of “green” publications like John Grant’s *The Green Marketing Manifesto* (2007), which argue that brands are — and should be — increasingly ecological. Since then, one can identify a sharp divide between people who have changed their way of life: what and how they consume in connection with “nature.” However, this “greening” has also — like everything else — become a commodity: when buying certain commodities, one gives “nature” something back, and one consumes ethically appropriately. Cleaning lives, cleaning selves, and cleaning cities seem to be the slogans of

12. *Omnom* describes itself in the following way: “Compassion and kindness are the key values that drive our project. *The gesture is simple yet powerful – when you eat at OmNom, someone else eats too.* For every meal we serve or for every yoga class you attend, we will feed a child a hot, healthy, nutritionally balanced meal in the developing world providing relief from poverty. Within OmSpace our beautiful yoga studio, we will also be offering mindfulness and yoga classes offering physical health and emotional wellbeing” (Omnom 2020; emphasis added).

neoliberal societies. As topics relatively unseen in China, Myanmar, or the Philippines, they become increasingly important in neoliberal consumerist societies, and mediated Buddhist brands become increasingly associated with ecological and “nature” aware discourses.

The hotel and travel company *Karma Group* advertises their contribution to “sustainability” and “sustainable designs” by mentioning on their website that they won the so-called *Rethinking The Future Architecture Awards* in 2020 (fig. 6.48) (Karma Group 2020). With its 450,000 journeys each year, *The Lotus Group* also invests in the charity sector under the slogan “Make My Day Better” so that consumers and entrepreneurs “feel better” when they consume (The Lotus Group 2020).



FIGURE 6.48. Sustainable designs by *Karma Group* won the top *Rethinking The Future Architecture Awards*.

Then there is *Zero Emissions Network (ZEN)*, established in 2012 and has since gained close to 1,300 business members and over 700 residential members from Bunhill, Shoreditch, and Spitalfields in London. *ZEN* has delivered over 800 emission-reducing initiatives; it is “a partnership project between the London Boroughs of Hackney, Islington, and Tower Hamlets, and it is supported by the Mayor of London” (Zero Emissions Network 2020). *ZEN*’s motto is “Be more Zen,” which can be achieved by “a range of emission-reducing measures to members of the network - all for free!” like an e-bike switch, a bike repair, an energy audit, a cargo bike trial, an electric minicab switch, cycle training, “fix your bike” courses, electric van trials, electric vehicles, workplace grants and grants in general (fig. 6.49). There are also car clubs, cycle safety seminars, 50% off cycle hires, electric scooter trials, energy audits at the workplace, reduced delivery costs at the workplace, and grants at the workplace (Zero Emissions Network 2020).¹³

13. *ZEN* advertises that “children at school in high-pollution areas have substantially smaller increases in attentiveness, brain development and memory” (fig. 6.51) (Zero Emissions Network 2020). The so-called *ZEN Discount Card* provides discounts from other *ZEN* members to save even more money (fig. 6.50) (Zero Emissions Network 2020). They state that nearly 9,500 people die prematurely in London every year, that 5-15 % of children’s lung capacity is lost in high-pollution areas, and that the cost of asthma per year is one billion British pounds since 1,167 people have died from asthma in 2011, and 90% of these deaths would have been preventable (fig. 6.52) (Zero Emissions Network 2020).

OFFERS: BE MORE ZEN

The ZEN offers a range of emission reducing measures to members of the network - all for free! Just click on the offer you're interested in to book now.



Nearly 9,500 die
prematurely in London every year.
752 of these were in Hackney,
Islington and Tower Hamlets..

5-15%
Loss of childrens'
lung-capacity in
high-pollution areas

HOSPITAL
£1,000,000,000
Cost of asthma to the NHS per year.
1,167 people died from asthma (2011);
90% of these deaths were preventable

FIGURE 6.49. Top left, Zero Emissions Network's slogan, "Be more Zen," and how to achieve this by generating less air pollution.

FIGURE 6.50. Top center, Zen discount card by Zero Emissions Network.

FIGURE 6.51. Top right, Graphic showing how high vs. low pollution affects human brains, made by Zero Emissions Network.

FIGURE 6.52. Bottom, Statistical graphic showing how many people die or get sick from pollution, designed and arranged by Zero Emissions Network.

5.3.3. Globalization, Cities, and Cosmopolitanism

Passion, love, and attachment are about multiplying goods and bads by undertaking interest and stopping transactions since it institutes passionate interests (Latour 2013a, 488–489). These are increasingly appearing in urban spaces.¹⁴ Branding with Buddhist mediators is about actors' situatedness in urban and cosmopolitan contexts against the backdrop of rural situations. In Western neoliberal metropolises, actors generate Buddhist mediators as their icons in many ways. London has an incredibly long affiliation and attachment towards Buddhist mediators through its — not least colonial — history. Centuries of importing, trading, and studying "things," actors, events, and ideas from regions where Buddhist traditions were lived have formed a situated Londonized version of Buddha and Buddhism. Otherwise, London's Buddhist mediators are exported to the UK and the rest of the world. This repeated import, export, and re-import significantly describes the

14. Scholars have written on the relations between spaces and religion (Rao 2018), cities or urbanity and religion in the context of the DFG-funded research group — so-called "Kollegforschungsgruppe" — "Religion und Urbanität: Wechselseitige Formierungen" (FOR 2779) (Rüpke 2019, Rau and Rüpke 2020, Max Weber Centre 2020), and translocative research and religion (Tweed 2002, 2006, 2011).

translocality of Buddhist mediators. Processes of transtemporality and translocality are performed by actors within urban and cosmopolitan contexts. Thus, Buddhist mediations and mediators are translocal, such as the *Buddha-Bar*'s franchising chain. Studying these mediators does not end in national analyses or comparisons between — for instance — the UK and Germany. With its primary focus on London, this thesis reaches out into the UK and other locations. However, it follows Bruno Latour's insight that "no one has ever had a truly global view" (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky and Havemann 2016a, 6), which is why Buddhist mediators can only start locally, then one should follow where they lead. Icons may come from elsewhere to London or leave London for other locations, but the specific location of London is primarily defined as the site where translocal objects and actors come together and repeatedly change this site.

However, Buddhist mediations and mediators are — spatially speaking — also an urban thing to do. In other places like Oxford, Cambridge, and Heidelberg or rural areas like Traben-Trarbach, Baden-Baden, and Speyer, the appearances of these Buddhist mediators are sometimes similar but never the same. Actors consuming or selling mediated brands are always situated in specific urban settings, which heavily influence their practices, emotions, and relation to neoliberal consumption. Actors consuming or selling Buddhist mediators are inevitably situated in an increasingly urban or cosmopolitan place, not rural. Why does urbanity seem to favor the increasing emergence of Buddhist mediators? Do Buddhist mediators and Buddhist brands lead to a solidification of the urban terrain itself, and how? Buddhist mediators somehow *are* the urban terrain and vice versa since urbanity and Buddhist mediators seem to form themselves reciprocally.

Zen London — for instance — offers a variety of treatments like holistic massage, reflexology, Lomi Lomi, deep tissue massage/sports massage, Thai massage, Swedish/Classic massage, jet lag treatment, aromatherapy, hot oil, trigger point/detox, pregnancy massage, "zen signature," four hands Lomi treatment, couples massage, chair massage, and Indian head massage (Zen London 2020). *ZenLayer* advertises with slogans like "[i]nstantly deploy your global network," "[i]mprove your global user experience," and "[e]xtend your global reach" (ZenLayer 2019). Several companies have multinational offices like *Little Buddha Brand Design Agency*, *Satori*, and *Kensho*, or franchises like the *Buddha-Bar*. Some companies have an office beyond London — possibly in the UK — and sell globally and thus also to London, like *Zen Internet* (headquartered in Rochdale (UK)), *Big Buddha Seeds* (headquartered in Birmingham (UK)), *Zen Condoms* (headquartered in West Sussex (UK)), *Rocks Off: Ro-ZEN & Ro-ZEN Pro* (Northamptonshire (UK)), *Lotus* (headquartered in Hethel (UK)) and *True Religion* (Vernon, CA (US)).

The following part of this chapter will (i) investigate how “staying calm” and relaxed in a cosmopolis — and a world full of stress — is targeted via Buddhist mediators; (ii) follow what urbanity — i.e., living in a vast city — might feel like; and (iii) studied how locality can be experienced in and as forms of a neighborhood.

5.3.3.1. “Staying Calm” in a Cosmopolis

In 2019, Martha Nussbaum studied cosmopolitanism in *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* from its beginnings in Greece and Rome up to the present. Rather than declaring one’s gender, lineage, city, or social class, one is a “citizen of the world” (1), which implicitly asserts the equality of all human actors. Nussbaum confronts the inherent tensions of this very noble but flawed concept. While the ideal remains that an ethical personality is complete, reality says that basic material needs must be fulfilled to realize actors’ inherent dignity. This becomes complicated considering the global prevalence of material want, the asymmetric opportunities of actors with specific disabilities, and the complexities of pluralistic societies, mass migration, and refugees. Nussbaum even recognizes non-humans like animals and nature within cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is about treating people equally and having a value beyond a — capitalist — price.

However, Londoners live not only in urban sites but in the capital, i.e., they live in metropolitan and cosmopolitan sites, as do their mediations and brands. In the busy city of London, there are dozens of services to stay calm in all the stress of today’s neoliberal societies (fig. 3.106). With *Headspace*, the former monk Andy Puddicombe developed an app for stressed metropolitans. His app is considered one of the most used media applications worldwide. *Welt* journalist Sarah Heuberger argues that “[a]pps like this one have helped to free meditation from its esoteric image - and make it popular especially among stressed city dwellers” (Heuberger 2020; translated by author). Especially the revitalization and rejuvenation of teams in a mega city like London hold interest for companies like *Zen London*. Because life can get “busy, stressful and tiring,” *Zen London*’s slogan promises a “moment of calm in a frantic world” (fig. 6.53) for individuals as well as employees and companies (Zen London 2020).



FIGURE 6.53. Meditating woman on a busy street with *Zen London*'s slogan, "A moment of calm in a frantic world."

5.3.3.2. *Feeling Urbanity*

Buddhist mediators often appear in cities and urban agglomerations — especially capitals — and much less in smaller towns and villages. In these urban contexts, companies use naming that directly refers to the respective city — London — like *Buddha-Bar London*, *Zenlondon*, *Karma London Records* (fig. 6.54), *Buddha.London* (Companies House 2020), *London Olympus Hotel Nirvana* (fig. 6.55) or they have the terms "London" in their label and "Buddha" in their product like *OMMO London's Buddha Bracelets* (fig. 6.56), *Xaavier London - Buddha* (fig. 6.57) and *Believe London's Buddha Head Stone Bracelets*. The *London Olympus Hotel* directly refers to the urban district of Stratford (fig. 6.55).



FIGURE 6.54. *Left*, Buddha figure with headset and bracelets gesturing victory sign, by *Karma London Records*.

FIGURE 6.55. *Right*, *London Olympus Hotel Nirvana's* advertising with the local football stadium in the Stratford district of London.

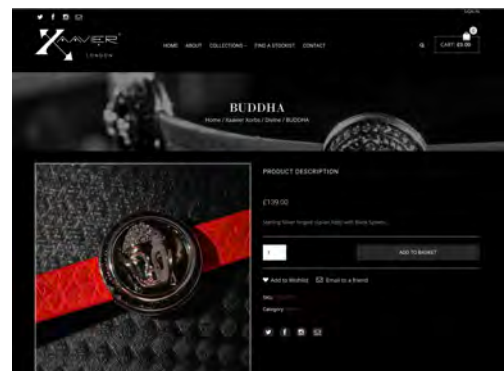


FIGURE 6.56. Left, Ommo London’s webshop with Buddha bracelets.

FIGURE 6.57. Right, Xavier London’s webshop with Buddha accessories.

Another exciting way to connect Zen and the specific locality is used by *Zen Meetings & Events*. They have designed a graphic where the cityscape of London becomes visible through the letters “ZEN” (fig. 6.58) (Zen Meetings & Events 2020). Then, Jessica Skye and her *Fat Buddha Yoga* team offer so-called “rooftop yoga” courses under the open sky while offering a comprehensive view of the city of London (fig. 6.59). The event locations are very diverse like rooftops, nightclubs and hotels, wellness in the workplace, retreats, and surf trips, including *The Hoxton Hotel* (fig. 6.60), *The Allbright Mayfair* or the *Coq D’argent* (Fat Buddha Yoga 2020a).

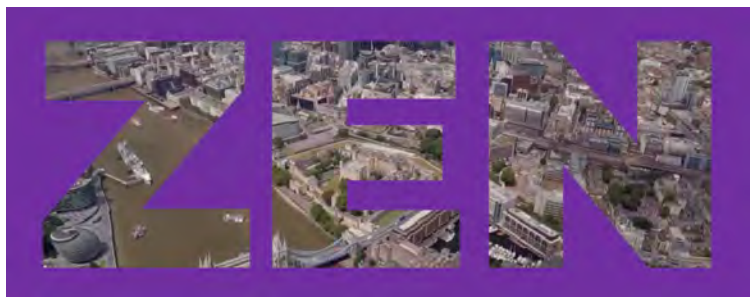


FIGURE 6.58. Left, Visualization of London through the letters “Zen” by *Zen Meetings & Events*.

FIGURE 6.59. Center, Women practice yoga at *Fat Buddha Yoga* at the “Sunday Rehab” at the Hoxton Hotel in London (UK).

FIGURE 6.60. Right, Rooftop yoga with Jessica Skye. *Instagram* post by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

5.3.3.3. Experiencing Locality in/as a Neighborhood

The *Zero Emissions Network* is part of the so-called “Low Emission Neighbourhood” (LEN) (figs. 6.61–6.63), whereby users can check on the ecological progress in their specific neighborhood, which comprises several streets in Shoreditch as well as the launch of “Ultra Low

Emissions Vehicle” (ULEV) streets in this area. Several businesses have profited from *ZEN*, like the *Spitalfields City Farm* in the Tower of Hamlets, London (fig. 6.64) (Zero Emissions Network 2020).

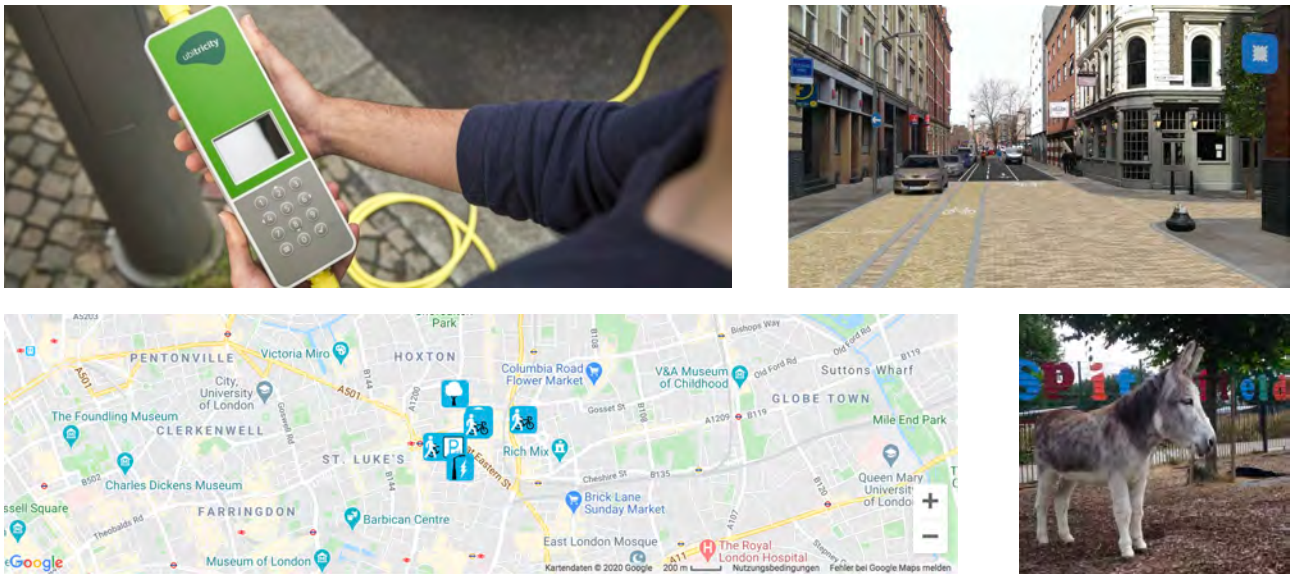


FIGURE 6.61. *Top left*, Lamp column EV charging in “Low Emission Neighborhood” by *Zero Emissions Network*.

FIGURE 6.62. *Top right*, Animation of “Low Emission Neighborhood” by *Zero Emissions Network*.

FIGURE 6.63. *Bottom left*, Map of “Low Emission Neighborhood” by *Zero Emissions Network*.

FIGURE 6.64. *Bottom right*, Electric taxi switch at Spitalfields City Farm with donkeys, by *Zero Emissions Network*.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Buddhism-as-mediators — beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm — generates the *economic* or economized translation of Buddhist mediators into neoliberal, consumerist brands. These mediators *assemble* various actors within forms of passion, organization, and ethics.

(i) Actors are *passionate* about Buddhist mediators when they are “bound” to buying products, consuming packaging, and experiencing interior and exterior architecture. All of those economic practices increasingly use Buddhist mediators and thus make actors *love* them, up to the point where actors cannot live without them.

(ii) Buddhist mediators are *organized* in neoliberal corporations and market practices. While corporations using Buddhist mediators focus on their corporate progress and well-being — and are dependent on a relatively noninvasive state — tend to expand and rise, the growing finance sector

also leads to the failures of smaller organizations. The multiplicity and range of markets using Buddhist mediators — or Buddhist branding — covers almost everything imaginable.

(iii) Buddhist mediators are *ethicalized* and moralized in practices of “feeling good” ethics, cosmopolitanism, and the ethics of living green, ecological, and local lives. These use Buddhist tropes to consider and debate what kind of lifestyle scruples there are: essentially, what are good and bad, true and false ways of living in contemporary societies.

Actants — human actors and Buddhist mediators, aesthetics, products, corporations, ethics, and much more — come together. These encounters would traditionally not be framed as “Buddhism,” but they *gather*, *mediate* and *assemble* all kinds of actants, thereby creating *new* and *economic* Buddhism-as-mediators. This new “thing” could be identified as a *compositionist* engagement protecting multiplicity, form, or practice with Buddhist mediators, including discourses of passion, organization, and ethics.

Chapter 6

Articulative Buddhism-as-Mediators

Introduction

This chapter will argue that Buddhism-as-mediators, Buddhist mediators, and Buddhist brands are *gathering* beyond the *secular and religious* divide in an *articulated* way through (i) networks, (ii) multiplicities, as well as (iii) simplifications to create something *new* — a composition — out of Buddhist traditions, some hybrid of Buddhist mediators, brands, consumerism, and neoliberalism.

6.1. NETWORK — Associative Buddhist Mediators in Heterogenous Courses of Action

6.1.1. Buddhist Mediators in the “West”

Buddhist mediations and mediators are part of translocal¹ networks of translation, which are transported and transformed for a “receiving culture” in the so-called “West.” For instance, researchers like Erik Braun (2009) and Thomas A. Tweed (2011) have focused on the translocality of “Buddhism.” Networks are about a multitude of associations and heterogenous connections, which institute irreducible networks that lead to an increasing amount of heterogeneity (Latour 2013a, 488–489, Latour 2013c; “[NET]”). Networks are both (i) an effect (technical networks like telephone, internet, and electricity) and (ii) a process (a movement recording all heterogeneous elements for completing a course of action, even before “everything is in place”). Networks have a specific vector — translation, exploration, and recruitment in the form of associations — and they can give “things” *space* (Latour 2013c; “Network”). *ANT* developed against notions of the social or

1. The field of transculturality or translocality has been researched by many in the last decade: for instance, Madeleine Herren, Martin Rüesch, and Christiane Sibille (2012) have delivered an introduction in its theories, methods, and sources, Doris Bachmann-Medick (2014) has worked on a translational perspective in studying culture transnationally, Esther Berg and Katja Rakow (2016) have applied a translocal perspective to religious studies, and Leila Abu-Er-Rub, Sebastian Meurer, Diamantis Panagiotopoulos and Susan Richter (2019) have contributed an exciting introduction and result of the work of the “Asia and Europe in a Global Context” *Cluster of Excellence at Heidelberg University* (2007—2019).

society to follow heterogeneous practices, first in science and technology and later in general (Latour 2013c; “Network: Actor-Network”).²

Art historians Anna Grasskamp and Monica Juneja have shown in their book *EurAsian Matters* (2018) that various forms of appropriation and usages in new settings have given rise to modes of understanding, signifying and reconfiguring that are cautious of a homogenizing global narrative. Instead, it is about specific ways to negotiate cultural differences through channels of material culture. Thus the investigation of materiality as a unifying force can help to understand modern globalization (11). Examining translocally means describing the processes of inscription, accommodation, rewriting/reframing, or rejection (25). As usual, Bruno Latour has questioned notions of “locality,” “globality,” being “decontextualized,” and “delocalized” (Latour 1993, 120).

The discourse of Buddhist mediators in the “West” has a long history. A historical perspective of Buddhism in Great Britain and the “West” is essential since this early contact — often an elitarian segment of so-called “finer culture” — set the stage for Buddhism’s *translation* into contemporary popular culture and neoliberal consumerism. On the one hand, these contacts involve the circulation of scripts, master narratives, ideas, metaphors, and collectively shared networks of meaning that enabled the effects of transformations between East and West, tradition and modernity. On the other hand, they are also part of contemporary popular culture, neoliberalism, and media, reflecting cultural narratives and regenerating themselves until the point where — as Iwamura (2011) has reminded one of — “orientalized stereotypes begin to take on their own reality and justify their own truths” (8).

Buddhist mediators are part of a multitude of what Doris Bachmann-Medick (1997), Maria Tymoczko and Edwin Gentzler (2002), Kate Sturge (2007), and many others have identified as “translation processes” involving significant power asymmetries. Philip Almond has done a brilliant job of describing Buddhism’s history as a British construction.³ He has analyzed early British intellectuals like the Pāli scholar Thomas William Rhys Davids, who characterized Buddha as “one of the greatest and most original thinkers on ethical, moral and religious questions whom the world has yet seen” (1879, 901).

2. For instance, Manuel A. Vásquez (2008) has studied “religion in motion,” flows, landscapes, and networks.

3. The Indologist and founder of the discipline of religious studies, Friedrich Max Müller, argued in a lecture in 1869 that “[n]ow it has been the peculiar fate of the religion of Buddha, that among all the so-called false or heathenish religions, it almost alone has been praised by all and everybody for its *elevated, pure, and humanizing character*. One hardly trusts one’s eyes on seeing Catholic and Protestant missionaries vie with each other in their praises of the Buddha” (Müller 1872, 132; emphasis added).

These intellectuals were interested in Buddhism’s teachings, practices, and history and heavily focused on texts by marginalizing material objects. Many scholars writing on Buddhism in the 19th were philologists, linguists, or in disciplines privileging texts (Almond 1988, 24—26, 139). They were also interested in relating Buddhism with Christianity, in historicizing the person Siddhartha Gautama, and identifying a radical rupture between (i) an idealized “original” and “authentic” “Golden Age” (Hegewald 2014) Buddhism in the antique source texts — which mostly privileged Hinayana/Pāli over Mahāyāna/Sanskrit Buddhism (Almond 1988, 95, 101, Davids 1877, 203–209) — and (ii) contemporary Buddhism since the mid 19th century, which was believed to be false and decadent. These British makings of an ideal Buddhism were both (i) instrumentalizing and legitimizing projects of colonization and missionization within Asian and Buddhist countries as well as (ii) translating, appropriating, and assimilating Buddhism into the Victorian society itself (Almond 1988, 37—40). Therefore, Almond concluded that “[i]n fine, the Buddha was an ideal Victorian gentleman, a ‘verray parfit gentle knight’” (79). He also highlighted that the Victorian interpretation of Buddhism was focused on the dichotomy of assimilation and rejection of Buddhism concerning its correlation — or not — with normative Victorian ideas and values (132). In the end — in a Saidian sense — the Victorian British *created* two qualitatively different modes of being human: oriental and occidental, while the “West” organized and filtered (140—141) — what Stuart Hall (1992) has famously coined — the “rest.”

Donald S. Lopez Jr. undertook an impressive delineation of the figure of the Buddha in Europe in his *Strange Tales of an Oriental Idol: An Anthology of Early European Portrayals of the Buddha* (2016b), in which he has analyzed 91 case studies between AD 200 and 1844.⁴ Lopez Jr. ends his portrayal of Buddha’s “arrival” in the “West” with Eugène Burnouf’s *Introduction à l’Histoire du Bouddhisme Indien* (1844), in which the multiple Buddhas were interwoven into one single entity. Thereby, the Europeans created a “human and humane Buddha,” unknown in Asia,

4. Lopez Jr. (2016b) argued that “the Buddha was not just one idol. He was many idols known by many names” (1—2). For the period between AD 200 and 1844, Lopez Jr. was able to collect more than 300 European names for Buddha, for instance, “Bubdam,” “Chacabout Dibote,” “Dschakdschimmuni,” “Goodam,” “Nacodon,” “Putza,” “Siquag,” “Thicca” and “Xaqua” (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 2). These names were primarily variants of four names or epithets: (i) Buddha, (ii) Gotama, (iii) Śākyamuni (the sage from the Śākya clan), and (iv) Samana Gotama (the ascetic Gotama). In the Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mongolian, and Tibetan Mahāyāna texts, he is often named the “Śākyamuni Buddha”; in the Sri Lankan, Thai, and Burmese Theravāda texts, he is called “Gotama Buddha” or “Somana Gotama.” The fact that these 300 names describe just one singular figure was first identified by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher in his *China Illustrata* from 1667, but much more prominent and reiterated was the English version of Engelbert Kaempfer’s *History of Japan* from 1727 (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 12–13).

constructed in late 19th-century Europe, and has remained unchanged in the Western imagination until today (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 8).⁵

The early European reception of Buddha shows the difficulty of dealing with the religious *other* by “translating the categories and concepts of one religion into another” (Lopez Jr. 2016b, 6). Religious studies scholar Jonathan Z. Smith already identified this problem in 1985 — in the context of Columbus “discovering” the “new world” — as the “stretching of the religious language.” This “stretching” *translated* the “new world” into the “old world,” which made the first one recognizable and comprehensible in the language of the second one (Smith 2004, 274—275, Maes 2017, 1176). According to Lopez Jr. (2000), this actual entity named Buddhism has been “ismed” in the last 200 years to compare it to (i) the other so-called “world religions” like — in Lopez’s words — “Hinduism,” “Brahmanism,” “Muhammadanism,” “Paganism,” “Taoism” and many more, but also (ii) other “isms” like communism, socialism, capitalism, and (neo)liberalism. According to the former president of the United States, Dwight D. Eisenhower, “all isms are wasms” because they — as Lopez Jr. has argued — have a “vaguely pejorative quality [...] which suggests something that someone else believes in but will eventually abandon when they see the error of their ways”. Following Lopez Jr. “[t]he question then, is not whether Buddhism is a wasm, but whether it ever was an ism.”

6.1.2. *Buddhist Terms in the English Language*

The words used when talking about these entities named “Buddhism” or “Buddha” today are English terms with specific histories. The development and evaluation of these terms and their relation to corresponding materialities have been part of translocal histories since at least the 17th century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the term “Buddha” has multiple origins, partly borrowing from Pāli and Sanskrit. The first “Western” uses were French “Bouddha,” “Budha,” “Bouddou,” and “Buddha” (1671), Portuguese “Buda,” “Budo,” and “Budão” (16th century), and the Dutch “Boeddha” and “Buddha” (1672 or earlier), reflecting the Pāli nominative. The forms with the final “-ou” reflect French and perhaps Portuguese pronunciation. The English sea captain

5. Lopez Jr. (2016b) points to the similarity to the Roman poet Ovid who told the story of the sculptor Pygmalion: he had built a statue of a beautiful woman and fell in love with her, and after praying to the goddess Venus, the figure turned to life, Pygmalion and the statue married and had a family. Lopez concludes that “[t]he Buddha was also a statue. Europeans, their eyes trained to see beauty in Greek statues, statues like those carved by Pygmalion, found the statue of the Buddha to be not beautiful but monstrous. Then Burnouf, with the aid of the goddess *Philology*, turned the Buddha from a monster into a man. But the Buddha is always his image, ever his idol” (17; emphasis added).

in the service of the *British East India Company* Robert Knox (1641–1720) delivered the first English-language and multiple uses of the term “Buddha” in his 1681 book *An Historical Relation of the Island Ceylon in the East Indies*⁶ — which he published after nineteen years of captivity in today’s Sri Lanka — albeit in a different spelling (Watson 2004): “There is another great God, whom they call *Buddou*, unto whom the Salvation of souls belongs” (Knox 1681, 72), “the *Buddou*, a great God among them” (18) and “[t]he first and highest order of *Priests* are the *Tirinanxes*. Who are the *Priests* of the *Buddou God*” (74). Following this first use, several others followed (Müller 1867, 51), among them also William Chambers (1788, 163), the later architect of the Chinese-looking pagoda in London’s Kew Gardens (“Buddha, n.” 2020).

The English-language term “Buddhism” is first mentioned in the English translation of the French philosopher, historian, orientalist, politician, and traveler Constantin François (de Chassebœuf, Comte) de Volney’s (1757–1820) (Volney 1911, 196) *Lectures on History, Delivered in the Normal School of Paris* in 1800. It is unclear whether Volney or an unknown translator did the English translation: “A worship, which is precisely the system of Buddhism” (De Volney 1800, 133) (“Buddhism, n.” 2020). According to Almond (1988, 14), the first monograph with the term “Budhism” in its title is Edward Upham’s *The History and Doctrine of Budhism* (1829).

The English-language term “Buddhist” was — according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* — first used by the English mathematician, surveyor, and orientalist Reuben Burrow (1747—1792), published in 1793: “The Boodhists appear to have been the inventors of the ancient Philolaic or Copernican, as well as of the doctrine of attraction” (R.T. and Burrow 1793, 324). The use was reiterated down to the present day in Boy George’s autobiography (Boy George and Bright 1995, 279, “Buddhist, n., and adj.” 2020; emphasis added).

The term “Buddhology” was first used in 1905 by sanskritist and religious studies scholar Joseph Estlin Carpenter (1844—1927) (1905, 6, “Buddhology, n.” 2018), and the term “Buddhologist” was first used no later than 1928 on the death of French Indologist Émile Charles Marie Senart (1847–1928) by Frederick William Thomas (1928, 751, “Buddhologist, n.” 2020).

6.1.3. *Iconoclasm, Iconoclash and Iconomash*

Scholars of several disciplines have researched the relations between art, images, icons, and religion. For instance, Peter Bräunlein studied the iconic representation of religion (2009), and S.

6. This book was translated into German, Dutch, and French in Knox’s lifetime and has become internationally famous for influencing Daniel Defoe’s works *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Captain Singleton* (1720).

Brent Plate's *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to Its Senses* (2014) used material object biographies⁷ — of stones, incense, drums, cross, bread, and the soul — to explain a more extensive history.

Grasskamp and Juneja (2018) have argued that this branch of Material Culture Studies — which ascribes *life* to objects and follows their multiple careers that are interwoven in networks — allows grasping the “thing”⁸ as a lens to find relationships through multi-scale reports of contact, resistance, memory or intellectual and sensory levels (5). The metaphor of “migration” refers to the potential of “things” to connect, innovate and transform lives and create “networks of affinity.” “Migration” also addresses the alterity of an object, its acceptance or rejection, displacement, and integration. Objects can generate sympathy and antipathy; they can have lovers and opponents. As soon as the re-contextualization of things into new frames of reference is involved, Grasskamp and Juneja identify a narrative of epistemic violence regarding material interventions — the dismantling, cutting, reframing, remounting, or any other transformation of the previous form, function, or meaning of an artifact — as erosion of its supposed *originality* and *authenticity*. Instead, the very performance of creating new layers and levels of material and meaning can be read more profitably as creating a new set of relationships between actors, institutions, and epistemic frameworks in which an object is given a new identity. Various forms of re-contextualization and re-inscription⁹ of the former form, function, sensuality, or meaning become the sites of new layers of materiality, meaning, and sensuality, as well as new relationships between actors, institutions and epistemic frameworks, which become the sites of new identities and places (7—8).

The term “iconoclash” is a hybrid of Greek and English that does not refer to “iconoclasm” but “to the uncertainty related to the direction of iconoclastic gestures: is not the destroyer of idols attacking the wrong target - attributing to those he claims to liberate beliefs they do not hold, making a sacrifice to the cult of a higher power etc?” (Latour 2013c; “Iconoclash”). In 2002, there

7. In other academic disciplines, object biographies have been known for a long time. They can be dated back to the concept of “chaîne opératoire” — introduced by French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan (1964, 164, 200), a student of Marcel Mauss — analyzing the techniques and networks involved in the production, use, and disposal of artifacts, a concept that was further developed in the following decades (Hoskins 1998, Hansen, Ashby and Baug 2015, Grasskamp and Juneja 2018).

8. Another term for *things* made by human hands is *fetish* (Latour 2011a). Amy Whitehead has argued that religious objects and actors bring themselves together into a co-creative and co-dependent state, which would initially be a sensual experience since “[t]o touch is to fetish” (Whitehead 2018, 218). For Latour (2010), the modern praise for *facts* is not dissimilar to *fetish*, so he combined both terms and created the term *factish*.

9. These forms include processes of domestication, multiplication, reproduction, transformation, conversion, adaptation, partial assimilation, re-inscription, acceptance or rejection, reframing, repression, integration, sympathy or antipathy, disassembly, and dissection (Grasskamp and Juneja 2018, 7–8).

was an exhibition by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel called *Iconoclasm: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art* in Karlsruhe (Germany).¹⁰ Latour (2002) has extensively worked on the question of iconoclasm. He advises suspending the reflex-like “iconoclastic gesture” and instead returning to the source of *anti-fetishism*, which is why critique often misses its target.¹¹

Latour recognizes in iconoclasm — i.e., its avatars and critics — an enemy of mediations necessary to produce meaning. The concept of iconoclasm tries to “listen equally” to both sides, especially those who have to defend against the — image-breaking — accusation that their mediations and mediators are “mere idols.” One essential resource for this argument is Jan Assmann, who — with *Moses the Egyptian* (2001) — published “one of the few texts in which we can hear two voices, that of those who destroy idols and that of those with which we destroy gods by taking them for idols.” The concept of the so-called “Mosaic distinction”¹² should itself be an object of reflection and endless redefinition (Latour 2013c; “Iconoclasm”).

Iconoclasm could be identified when the consumption of certain mediations and mediators becomes prohibited and forced by law, as this study has tried to show in several cases in South and South-East Asia related to Buddha tattoos or so-called Buddha bars, which are not necessarily the infamous French-based *Buddha-Bars*. When iconoclasm increasingly happens in non-Western and non-neoliberal societies, where Buddha is perceived simply as “Buddhist tradition” and not as a mediator, an icon, or a brand for consumption, one can — once again — discuss Stuart Hall’s question of the neoliberal “West vs. the rest.” At least these two attitudes towards icons and “idols” are connected in some way and much about the contemporary translocal world that actors live in and that there is another universe when neoliberal consumers leave their — particular — bubble.

10. In one of the essays in the accompanying exhibition catalog — with more than 700 pages — Latour explained iconoclasm in the following way: “Iconoclasm is when we know what is happening in the act of breaking and what the motivations for what appears as a clear project of destruction are; iconoclasm, on the other hand, is when one does not know, one hesitates, one is troubled by an action for which there is no way to know, without further enquiry [!], *whether it is destructive or constructive*” (Latour 2002, 16; emphasis added).

11. Thus, Latour explains *iconoclasm* by reflecting on the shortcomings of constructivism: “The concept of the iconoclasm compels us not to try and solve too quickly the contradictory injunction at the heart of history: “If only there was no mediation we could directly access the true, the good, the divine”, “unfortunately, without mediation, without images, we cannot access the true, the good, the divine.” It is this continual balancing which explains why constructivism can never become an instauration, and *why mediations are always shrouded in suspicion*” (Latour 2013c; “Iconoclasm”; emphasis added).

12. Latour quotes Jan Assmann’s “Mosaic distinction” as the best summary of iconoclasm: “Freud is perfectly right in insisting on the fact that we are dealing in Egypt with the first counter-religion in the history of humanity. It is here that, for the first time, the *distinction* has been made [by Akhenaton] that has triggered the hate of those excluded by it. It is since this *distinction* that hatred exists in the world and the only way to go beyond it is to go back to its origins” (Assmann 2001, 283, quoted after and retranslated by Latour 2002, 16; emphasis added).

The “Western” iconizations of Buddhist mediators — for instance, *Buddha-Bar*, *KFC Chill*, or *Fat Buddha Yoga* — meet the iconoclasm¹³ visible in the Buddhist reactions to *Buddha-Bars* and Buddha tattoos — mainly — in South-East Asia. In front of the German embassy in Bangkok (Thailand), people demonstrated with a poster saying “[s]top disrespecting Buddha” (fig. 7.1) due to an artwork at the so-called Viktualienmarkt in Munich by the Malaysian artist Han Chong, which displayed a golden, meditating Buddha lying on his back and was named “Made in Dresden” (fig. 7.2) (Hana Yeung Pui Wan 2018). The *taz* journalist Hana Yeung Pui Wa instead argues that “We are all Buddhas ♡” (fig. 7.3), whether neoliberal consumers from the so-called “West” or traditional Buddhists in Europe and Asia (Hana Yeung Pui Wan 2018).

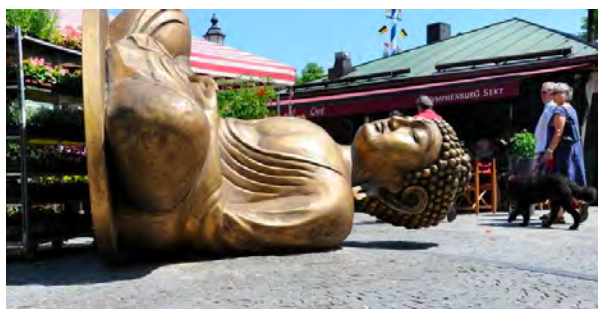


FIGURE 7.1. *Top left*, A Woman holding a poster saying, “Stop disrespecting Buddha.”

FIGURE 7.2. *Top center*, Artwork “Made in Dresden” at Viktualienmarkt, Munich by Han Chong.

FIGURE 7.3. *Top right*, Graffiti on a wall saying, “We are all Buddhas ♡.”

FIGURE 7.4. *Bottom*, Glasswork displaying British soldiers shooting a tigress on the Shwedagon Pagoda in 1903.

13. A prominent case of iconoclasm was — for example — the destruction of the two Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan by the Taliban on March 11, 2001, exactly six months before 9/11. The author of this thesis analyzed western academic and journalistic reactions in 2013 under the title *Dealing with Bamiyan: Religious Studies and the ‘Other.’* Another famous iconoclasm concerns the destruction of the World Trade Center — precisely six months after the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. In both cases, an icon that the — here Muslim — fundamentalists rejected for political, religious, and power-strategic purposes was destroyed (C. Koch 2013).

By images and icons, Latour means any signs, logos, pictures, labels, or inscriptions (Latour 2002, 16). Latour further distinguishes between five types of people performing the iconoclasm: (i) The first type of people is against all images, (ii) the second type is against freezing the frame and stopping their circulation and flow, but they are not against images, (iii) the third type is not against images in general, except those of their opponents, (iv) the fourth type of people breaks images unwittingly, and (v) the fifth type is simply the people mocking both iconoclasts and iconophiles (27—30).

The discourse of Buddhist mediators — for instance, Buddha tattoos or Buddha figures in museums — is often about this fourth type of people breaking images unwittingly, which makes them “innocent vandals” and distinguishes them from the other “bad” vandals (i—iii) since “[t]hey had absolutely no idea that they were destroying anything. On the contrary, they were cherishing images and protecting them from destruction, and yet they are accused later of having profaned and destroyed them!” (29; emphasis added). Myanmar scholar Donald Stadtner (2008) told the story of a tigress¹⁴ on the Shwedagon pagoda in colonial Rangoon in British Burma, which is Yangon in today’s Myanmar (fig. 7.4) on March 3, 1903: The tigress moved on the terraces of the Shwedagon pagoda, which panicked the monks and temple attendants, they then went to the fort of the British soldiers to come up and kill the tigress. Once it was dead, the next day was a great commotion, and the very monks, having begged the soldiers to kill the tigress, were now denounced as murderers of the pagoda’s nat spirit; they then hung the tigress’s skin over the killing spot and a plaster image of the tigress for worship (119). For Latour (2002), the British soldiers are iconoclasts in retrospect since they love the images that they restore and preserve — like the Shwedagon pagoda — or make them mediate “and yet they trigger the very same curses of “profanation,” “sacrilege,” and “desecration” as all the others” (29). This means that “by restoring works of art, beautifying cities, rebuilding archeological sites, they have destroyed them, their opponents say, to the point that they appear as the worst iconoclasts, or at least the most perverse ones” (30).¹⁵

When one asks oneself — like Latour famously did — “[h]ow to get beyond the image wars?” the decision is not between a world of images and a world without images, “but between the

14. Although Walter del Mar (1906, 27—28) “refers to the animal as a tiger, it was in actuality a tigress” (Stadtner 2008, 119, Lynam 2003, 50).

15. Latour (2002) explains that these beautifying, rebuilding, and restoring iconoclasts could be accused “of aiming at the wrong target, of forgetting to take into account the side effects, the far reaching consequences of their acts of destruction. “You believe you freed people from idolatry, but you have simply deprived them of the means to worship;” “You believe you are a prophet renewing the cult of images with fresher images, you are nothing but a scandal-monger thirsty for blood;” [...]. What if we had killed the wrong people, smashed down the wrong idols? *Worse, what if we had sacrificed idols for the cult of an even bloodier, bigger, and more monstrous Baal*” (30; emphasis added).

interrupted flow of pictures and a *cascade* of them” (2002, 32). This is reminiscent of the famous image “Les Idoles au Champ de Mars” by Charles Kreutzberger, which he created for the catalog of the world exhibition in Paris in 1867 (fig. 7.5) and which depicts countless “idols” piled one upon another like Buddhist pagodas, statues of Ganesh, Vishnu, Buddha, Egyptian and Aztec gods, and kings and many more (Dentu and Petit 1867, 217). Nevertheless, it is not about achieving peace in these *image wars* but looking for *other properties* of images (Latour 2002, 32).



FIGURE 7.5. Drawing of “Les Idoles Au Champ de Mars” by Charles Kreutzberger for the World Exhibition catalog in Paris in 1867.

Similar to Kreutzberger’s *Les Idoles Au Champ de Mars* from 1867 and the accumulation of things from remote cultures is the multitude of archaeological, geological, and other scientific surveys controlled by — for instance — the government of the United Kingdom in former Burma, India, and other colonized countries. These surveys have created many archaeological photographs and excavations in South and South-East Asia. Many non-archaeological European photographers were also in colonial Burma, like Colonel Linnaeus Tripe (Tripe 1855, Dewan 2003a, Dewan 2003b), Max and Bertha Ferrars (Ferrars and Ferrars 1900, Wright 2002), and many others¹⁶.

16. Others included — for instance — Felice Beato, Baden Henry Baden-Powell, Adolphe Klier, D.A. Ahuja, Willoughby Wallace Hooper, Johnston & Hoffmann, Ernest S. Lumsden, Frederick Oscar Oertel, Underwood & Underwood, Watts & Skeen, and Bourne & Shepherd. Most of their photographs are found in the *British Library* archives and catalogs.

However, the archives of the *Archaeological Survey of Burma* (ASB) and the *Archaeological Survey of India: Burma Circle* (ASI: BC) held both by the *British Library* and the *British Museum* include hundreds of thousands of photographs of pagodas, Buddha figures, relics, actors, etc. Many of these photographs were digitalized and put online on *Zenodo* (Archaeological Survey of India. Burma Circle 1903-1922).

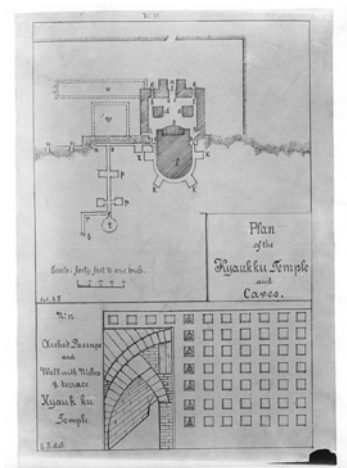
The surveys of amateur archaeologist and Swiss-born Emmanuel Forchhammer (1851-1890) — who died very young in colonial Burma — are specifically interesting because he not only photographed and described several pagodas, temples, and sites (Forchhammer 1891a, Forchhammer 1891b), but also the arrangement of Buddhist “images” in or before several pagodas (fig. 7.6–7.7), drawings and plans (fig. 7.8–7.9), as well as the creation of very detailed lists and tables (fig. 7.10) on locality, name, local history or tradition, present use, the present state of preservation, desire and the possibility of restoration, the existence of photographs, plans or drawings, and any further remarks.



FIGURE 7.6. *Left*, Photograph of a group of Buddha figures in Parabo Pagoda, Myoe Haung, Myanmar.

FIGURE 7.7. *Center*, Piled-up Buddhist relief plates in British Burma.

FIGURE 7.8. *Right*, Drawing of rock reliefs in a pagoda in Palaw, Myanmar.



List of Objects of Antiquarian Interest in Lower Burma.

1.—Sri Lanka.

No.	Object.	Locality.	Name of object.	How first history or evidence regarding it.	Locality or present use.	Present state of preservation.	Whether mentioned in records and records.	Whether photograph, plan, or drawing of the building.	Remarks.
7	AKYAR	MYINTUNG	Site of MYINTUNG	The site is built on a hill about 100 feet high. It is a square with a wall 100 feet high. The site is built on a hill about 100 feet high. It is a square with a wall 100 feet high.	None	Many pagodas, including the New Pagoda, are situated on the site. The site is built on a hill about 100 feet high. It is a square with a wall 100 feet high.	None	None	These pagodas are now under the control of the Government. The site is built on a hill about 100 feet high. It is a square with a wall 100 feet high.
8	AKYAR	MYINTUNG	Palace of King	Palace of King	None	None	None	None	None
9	AKYAR	MYINTUNG	Palace of King	Palace of King	None	None	None	None	None

FIGURE 7.9. Left, Plan of the Kyaukku Temple in Pagan, Myanmar.

FIGURE 7.10. Right, List of objects of antiquarian interest in Lower Burma.

Then there is the *Buddha Museum* in the small German town of Traben-Trarbach, which houses about 2,000 Buddha, Arhat, and Bodhisattva figures in different sizes on 4,000 square meters. The businessman Wolfgang Preuss collected these exhibits for more than 20 years through auctions, the purchase of individual objects, and whole collections. He opened the museum in 2009 in the Art Nouveau building of a former wine cellar. This museum is attached to the so-called “Ayurveda Parkschlösschen,” a — high-end — hotel focusing on Asian massages. Most striking is the fact that the exhibited Buddhas are mostly not in glass cases but standing or sitting around freely so that visitors could — but are prohibited to — touch them, which perhaps does not irritate traditional Buddhists as much as putting them into glass cases (figs. 7.11–7.13) (Buddha Museum 2016).



FIGURE 7.11. Left, Sitting Buddha figure in front of Buddha Figures in glass cases in the *Buddha Museum* in Traben-Trarbach (Germany).

FIGURE 7.12. Right, Buddha figures from Mandalay in Myanmar, now located in the *Buddha Museum* in Traben-Trarbach (Germany).



FIGURE 7.13. Arranged Buddha figures from various locations, now situated in the *Buddha Museum* in Traben-Trarbach (Germany).

S. Brent Plate (2009) has reshaped Latour’s iconoclasm concept — which would be about depicting *representations* of “the religious and the sacred” — to iconomash, which focuses on the otherness of religious collectives that are simultaneously living next to each other and pluralistically *present* themselves (210). Plate then suggests that “[i]conomash proceeds from the lived pluralism on the streets of regions around the world, from New Delhi to New York, York to Dubai” and deals with the religious behavior of people *practicing religion*, which includes the production of material objects, its display, ritual use, and veneration. This is why “*in these cultural exchanges new work is produced that transcends the local and the global, past and present.*” Finally, Plate concludes that “religion and art connect through processes of iconomash” and that “[r]eligious images morph, move, and mask themselves” (Plate 2009, 211). As has been illustrated so far, the Buddhist iconomash differs in each location. Still, it *connects* various places like Germany (Speyer, Heidelberg, Traben-Trarbach, Karlsruhe), the United Kingdom (London, Manchester, Cambridge, Oxford, Hethel, Teddington, Sheffield, Northamptonshire, West Sussex), Myanmar (Yangon, Insein), Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the United States (Washington D.C., New York City), Indonesia (Jakarta), Thailand (Bangkok) and France (Paris).

6.2. MULTIPLICITY — Interpretive Buddhist Mediators in a Multitude of Keys

6.2.1. (In)Visibility

Latour has portrayed Paris, albeit not as the beautiful and picturesque visible city, but rather the invisible underground sites (Latour and Hermant 2006a, Latour and Leclercq 2016b). Some

mediators and brands are invisible behind others, so the brand behind the brand is perfectly illustrated by the artworks of Armin Linke, “The Appearance of That Which Cannot be Seen,” showing gas pipelines in Russia, an “operation theatre” in Modena (Italy) or the Ertan Dam in Panzhihua (Sichuan, China) (figs. 7.14–7.16) (“Armin Linke: The Appearance [...]” 2017, “Armin Linke: The Appearance [...]” 2019).

Fat Buddha Yoga’s corporate wellness and client range refer to the brand behind the brand. Sometimes, behind the advertising strategies of well-known brands, there are pretty different brands that work *via* Buddhist mediators. The “big brands” like *LG* become the customers of companies like *Gautama Payment*, creating advertising for the new smartphone *KS20* (fig. 7.17). The naming *Gautama Payment* does not appear in the advertising; thus, one brand hides behind another large and well-known brand (*Gautama Payment*, n.d.).

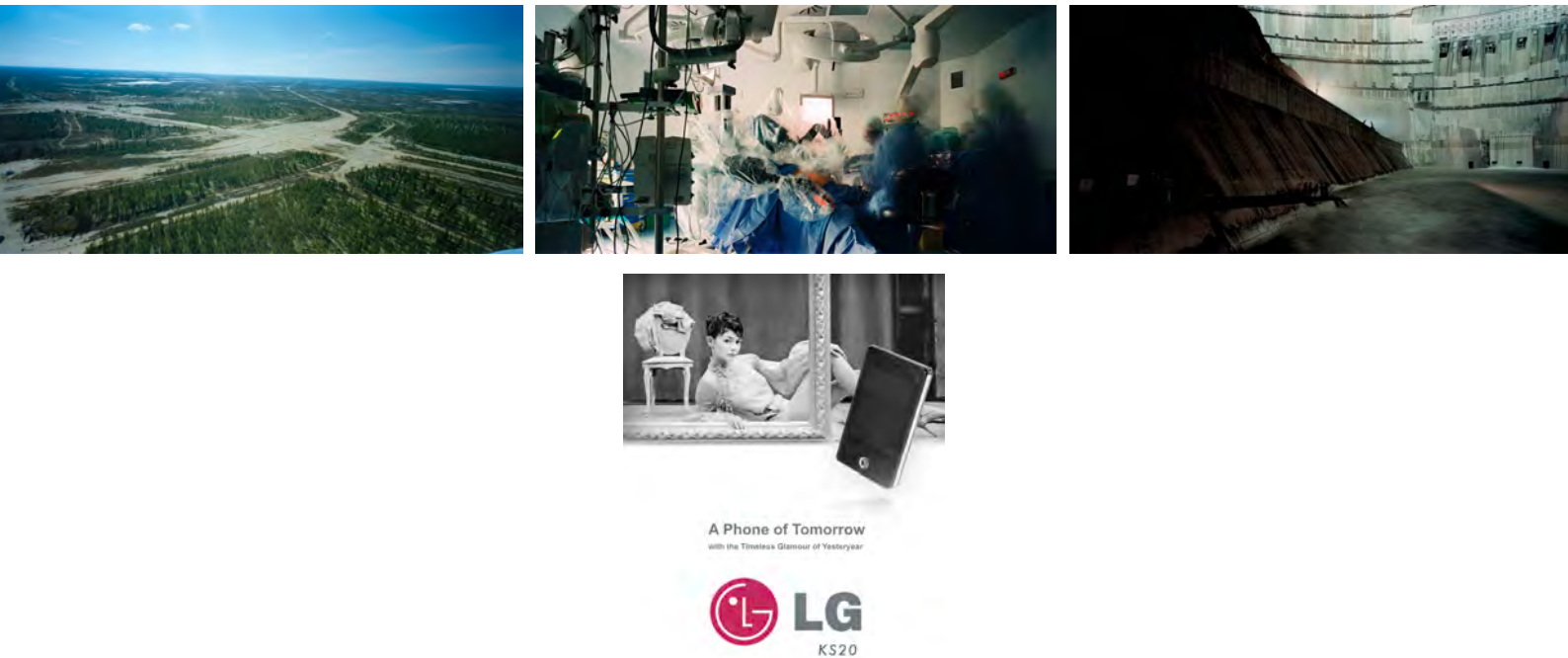


FIGURE 7.14. *Top left*, Gas pipeline junction in Nadym, Russia. Artwork by Armin Linke. “The Appearance of That Which Cannot be Seen,” 2011.

FIGURE 7.15. *Top center*, “Operation Theatre” in Modena, Italy. Artwork by Armin Linke. “The Appearance of That Which Cannot be Seen,” 2006.

FIGURE 7.16. *Top right*, Ertan Dam in Panzhihua (Sichuan), China. Artwork by Armin Linke. “The Appearance of That Which Cannot be Seen,” 1998.

FIGURE 7.17. *Bottom*, Advertising for *LG KS20* smartphone by *Gautama Payment*.

There is a multitude of examples of these invisible brands.¹⁷ Some of them use Buddhist namings and display their customers with respective logos on their websites like *Gautama Payment*¹⁸ and *WiseBuddah* with high-profile clients like *Audi*, *BBC Radio*, *Huawei*, or *L'Oréal Paris* (fig. 7.18) (WiseBuddah 2020). The video production company *Nirvana Studios* mentions *Adidas*, *Beano*, *Boots*, *Burberry*, *Dior*, *Estée Lauder Go Ape*, *Gorillaz*, *Jaguar*, *KFC*, *Microsoft*, *Save the Children*, *Sony*, *Stoli*, and *Unilever* as their clients (fig. 7.19) (Nirvana Studios 2020). For instance, *ZenKraft*¹⁹ claims they have over 1,000 companies as their customers (fig. 7.20) (ZenKraft 2020).



FIGURE 7.18. Left, Diagram of *WiseBuddah*'s client range.

FIGURE 7.19. Center, Diagram of *Nirvana Studio*'s client range.

FIGURE 7.20. Right, Diagram of *ZenKraft*'s client range.

17. For instance, service providers such as *Karmarama* — which is now partnered with *Accenture Interactive*, a company with net sales in 2018 of around \$40 billion and headquarters in Dublin — have worked for #GlobalPrideMakeover, *AOL*, *Auto Trader*, *Battersea*, *Boehringer Ingelheim*, *CBeebies*, *City to Sea*, *confused.com*, *Honda*, *Just Eat*, *Lidl*, *Lucky Saint*, *Magnum*, *Nando's*, *NCS*, *Pride in London*, *The British Army*, *The Guardian*, *Unibet*, and *Wavo* (Karmarama 2020). The video production and live streaming company *Karma* has dozens of clients like *Adidas*, *Amazon*, *AOL*, *BBC*, *BBC Radio 1*, *BBC Sport*, *BMW*, *Bridgestone*, *Calvin Klein*, *Canon*, *Channel 4*, *Christie's*, *DAZN*, *Disney*, *English Heritage*, *Facebook*, *FIFA*, *Fuji Television*, *Guinness*, *Hudson London*, *Huff Post*, *ITV*, *Knorr*, *Lacoste*, *Lidl*, *Longines*, *Mastercard*, *McLaren*, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, *Mercedes Benz*, *Microsoft*, *Nike*, *O2*, *Pizza Papa John's*, *PUMA*, *Red Bull*, *Renault*, *Royal Albert Hall*, *San Miguel*, *Science Museum Group*, *SKY*, *Snapchat*, *Starbucks*, *The Body Shop*, *UEFA Champions League*, *Unilever*, *Universal Music Group*, *Vice*, *Virgin*, *Vodafone*, *Warner Music Group* and *YouTube* (Karma 2020). The *Nirvana Creative Production House* publishes a massive list of clients they work with, of which the most prominent are *Adidas*, *Akqa*, *Alexander McQueen*, *Burberry London England*, *Fred Perry*, *Gucci*, *Hermès Paris*, *Lacoste*, *Levi's*, *Louis Vuitton*, *Mercedes-Benz*, *Nike*, *Nokia*, *Prada*, *Royal Mail*, *Saatchi & Saatchi*, *Sony*, *Stella McCartney*, *Victoria & Albert Museum* and *Volkswagen* (Nirvana Creative Production House 2020). The *Pink Buddha* shares their client range comprising *Huawei*, *Ricoh*, *Schwarzkopf*, *Seat Ibiza SC*, *Time Inc.*, *Total*, *Trinity Communications*, and *Wonderful Sky*. Among many European companies, there are also a lot of Chinese and Hong Kong enterprises (Pink Buddha 2020a). Then there is the company *Corporate Travel Management (CTM)* — headquartered in Brisbane, Australia — which expanded strategically in Asia by acquiring the Hong Kong-based *Lotus Travel Group* in 2018 (CTM 2018).

18. These are *BBC Broadcast*, *Fit Property*, *LG KS20*, *Royal Bank of Scotland: MarketInvest*, *Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi Website*, *Split the Bills*, *"The Best for the Best" Luxury Wilderness Resort*, *The Lodge at Suttle Lake*, *Universal Music Portrayal Prototype* and *Webmaster CMS* (Gautama Payment 2020).

19. Some of them are *AT&T*, *Breville*, *Columbia University*, *Essilor*, *Eventbrite*, *Fitbit*, *Häagen-Dazs*, *Herman Miller*, *Hunter Douglas*, *Leatherman*, *Lenovo*, *MakerBot Industries*, *Matouk*, *Medtronic*, *Newell Rubbermaid*, *Red Bull*, *Samsung*, *Stanley Black&Decker*, *Taco Bell*, *Tesla*, *Textron*, *The Weather Channel*, *Walt Disney* and *Yeti* (ZenKraft 2020).

Karma Kabs/Karma Cars mentions its appearance in videos by Keane and Lilly Allen and the wedding of Dev and Sunita in the British TV series *Coronation Street*. Some of their customers are *Bloomberg*, *Monsoon/Accessorize*, *Selfridges*, and celebrities like Sienna Miller, Sadie Frost, Kate Moss, and Jason Donovan (Karma Kabs/Karma Cars 2020a).

Following Latour's understanding of "technology" — on which he wrote extensively in *Aramis: Or the Love of Technology* (1996)²⁰ — some things cannot be seen so that other things can work in the usual way. This is the case with gas pipelines, surgeries in hospitals, dams, public transport services like buses, planes, or trains, and Buddhist mediators in general. Branded Buddhist mediators work *on the surface* so that more prominent brands like *Nike*, *Google*, and others can operate efficiently *under the surface*. Behind any brand and company, there is at least one other brand and one other company, which are not necessarily immediately visible and identifiable. This means that brands and their mediators are so interconnected that there is hardly any place where mediators do not appear, especially but not exclusively Buddhist mediators.

6.2.2. Simulations and the Homo Mediaticus

Are actors always mediating actors, and can thus be described as *homo mediaticus*? There are several ways to capture this question:

On the one hand, Massimo Ragnedda has defined the *homo mediaticus* — rather negatively — as someone for whom "thinking's tiring" and who "seems to be more and more "cognitive lazy"" (2009, 5), who is "losing his critical abilities" (6) and who "abuse[s]" the mass media (9). They do not "go beyond the superficial level of things" — thus, "[i]n the society of the ephemeral, the homo mediaticus prefers, by choice and necessity, not to go beyond the iron curtain of television's world" (9). Ragnedda suspects — in a Horkheimerian and Adornian way — that the "culture industry" homogenizes each actor and deprives them of their identities, which is why actors — although they might believe that they are freer than ever — would become "less and less free," because "his identity is homologated to others" (19).

On the other hand, sociologist Luigi Gentili describes in his book *Homo Mediaticus: The mass media and the cult of the image* (2013) — in a way referring to Baudrillard's book *Simulations*

20. Twenty years later, Latour identifies a love-hate relationship in actors' relations to techniques, which would invoke "the ghost of Dr. Frankenstein." Although actors were used to living in artificial and technical surroundings and were dependent on them, they often forget what they do, how they were made, or how they are maintained. When techniques are viewed at all, they are viewed as objects, but techniques are created as projects with histories, conflict, and unintended consequences, which is why "they zigzag into the world." Instead of mastering or hyping techniques, Latour, therefore, votes for "[t]aking care of techniques" (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a, 61).

(1983) — the *homo mediaticus* (“The Future of Marketing [...]” 2020) as “an evolution of homo sapiens”, who “likes to live in artificial environments” and who not only “likes to show his images, but lives in environments in which image becomes real”, like in Michel Foucault’s *heterotopias* (1986), which is an “open space that has the characteristic of making individuals feel that they are outside” like looking inside a mirror, where “we see ourselves in an environment in which we are not, an unreal place that opens up virtually beyond the surface but is, at the same time, an absolutely real place, linked to all the space that surrounds it”. Successful marketing and branding would therefore want to create heterotopias. The *homo mediaticus* is a marketing being, who is only about the present, who lacks any memory, and who “has a Pirandellian nature, being one, none and one hundred thousand”. This *homo mediaticus* is fascinated by mediations and mediators, aesthetics and appearances, which has led to “an ever increasing variety of artificial landscapes” in which “time and space are removed”, i.e. casinos, theme parks, restaurants, bars, shops and malls (The Future of Marketing, n.d.).

Another example is the Japanese company *Kokuyo*, which had launched a print campaign for their stapleless stapler, where it advertised “a new way to staple,” cutting a little paper tab and folding it back into the paper. This campaign then used famous monuments that no longer exist and remade them as staples like the Bamiyan Buddhas, the Twin Towers, and the Berlin Wall (fig. 7.21) (Asia Ad Junkie 2018).

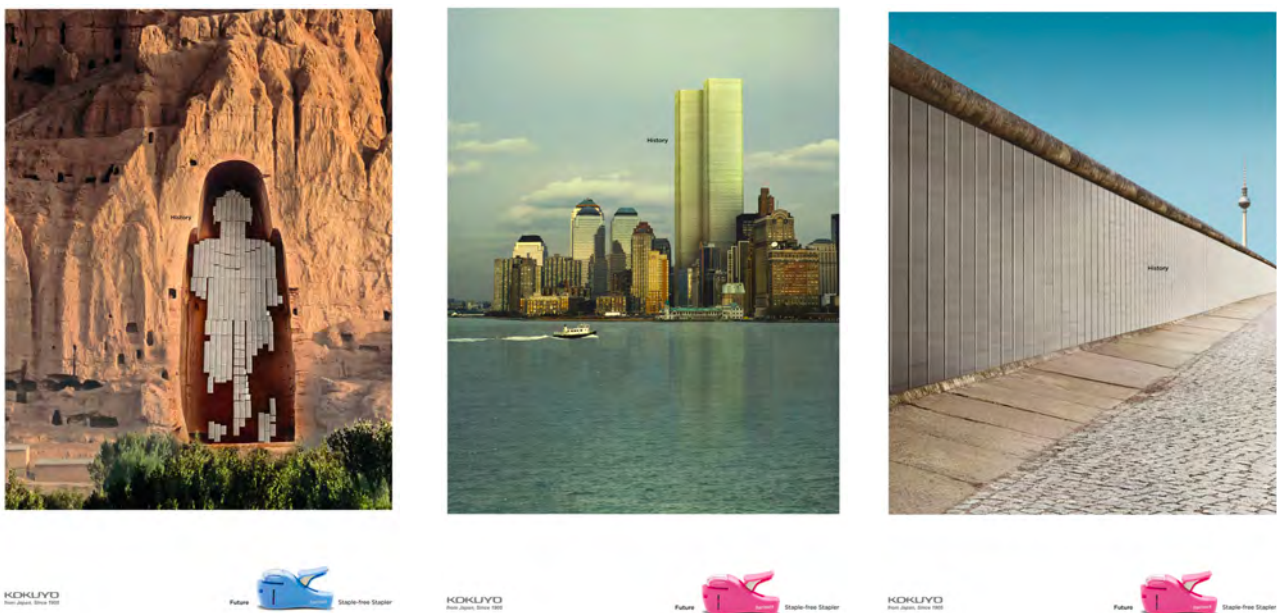


FIGURE 7.21. From left to right, Bamiyan Buddha, Twin Towers, and Berlin Wall as staples by *Kokuyo*.

By drawing on Jean Baudrillard’s understanding of *homo simulacrum*, one can understand neoliberal consumer commodities (Xavier 2018, 184) as “a pure screen, a pure absorption and re-absorption surface of the influent networks” (Baudrillard 1988, 27). The French anthropologist Marc Augé has defined this “fictional self,” relating exclusively to the image, as “a self without relationship” and “without any basis for identity” (1999, 16—17).²¹ Branding’s artificial landscapes, sceneries, and figures appear everywhere, like actors in cat costumes advertising *Fortnum & Mason*’s tea time (fig. 7.22). London’s Brick Lane is an example of busy and “hypermodern” lives in overcrowded streets with an overload of shops, products, brands, and mediators (fig. 7.23). Then there is the invention of the term “LonDoner” for a doner kebab store — about “London” and the German word “Döner” for a kebab — next to advertising for various movies and Coca-Cola (fig. 7.24).



FIGURE 7.22. *Left*, Enactment in cat costumes at *Fortnum & Mason* in St. Pancras Station, London (UK).

FIGURE 7.23. *Center*, *Religion* clothing store on a busy street at 154 Brick Lane, London (UK).

FIGURE 7.24. *Right*, Advertising posters at 23 Duke St Hill, London (UK).

Parts of *Harrods*’ interior architecture are modeled like a hybrid ancient Egyptian temple with pillars, ceiling paintings, sphinxes, and several decorations. These simulated worlds offer the flair of a specific image and trigger the customer’s emotions to buy rather expensive bags and jewelry (fig. 7.25). They appear like theme parks like the *Humboldt Forum* in Berlin (C. Koch 2016), which combines a Prussian outside (fig. 7.26) with “Asian” objects on the inside — primarily “acquired” in the context of German colonialism — on the very grounds where the German Democratic Republic’s Palace of the Republic stood between 1976 and 2006. This is reminiscent of the movie *The Truman Show* (fig. 7.27) from 1998 — with Jim Carrey as the main

21. Similarly, Marlon Xavier (2018) has studied contemporary societies with a psychoanalytical approach and ascertained that “[t]he more massified society and subjects get, the more the consumer will crave for difference: massification and consumerism (as provider of difference through the code) are two parallel forces; the latter depends on the first” (184).

character — which also appears like a *dreamland* or like philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s vision of simulations (1983)²².

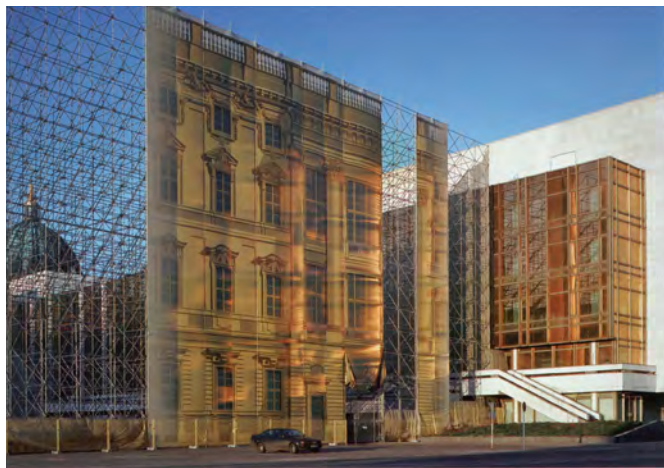


FIGURE 7.25. *Top*, Artificial Egyptian-style decoration next to handbags at *Harrods* in London (UK).

FIGURE 7.26. *Bottom left*, Simulation of the Berlin City Castle’s facades in front of the Palace of the Republic, 1993.

FIGURE 7.27. *Bottom right*, Movie advertising for *The Truman Show* from 1998. Directed by Peter Weir.

Another example is that of the two Buddha figures — around 55 and 38 meters high — in the Afghan Bamiyan valley, which the Taliban destroyed in March 2001, exactly six months before 9/11 (C. Koch 2013) and later “beamed” into the niche in the face of the rock in Bamiyan by a 3D light projection. This project started in 2015 — initiated by the Chinese couple Janson Hu and Liyan Yu, who had donated the expensive projector to the culture ministry — and is still brought out on rare occasions (fig. 7.28) (Nordland 2019). This hologram of a Buddha figure shows the simulational and mediated character of religious and secular phenomena.

22. Baudrillard has argued that “*the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials [...]. It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself*” (1983, 4; emphasis added).

The Harry Potter theatre play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* is a “global” phenomenon visible in theaters in London, New York, Melbourne, San Francisco, Hamburg, Toronto, and Tokyo that simulates the world of Harry Potter to the specific urban site (fig. 7.29). The famous Diagon Alley — and many other Harry Potter places like *Gringotts Wizarding Bank* or *Hogwarts Castle* — can be found in *Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden* in Watford (fig. 7.30).



FIGURE 7.28. *Top left*, 3D light projection of one of the destroyed Buddhas (2001) in Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan.

FIGURE 7.29. *Top right*, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* at Palace Theatre in London (UK).

FIGURE 7.30. *Bottom*, Diagon Alley in *Warner Bros. Studios Leavesden* in Watford (UK).

Oxford’s *Pitt Rivers Museum* — founded by Augustus Henry Lane-Fox Pitt Rivers, an English officer in the British Army, ethnologist, and archaeologist, whose collection of around 22,000 objects was the founding collecting of the museum named after him — is famous for its sorting and categorization system, which is entirely different to other museums (fig. 7.31) since it does not sort by epochs, regions or themes, but rather types like masks, boats, axes, etc. This shows how “things” are categorized and sorted, *changing* how actors consume the simulated world. Actors seem to love accessorizing their homes with images of Buddha and many others — like in this German accessory store (fig. 7.32) — because it gives them a feeling of “living in the end of time in

time” (Latour 2015c) — albeit not sometime after death, but — *in time*: for instance, having the economic capital to fully accessorize their home, living in neoliberal, consumerist and democratic societies, etc.



FIGURE 7.31. *Left*, Collection display at *Pitt Rivers Museum* in Oxford (UK).

FIGURE 7.32. *Right*, Buddha figures for sale at *Christmann* shop in Speyer (Germany).

Actors also love to simulate how they change themselves. So they love to have images and figures around them, which they can adore and cherish, like Harry Potter Hedwig plushes (fig. 7.33), Buddha labels like a bar and sushi restaurant in Mainz (Germany) (fig. 7.34) or “Buddhist” interior decoration at the *Rheinland-Pfalz-Ausstellung 2019* in Mainz (Germany) (fig. 7.36). They even queue before these icons like *The Harry Potter Shop at Platform 9 3/4* at London’s King’s Cross (fig. 7.35).

Actors seem to resemble the *homo mediaticus*: they need mediators and images living within mediatized, neoliberal, and consumerist societies. Even when recycling branded mediators — like a *Starbucks* cup used as a toilet brush holder (fig. 7.37) in a now-closed cafe in London Bloomsbury — actors cannot get rid of brands or mediators as such. The transformation of the mediator puts it into a new context — with the help of a humorous devaluation — but this somewhat “anti-branding” of the mediator is likely to attract new customers to this store and thus works as branding again.



FIGURE 7.33. *Top left*, Hedwig plushes in a showcase at *The Harry Potter Shop at Platform 9 3/4* at King’s Cross, London (UK).

FIGURE 7.34. *Top center*, Sushi bar *Buddhas*’ logo and label in Mainz (Germany).

FIGURE 7.35. *Top right*, Queue in front of *The Harry Potter Shop at Platform 9 3/4* at King’s Cross, London (UK).

FIGURE 7.36. *Bottom left*, Buddha figures as interior decoration at *Rheinland-Pfalz-Ausstellung 2019* in Mainz (Germany).

FIGURE 7.37. *Bottom right*, Starbucks cup as a toilet brush holder (2018) in now-closed (2019) café in Bloomsbury, London (UK).

Then there is British *Royal Mail*, which had designed a specific *Star Wars* advertising printed on their trucks — due to the movie *Stars Wars: The Last Jedi*, which premiered in December 2017 — saying, “[t]hese are the droids, aliens, and creatures you are looking for” (fig. 7.38). The movie advertising for Wes Anderson’s *Isle of Dogs* — which premiered in the first half of 2018 (fig. 7.39) — was displayed everywhere throughout London, Harry Potter accessories like Hedwig mugs, magic wands, and lots of plushes can be bought at *The Harry Potter Shop at Platform 9 3/4* at King’s Cross, London (fig. 7.40), and wall facades like these on Camden High Street simulate various “things” like Hindu cultures, Elvis and vampire films (fig. 7.41). Kew Gardens’ pagoda — erected by William Chambers in 1761-1762 following pagodas he had

personally seen in China — has been used to create souvenir shops, accessories, and cafés (fig. 7.42). These findings also point to the simulatedness of actors’ surroundings, which is achieved through brands, images, icons, and mediators.

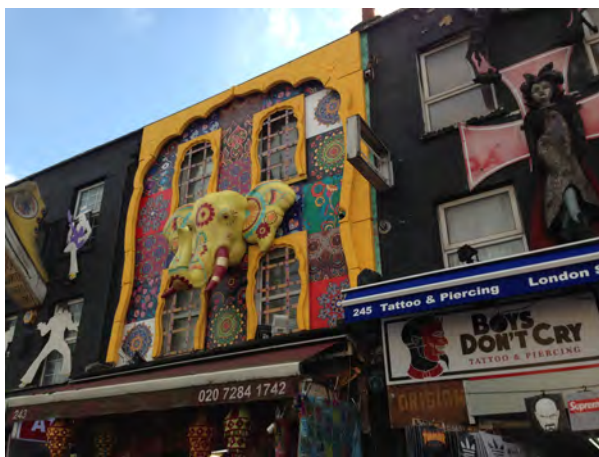


FIGURE 7.38. *Top left, Star Wars stamp advertising for British Royal Mail in London (UK).*

FIGURE 7.39. *Top right, Movie advertising for Isle of Dogs in London (UK) from 2018. Directed by Wes Anderson.*

FIGURE 7.40. *Bottom left, Hedwig mug from The Harry Potter Shop at Platform 9 3/4 at King’s Cross, London (UK).*

FIGURE 7.41. *Bottom center, Multicultural bricolage wall facades in Camden High Street, London (UK).*

FIGURE 7.42. *Bottom right, Cafe Pagoda at Kew Gardens in London (UK).*

6.2.3. Language, Icons, and Images

Finally, language, icons, and images — in the form of logos and slogans — will display the fifth mode of mediating specific content into Buddhified one and thus create and compose something new out of Buddhist traditional “material.” In a mediating way, language, icons, and images can act as a thing and its opposite, thus a site of multiplicity.

6.2.3.1. Logoization

6.2.3.1.1. Logoization I: Buddhified

Buddhified logos use Buddhist mediators: the Buddha, Zen — as paint or symbol — the lotus flower or lotus seed, the begging bowl, and many more. The Buddha figure is the one logo appearing the most in brands using Buddhist mediators, like in *Fat Buddha Yoga*, which displays only the outlines of the Buddha’s head on a white surface with a bindi dot on the forehead and ten dots beneath the head (fig. 7.43). *Buddha Sista* — a London-based shop founded primarily by women of color — is specifically designed for women. The brand’s gold and black logo displays a person in a Buddha-like lotus seat (fig 7.44). At the same time, the face is not visible due to the Afro hairdo (a recognized symbol of people of color). Two types of displaying the Buddha in logos appear in many Buddhist mediators: (i) Buddha sitting in a meditation pose, and (ii) just the Buddha’s face. Other Buddhified logos use Zen styles like Zen paint brushes (fig. 7.45) or Zen symbols in the advertising by *Kentucky Fried Chicken* from 2019, designed by the company *Mother London* in London (fig. 7.46).



FIGURE 7.43. Left, Logo with Buddha’s head by *Fat Buddha Yoga*.

FIGURE 7.44. Second left, Logo displaying a seated Buddha with an Afro hairdo by *Buddha Sista*.

FIGURE 7.45. Second right, Logo in Zen paint brush style by *Nirvana Health*.

FIGURE 7.46. Right, “KFC Gravy: Scented Candle” and logo with Zen symbol by *Mother London*.

Some logos use the lotus flower, shaped as a circle, octagon, or rising sun. Other logos use the Buddhist monks’ begging bowl in their label and logo (figs. 7.47–7.49). Then there are Asian-style logos, which include Chinese- or Asian-like fans and signs, yoga poses, and yin and yang symbols (figs. 7.50–7.53).



FIGURE 7.47. *Top left*, Logo with lotus flower by *Redemption*.

FIGURE 7.48. *Top center*, Logo with Buddhist begging bowl by *The Begging Bowl*.

FIGURE 7.49. *Top right*, Logo with lotus flower by *DeepZen*.

FIGURE 7.50. *Bottom left*, Logo with Chinese or Asian-style fan by *Buddha-Bar*.

FIGURE 7.51. *Bottom second left*, Logo with a Chinese sign by *Concept Zen*.

FIGURE 7.52. *Bottom second right*, Logo with yoga pose by *Buddha Pants*.

FIGURE 7.53. *Bottom right*, Logo with yin and yang symbols by *Zen London*.

6.2.3.1.2. Logoization II: Non-Buddhified

Some companies can be identified, which refer to Buddhist mediators in their labels, slogans, or elsewhere, but not in their logos. Instead, they use logos that refer to their specific market section: for instance, the symbol of teeth is used by dentists (fig. 7.54). The logos used in this category are diverse, like teeth, cannabis, bicycles, leaves, trees, or a haloed burger (figs. 7.54–7.59). Other logos show training poses, compasses, globes, architecture, pigeons, wings, foxes, owls, and deer (figs. 7.60–7.67).



FIGURE 7.54. Logo with tooth by *Buddha Dental Tree*.



CULTIVATE MINDFULNESS

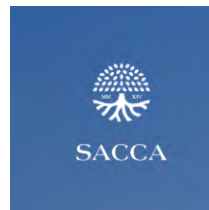


FIGURE 7.55. Top left, Logo with cannabis by *The Organic Zen*.

FIGURE 7.56. Top right, Logo with a bicycle by *Buddha on a Bicycle*.

FIGURE 7.57. Bottom left, Logo with a tree by *Cultivate Mindfulness*.

FIGURE 7.58. Bottom right, Logo with a tree by *Sacca Lifestyle*.



smartkarma

FIGURE 7.59. Left, Logo with a haloed burger by *Karma Burger*.

FIGURE 7.60. Center, Logo with a training pose by *Zen Bootcamp*.

FIGURE 7.61. Right, Logo with a compass by *Smartkarma*.

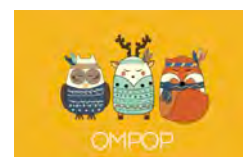


FIGURE 7.62. Top left, Logo with a globe by *Zencom Telecommunications*.

FIGURE 7.63. Top center, Logo with architecture *Zen Apartments*.

FIGURE 7.64. Top right, Logo with a pigeon by *Karma Nirvana*.

FIGURE 7.65. Bottom left, Logo with wings by *Zenron*.

FIGURE 7.66. Bottom center, Logo with an owl by *Samsara*.

FIGURE 7.67. Bottom right, Logo with an owl, deer, and fox by *Here For You For Them* in their *Om:Pop* app.

There are also logos displaying chameleons, hops, the gingerbread man, animals, two kissing faces, building a yin and yang symbol, four people arranged in a circle, or a cat spinning in a circle (figs. 7.68–7.75). The travel agency *Black Buddha* explains its logo (fig. 7.73) as representing “[t]he infinity knot. Everything is connected, and our logo represents our commitment to connecting the unknown”, which they connect to the color black and Buddha since “[b]lack embraces all colors and represents our pursuit for unbiased, premium, well-crafted quality” and “*Buddha [is] Outside of religion, a global symbol of light, positivity, knowledge and goodness*” (Black Buddha 2020; emphasis added).



FIGURE 7.68. *Top left*, Logo with a chameleon by *Karma*.

FIGURE 7.69. *Top second left*, Logo with a hop by *Kew Brewery*.

FIGURE 7.70. *Top second right*, Logo with a cat by *The Mindful Cat*.

FIGURE 7.71. *Top right*, Logo with a gingerbread man by *The Cake Store*.

FIGURE 7.72. *Bottom left*, Logo with an elephant by *Barnes & Scott*.

FIGURE 7.73. *Bottom second left*, Logo with an infinity knot by *Black Buddha*.

FIGURE 7.74. *Bottom second right*, Logo with four people in a circle by *Anatta*.

FIGURE 7.75. *Bottom right*, Logo with two kissing faces by *Sensual Sutra*.

6.2.3.2. Slogанизation

6.2.3.2.1. Slogанизation I: Buddhified

Buddhist mediators usually use slogans. There are slogans (a) using Buddhist terms, and those (b) not referring to traditional Buddhism but are used by companies having Buddhified namings. (a) The use of Buddhist terms in slogans is exemplified best through six terms associated with Buddhism: (i) “Zen,” (ii) “nirvāṇa,” (iii) “karma,” (iv) “enlightenment,” (v) “liberation” and “salvation” and (vi) “meditation.”

(i) *Barnes & Scott* (2020) — which is one of London’s “Top 15 Accounting Firms” (2020) — uses the slogan “bookkeeping Zen” and asks its consumers: “Want to run your business in a zen-like way?” (fig. 7.76). The company is marketing the slogan as a “blueprint for success” in “four simple steps”: understanding the business, fine-tuning processes, setting up systems, and touching in and out. Thus *Barnes & Scott* can generate a creative solution by combining finances, bookkeeping, and Zen (fig. 7.77). Then there is the finance and security company *Zen Wealth*, which creatively combines “Zen and the art of Financial Planning” (2020) (fig. 7.78).

(ii) *Hayne Solutions* uses the slogan “How do you achieve your finance Nirvana?” (2020) while depicting a paraglider pilot, referring to almost infinite freedom (fig. 7.79).

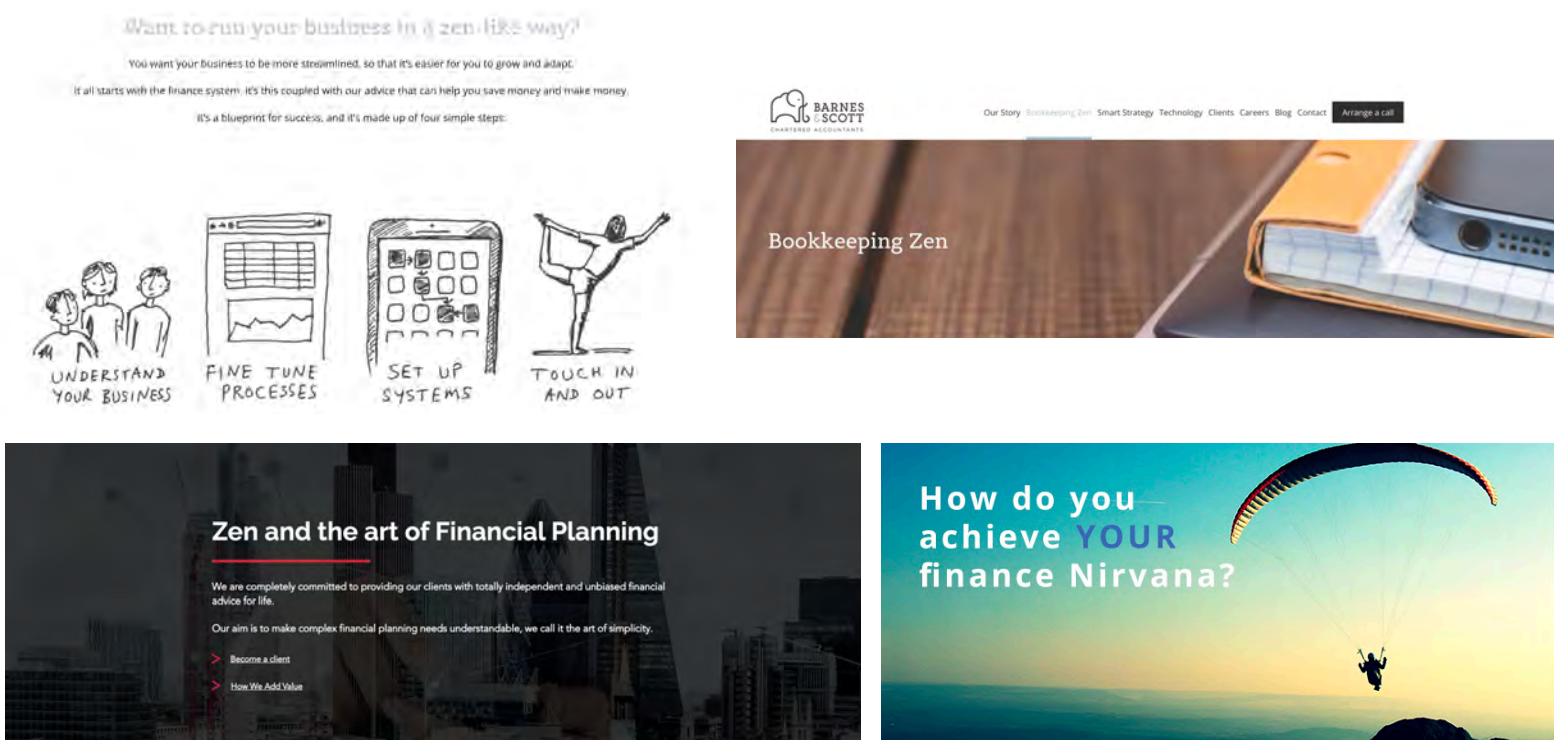


FIGURE 7.76. Top left, Slogan on how to “run your business in a zen-like way” by *Barnes & Scott*.

FIGURE 7.77. Top right, “Bookkeeping Zen” slogan by *Barnes & Scott*.

FIGURE 7.78. Bottom left, Slogan on “Zen and the art of Financial Planning” by *Zen Wealth LLP*.

FIGURE 7.79. Bottom right, Slogan on how to “achieve your finance Nirvana” by *Hayne Solutions*.

(iii) The third type of Buddhified slogan uses the term “Karma” like in *Karma Dental Care*’s: “[d]entistry from the heart ... in the heart of Fulham. That’s Good Karma” (2020) (fig. 7.80) or *Dharma Record*’s display of a Japanese girl with a large red koi in her hands and the slogan “instant karma” (2020) (fig. 7.81).



FIGURE 7.80. Left, “That’s Good Karma” advertising by *Karma Dental Care*.

FIGURE 7.81. Right, *Dharma Records*’ logo and “Instant Karma” advertising slogan.

(iv) The financial think tank *Z/Yen* uses the slogan “zest for enlightenment,” which would be “embodied in five distinguishing principles: Investing in clients; Investing in partners; Improving ourselves; Sharing rewards; Keeping our sense of humour” (*Z/Yen* 2020). Then there is the plant-based restaurant, bar, and yoga site *OmNom*, which has the slogan “Enlightened eating” (2020) (fig. 7.82), connecting the concepts of “enlightenment” and “eating” as well as the syllable “om,” which refers to a rather vague cluster of associations like yoga, the Orient and Asia, by combining slogan and naming rather creatively.



FIGURE 7.82. Naming and slogan “Enlightened eating” by *OmNom*.

(v) The fifth type of Buddhified slogan uses the terms “liberation” and “salvation,” like *Moksha*’s “Liberation and Salvation of the Soul through Music” (2020) (fig. 7.83).

(vi) The sixth and final mode uses the term “meditation” and is often found, like in *Osho.London*’s “Active Meditations” (2020) (fig. 7.84).



FIGURE 7.83. *Top*, Website banner and the slogan “Liberation and Salvation of the Soul through Music” by *Moksha Music*.

FIGURE 7.84. *Bottom*, Logo with a heart by *Osho.London*.

6.2.3.2.2. Sloganization II: Non-Buddhified

Non-Buddhified slogans used by companies that have Buddhified logos or naming are very diversified and usually refer to something other than Buddhist traditions. Still, instead, they (i) refer to specific markets, mainly in the way of phrase-mongering, (ii) enumerate buzz words, (iii) directly speak to the consumer, or (iv) use rather descriptive slogans.

(i) The self-driving company *Zenuity* — whose slogan is “Make it real” — describes its business approach regarding its specific industry as “disruptive” and “rapidly approaching a future with completely new rules of mobility” (fig. 7.85) (*Zenuity* 2020). *Agama Consultants* uses the slogan “Creating Solutions for a Challenging World” (2020) (fig. 7.86), Swedish *Tenzo*’s slogan “Excites Your Living with Contemporary and & Classic Design Furniture” (2020) connects perfectly well to their specific market (fig. 7.87), the slogan by *Satori: Analytics Agency* — working on AI algorithms — is called “Changing the world one algorithm at a time” (2020) (fig. 7.88). Then there is *Samsāra: Mind and Body*, which promotes its business with the slogan “A place to release” (fig. 7.89), *Kensho Media* works with the slogan “we live Digital” (fig. 7.90), and the internet provider *Zen* advertising with “[a]t Zen, we believe that business can be a force for good” (fig. 7.91).

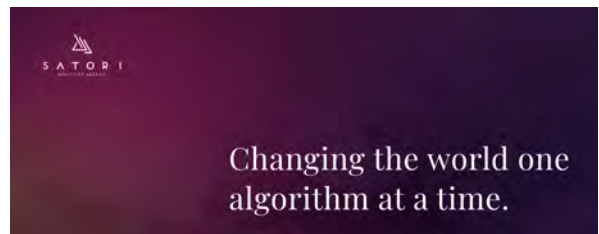
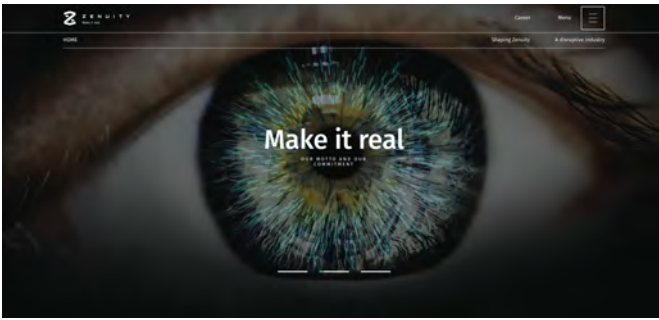


FIGURE 7.85. Top left, “Make it real” slogan by Zenuity.

FIGURE 7.86. Top right, Website front page with an agamid in its logo by Agama Consultants.

FIGURE 7.87. Bottom left, Website with logo, naming, and slogan by Tenzo: Excites Your Living.

FIGURE 7.88. Bottom right, Logo, naming, and the slogan “Changing the world one algorithm at a time” by Satori: Analytics Agency.

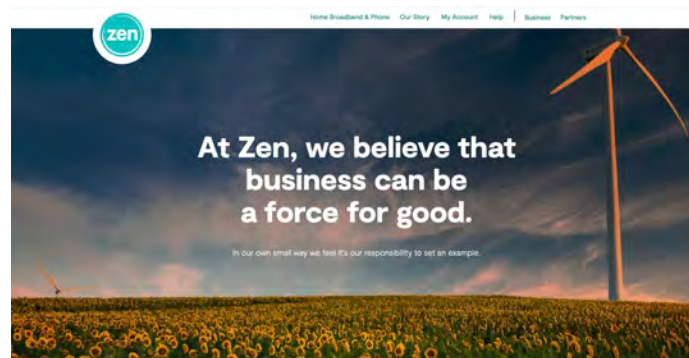


FIGURE 7.89. Top left, Website header “A place to release” by Samsara: Mind and Body.

FIGURE 7.90. Top right, Naming and butterfly logo by Kensho Media.

FIGURE 7.91. Bottom, Advertising slogan on the website by Zen Internet.

(ii) Companies sometimes also use an enumeration of specific buzzwords like *Sanzen*'s "Inspiration, Transformation, Innovation. Delivered" (2017) (fig. 7.92), *Yoga Leggs*' "Serious Fun" promoting "the new generation of yoga wear..." (2020) (fig. 7.93), *Mandala Leaders*' "Support — Challenge — Inspire" (2020) (fig. 7.94), *Mindful Research*'s "Usability, Accessibility & Ethnography" (2010) (fig. 7.95) or *Think Mantra*'s "Creation. Activation. Representation" (2020) (figs. 7.96–7.97).

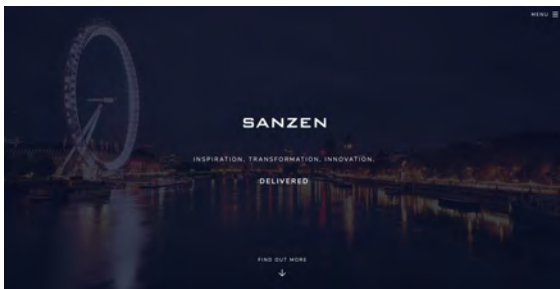


FIGURE 7.92. *Left*, Website header with naming and slogan — "Sanzen: Inspiration, Transformation, Innovation. Delivered" — by *Sanzen*.

FIGURE 7.93. *Right*, Logo, naming, and the slogan "Serious. Fun. The new generation of yoga wear ..." by *Yoga Leggs*.

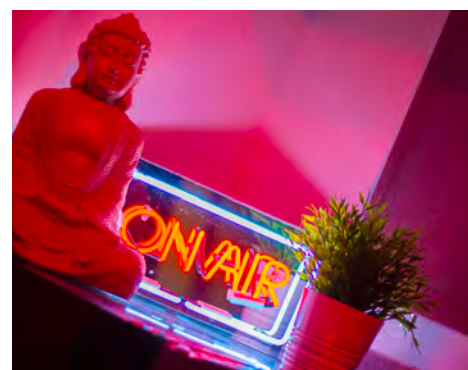


FIGURE 7.94. *Top left*, Maṇḍala logo, naming, and the advertising slogan "Support — Challenge — Inspire" by *Mandala Leaders*.

FIGURE 7.95. *Top right*, Logo, naming, and the slogan "Usability, Accessibility & Ethnography" by *Mindful Research*.

FIGURE 7.96. *Bottom left*, Naming and the advertising slogan "Creation. Activation. Representation" by *Think Mantra*.

FIGURE 7.97. *Bottom right*, Red Buddha figure next to "On air" neon sign by *Think Mantra*.

Corporate branding sometimes also includes creating fancy catchwords or slogans around the neoliberal enhancement discourse, like *Clarizen*'s “increase effectiveness,” “go do something great,” “drive focus,” “response faster” (fig. 7.98), “accelerate progress” and “we move business forward” (*Clarizen* 2020).



FIGURE 7.98. Visualizing of optimization catchwords by *Clarizen*.

(iii) Some companies seem to personalize their slogan to specific user groups, like clothing company *Yana*'s “Your lifestyle brand” (2020) (fig. 7.99), *Sacca Lifestyle*'s “The Art Of Life Starts With You” (2020) (fig. 7.100), *Zendo Marketing*'s “Your Digital Marketing Partner” and “Dedicated to helping businesses grow online” (2020) (fig. 7.101) or *Nirvana Brewery*'s “Join the journey” and “Welcome to nirvana” (2020) (fig. 7.102).

YANA

Your lifestyle brand.



FIGURE 7.99. Top, Naming, and slogan by *Yana London*.

FIGURE 7.100. Center left, Website header with logo, naming, and slogan — “The Art Of Life Starts With You” — by *Sacca Lifestyle*.

FIGURE 7.101. Center right, Website header with logo, naming, and slogan “Dedicated to helping businesses Grow online — Your digital marketing partner” by *Zendo Marketing*.

FIGURE 7.102. Bottom, Website “Join the journey — Welcome to nirvana” by *Nirvana Brewery*.

(iv) Rather descriptive slogans are also used; for instance, *Sila Removals*'s “The art of moving since 1998” (2015) (fig. 7.103) — refers to their foundation date — *Atman Strategy*'s “Joined Up Strategy” (2020) (fig. 7.104), *Ahimsa*'s “the Vegan café” (2020) (fig. 7.105) or *Panna*'s “Kitchen & Canteen” (2020) (fig. 7.106).



FIGURE 7.103. Left, Logo, Naming, and slogan “The art of moving since 1998” by *Sila Removals*.

FIGURE 7.104. Second left, Geometric logo, naming, and the slogan “Joined Up Strategy” by *Atman Strategy*.

FIGURE 7.105. Second right, Logo with pigeon by *Ahimsa: The Vegan Café*.

FIGURE 7.106. Right, Logo by *Panna: Kitchen & Canteen*.

Therefore, regarding the multiplied side of Buddhist mediators, every Buddhist mediator has a logo and slogan, visible or not, and simulates specific (dream) worlds. Buddhist mediators have 59 different names. These naming strategies used by Buddhist mediators like *Buddha-Bar*, *Karma Cola*, *Tara Property Investments*, or *Nirvana Capital* range from lesser-known to popular Buddhist terms. One can also identify Buddhified slogans like *Hayne Solution*'s “How do you achieve your finance Nirvana?” and non-Buddhified slogans by companies using Buddhified labels like “Make it real” by *Zenuity*. Cultural resources are transformed and translated into logos ranging from Buddhist to Asian — and originally rather non-Buddhist — symbols. On the one hand, this logoization involves different visual references to Buddhist mediators like Buddha figures, lotus flowers, Zen paint brushes, and many more. Still, on the other hand, it also involves non-Buddhist logos combined with Buddhist naming like *Karma Burger* having a haloed burger in their logo, as well as *logoized* uses of the gingerbread man or cannabis flowers.

6.3. SIMPLIFICATION — Formal Buddhist Mediators in Displacement Without Transformation

Simplification (or double-click) — in a Latourian understanding — is about displacement without transformation, translation, literal speech, and speaking in figures and tropes. It includes the creation of “indisputable Reason” and alternates in maintaining the same despite the other (Latour 2013a, 488–489). Simplification is “the possibility of information without transformation” since any transformation “appears misleading, biased, deviated or in any case artificial.” It thereby “judge[s] all others as though they had an existence deficit” (Latour 2013c; “[DC]”). Therefore,

simplified double-click information is defined by Latour with the metaphor of a computer mouse, which obtains “all the information we might require to be available at the click of a button” without all the required mediations necessary for acquiring this very operation (Latour 2013c; “Double Click”).

6.3.1. Namings

6.3.1.1. Namings I: Buddhified

The use of English terms from a traditional Buddhist discourse²³ for other — here, neoliberal consumerist — settings started with the emergence of Buddhism in Europe, which *made* the new and unknown at least namable and comprehensible.

Every brand using Buddhist mediators has to find its very own specific naming. Companies are using 59 more or less known Buddhist concepts or terms like “Buddha,” “Zen,” “karma,” or “nirvāṇa” for their naming. Buddhist traditional terms are repeatedly used in consumerist endeavors. They can be distinguished in terms of being (i) relatively well known within popular discourse, (ii) rather unknown to non-Buddhists, (iii) from a Buddhist discourse but not perceived as such, (iv) used in Buddhist traditions, but also other “religious traditions,” and (v) not coming from Buddhist traditions, but primarily being attributed to them in popular cultural discourses.²⁴

(i) There are a variety of — even to non-Buddhists — relatively well-known Buddhist terms, including vital Buddhist concepts. The most popular of these is — of course — “Buddha.” In Sanskrit and Pāli, “buddha” means “awakened one” or “enlightened one.” The term is derived from the Sanskrit root “√budh,” meaning “to awaken” or “to open up” — like a flower. Etymologically, it refers to someone “who has awakened from the deep sleep of ignorance and opened his consciousness to encompass all objects of knowledge.” Many different religious groups in ancient India used the term. Still, it became dominantly associated with followers of Gautama, “who claimed to be only the most recent of a succession of Buddhas who had appeared in the world over many eons of time” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 148–149). Buddhist company naming appears very often — 450 cases in the UK and 104 in London (CompanyCheck 2020)²⁵ — including many

23. These Buddhist terms are taken from Wikipedia 2020 and Modern Kadampa Buddhism 2020.

24. This last part (v) will be discussed in chapter 6.3.1.2. “Non-Buddhified.”

25. Unless otherwise stated, the numbers are from May 2020. First come UK numbers, then those for London, with the latter included in the former.

markets and companies. The best-known are probably *Fat Buddha Yoga* and the *Buddha-Bar*. Nonetheless, several others sometimes creatively build new connotations with the Buddha in their label, like *Buddha on a Bicycle*, *The Sleeping Buddha Tattoo Studio*, *Wisebuddah*, *Urban Buddha*, and *Yankee Buddha*. Then some companies need Buddha names to support their market profession, like medicine (*Buddha Dental Tree*), finances (*Fat Buddha Finance*), and clothing (*Buddha Wear* and *Buddha Beachwear*). Some companies do not have a Buddha naming but create Buddhified products, like *Paradise Row London*'s handbags and satchels named “The Buddha.” Sometimes it is not apparent at first sight why a specific product should be sold under the naming “Buddha” — for instance, *Budhi Budha* (2020), which sells baby clothes and accessories (fig. 7.107) or *Buddha Beachwear*'s flip flops named “Buddha Boy” (fig. 7.108) — since most of these namings seem to have little to do with the etymological meaning of “enlightened one,” except perhaps the notion that the baby clothes should help the baby “to open up” like a flower. “Enlightenment” and “awakening” seem to sell well, so the combination is in the interest of entrepreneurs with market interests to transform Buddhist traditions into companies' and products' namings.



FIGURE 7.107. *Left*, Baby bib with foxes by *Budhi Budha*.

FIGURE 7.108. *Right*, Orange “Buddha Boy” flip flops by *Buddha Beachwear*.

The Sanskrit term “karman” — in Pāli “kamma” — in its inflected Sanskrit form “karma” is now an accepted English word. “Karma” literally means “action.” It is used to refer to a doctrine of action and its corresponding “fruition,” “according to which virtuous deeds of body, speech, and mind produce happiness in the future (in this life or subsequent lives), while non-virtuous deeds lead instead to suffering” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 420–421). Karma naming — 818 cases in the UK and 198 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — includes companies strengthening their specific profession and market — where no direct Buddhist reference or knowledge seems

necessary, like medicine (*Karma Dental Care*), telecommunications (*Karma Telecom*), the internet (*Kamma Data Services*), hotels (*Karma Sanctum Soho*) and finances (*Credit Karma*). Some companies creatively use the label “karma” to generate a new word like “Karmarama.” Other companies refer to the etymological meaning, an “action” and “fruition,” relating to the fact that good actions lead to happiness in the future, like the *Karma* app propagating these “good” actions. The food delivery company *Karma Cans* creates a double meaning of “cans” (as substantive) and “cans” (as a verb), which has been very creatively hybridized with the term “karma” in the cooking and delivering food sector.

The Sanskrit term “nirvāṇa” — Pāli “nibbāna” — means “extinction,” and it is mainly interpreted as “blowing out” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 589–590). Nirvāṇa naming — 406 cases in the UK and 88 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — includes specific markets like drinking (*London Nirvana Brewery*), hotels (*London Olympus Hotel Nirvana*), the creative industry (*Nirvana Studios* and *Nirvana Creative Production House, Nibbana Music*), and the health sector like *Nirvana Fitness* and *Nirvana Health* in London’s Green Lanes. Hardly any specific reference to the etymology of “extinction” can be found in any of these offers’ namings.

“Zen” (禪) is Japanese for “meditation,” and it is the Japanese strand of the Chinese Chan school, which is itself a transcription of the Sanskrit term “dhyāna.” At present, there are three significant traditions or “schools” in Japan: Rinzai-shū (臨濟宗), Sōtō-shū (曹洞宗), and Ōbaku-shū (黄檗宗). They refer to themselves as Zen schools and are thus known collectively as Zen tradition (Zen-shū) (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1050). Many companies support their specific market profession with 1,348 cases in the UK and 346 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — like health (*Zen. Pharmacy - Beauty - Health Centre*), finances (*Zen Capital*), realty (*Zen Apartments*) and technology (*Zen Internet*), whereby the connection to the etymological origin seems not to be sought, but the reference to health, finances, apartments, and the internet. Zen naming also includes companies — like *Deep Zen* — that try to connect to multiple discourses: “Zen” (Buddhism) and “Deep” (AIs like *DeepBlue* and *DeepMind*). Then there is a company which — by abbreviating three of its terms “Zero Emissions Network” — actually creates the word “ZEN” in the first place, probably not by accident. Some companies make a new word around “Zen” by adding other words like *ZenLayer*, *Zenzic*, *Clarizen*, *Zenuity*, and *Houzen*. *Zenzic* describes its meaning as “‘squared’ or ‘to the power of,’” which would convey the “multiplier effect” the company aims for in the “connected and self-driving ecosystem.” This rather creative adaption leads to the company stating:

“We are both catalyst and connector,” which is trying to accelerate the self-driving revolution by increasing the speed and intensity of moving to a mobile future (Zenzic 2020). Then again, *Houzen* focuses on enhancing revenue faster than competitors (Houzen 2020).

The term “Lama” refers to “lamaism,” which is an “obsolete English term that has no correlate in Tibetan, sometimes used to refer to the Buddhism of Tibet.” Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. (2014) argue that “the term is considered pejorative by Tibetans, as it carries the negative connotation that the Tibetan tradition is something distinct from the mainstream of Buddhism. The use of this term should be abandoned in favor of “Tibetan Buddhism.”” (464). The term also refers to “lamas” like the Dalai Lama, of whom the current one, Tenzin Gyatso (b. 1935), is the fourteenth (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 209–210). Lama naming in advertising and marketing — 98 cases in the UK and 28 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears in promoting specific — non-Buddhist — markets like *Lama Petroleum* or *Lama Publications*. There are also amusing hybrid formations combined with the term “lama,” like in *Lama’s Pyjamas* (fig. 7.109).



FIGURE 7.109. Website banner by *Lama’s Pyjamas*.

Finally, the term “Gautama” is the family name of Śākyamuni Buddha, “Gotama” in Pāli. Buddha was a member of the Śākya tribe in today’s southern Nepal, and within these, his family or clan was named “Gautama” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 316). Gautama naming is less numerous — with seven cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — and more generic like *Gautama Digital*, which connects the “digital” to “Gautama” and is nevertheless a creative input.

(ii) Then there are Buddhist terms that will probably be relatively unknown to non-Buddhists, and which — in contrast to “Buddha,” “nirvāṇa,” and “karma” — cannot be immediately attributed to Buddhism, and which therefore cannot be understood as a sales magnet. “Dharma” is the Sanskrit term — which is “dhamma” in Pāli — for “factor” or “element.” The term is difficult to translate; even in traditional sources, there are up to ten meanings. The Sanskrit root “√dhr̥” means “to hold” or “to maintain.” It appears in Vedic literature, in Hinduism and Buddhism,

but in the latter, it mainly refers to “teachings” or “doctrines” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 242–243). Companies using dharma naming — 128 cases in the UK and 38 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — try to strengthen their marketing branches like cooking (*Dharma Chef*) and music (*Dharma Records*) (fig. 7.110), which de facto refers to the etymological meaning and the Sanskrit root meaning of something that holds or maintains. This is undoubtedly one of the most urgent interests of every company to preserve itself and its business and is therefore very well combinable with this Buddhist term and concept.



FIGURE 7.110. *Dharma Records*’ logo with meditating man.

The term “zazen” (坐禪) is Japanese for “zuochan,” meaning “seated meditation.” Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that it “refers to sitting with legs folded on top of each other and eyes slightly closed in meditation” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1049, 1062). Zazen naming is rarer — twelve cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — but it appears in online marketing (*Zazen Media*) that seems to have little to do with meditative sitting but seems to indirectly jump on the “Zen train” because there is also a capital “Z” in the logo (fig. 7.111).



FIGURE 7.111. *Zazen Media*’s logo and label with a capital “Z.”

“Pagoda” is a Portuguese term adapted into English, which probably derives from the Sanskrit term “bhagavat” — meaning “blessed” or “fortunate” — or the Persian “kadah” for “idol house.” Portuguese explorers first used this term to describe temples they had seen in India. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “[t]he term was subsequently adopted by the British and eventually came to take on the specific meaning of the multistoried tower found in Buddhist monastic complexes, especially those in East Asia.” A pagoda is a “stupa” which houses a relic of

the Buddha or a Buddhist “saint” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 611). Pagoda naming appears in different markets — 200 cases in the UK and 42 in London (CompanyCheck 2020), while some of them strengthen their specific marketing field like eating and drinking (*Kew Pagoda Beer*, *The Pagoda pub*) (fig. 7.112) (“Pagoda, 64 Tower Bridge Road [...]”) or health (*Pagoda Pharmacy*). This naming is mainly used by companies that sell online and have physical buildings to be visited by embodied customers. Whether these buildings — like pharmacies or pubs — can be called “idol houses” is in the eye of the beholder, but in the case of the Kew Pagoda — the historical references to the Chinese Nanjing pagoda are documented — the creation of a beer company that links this pagoda with Kew Gardens can be called highly creative.



FIGURE 7.112. *The Pagoda pub at 64 Tower Bridge Road, January 2007.*

In Sanskrit and Pāli, “saṃsāra” means “wandering,” which refers to the “cycle of rebirth.” There are typically six rebirth destinies: “divinities (deva), demigods or titans (asura), humans (manusja), animals (tiryak), ghosts (preta), and hell denizens (naraka)” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 757–758). Saṃsāra naming — 87 cases in the UK and 26 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used by companies to advertise their specific business like consulting (*Samsara Consult*), the film industry (*Samsara Motion Picture*), fitness and health (*Samsāra: Mind and Body*), care (*Samsara Care*) or the Internet of Things (*Samsara*). Many of these uses — in their company names — do not seem to relate to the “cycle of rebirth” of the Buddhist tradition, only the detailed review of the website portfolio of *Samsara* as “the leader in industrial IoT” (Samsara 2020a) seems to refer to the “wandering” of things and people.

The term “saṅgha” is the Pāli and classical Sanskrit variant of “community” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 768), while the Buddhist hybrid Sanskrit term is “saṃgha,” which means “community” or “order” and usually refers to Buddhist nuns and monks (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 750–751). Saṅgha naming — 192 cases in the UK and seventeen in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to promote specific marketing branches like sales (*Sangha G Wines*, *Sangha Sweets & Snacks* in Wellington (UK) (fig. 7.113)) or yoga (*Sangha Yoga*). The latter even combines “saṅgha” with “yoga” and creates something completely new that is also capable of creating “community” according to Buddhist traditions.

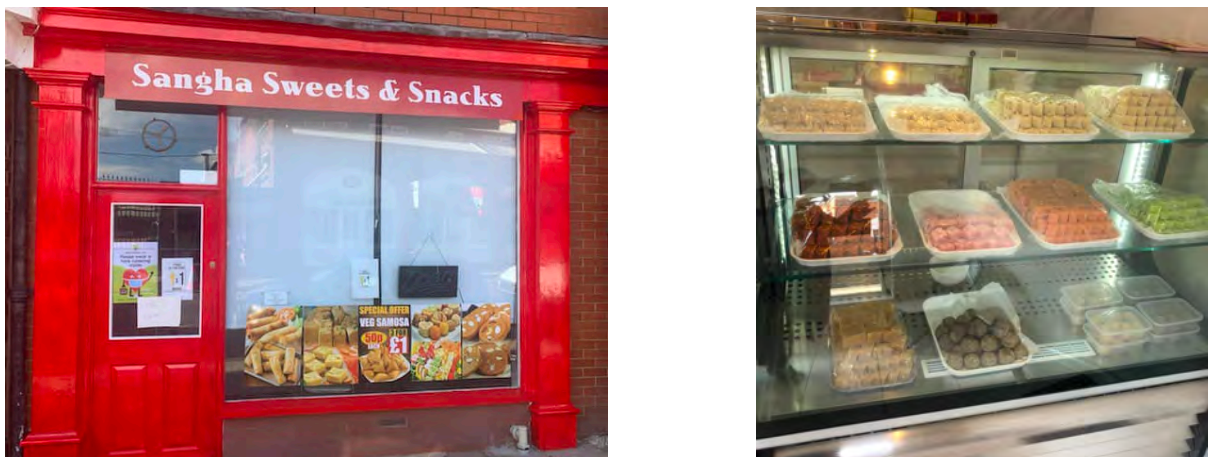


FIGURE 7.113. Store and sweets by *Sangha Sweets & Snacks*.

“Karuṇā” is the Sanskrit and Pāli term for “compassion” or “empathy,” and it is the wish that others are free from suffering (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 424). Karuṇā naming — 50 cases in the UK and nine in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to strengthen specific markets like clothing (*Karuna Rose*), jewelry (*Karuna Gems*) (fig. 7.114), care (*TLC Karuna Manor*) or mental health (*Karuna Institute*). The specific cases of *Karuna Trust* and *Karuna Action* illustrate the reactivation of the traditional Buddhist meanings of compassion, empathy, and helping the poor, caste-based discriminated, and unequal people in India and Nepal.



FIGURE 7.114. Logo with a sparkling diamond by *Karuna Gems*.

The Sanskrit term “Tārā”²⁶ literally means “savioress” or “a female bodhisattva who has the miraculous power to be able to deliver her devotees from all forms of physical danger” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 895–896). Tārā naming — 1,168 cases in the UK and 233 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — usually strengthens specific branches like investment (*Tara Property Investments*), sale (*Tara Leathers* in Dublin (Ireland)) (fig. 7.115) or publishing (*Tara Publishing*), while the traditional Buddhist meaning of “savioress” does not seem to be taken any further there.

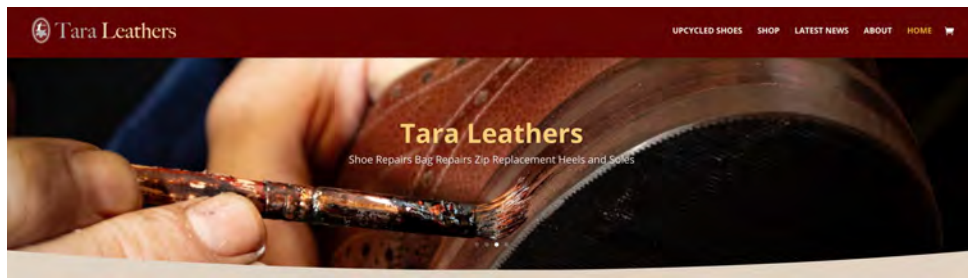


FIGURE 7.115. Website header displaying shoe repair by *Tara Leathers*.

The Sanskrit and Pāli term “bodhi” means “awakening” or “enlightenment.” Bodhi is “the consummate knowledge that catalyzes the experience of liberation (vimokṣa) from the cycle rebirth” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 128). Bodhi naming — 109 cases in the UK and 24 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises markets like clothing (*The Little Bodhi*) (fig. 7.116), health and fitness (*Bodhi Yoga, Bodhi Fit*), and development consulting (*Bodhi: Global Analysis*) (fig. 7.117). Some Bodhi naming refers indirectly to the Buddhist “awakening” combined with the term “yoga.” Still, mentioning “bodhi” seems only incidental or exclusively contributes to an orientalist — or exoticized — “aura” of the Far East.

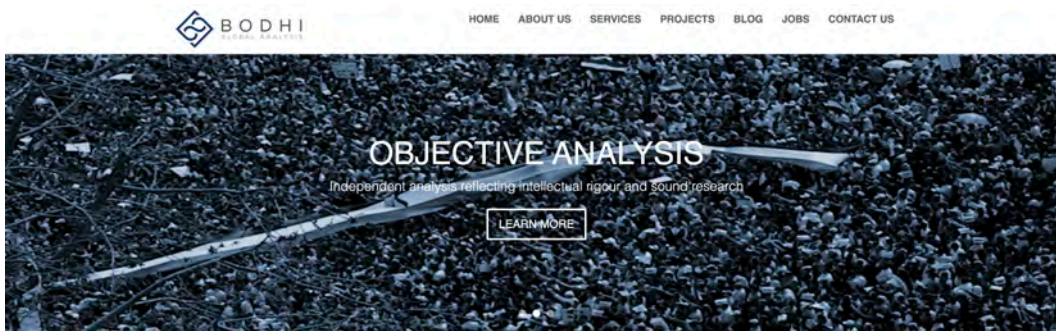


FIGURE 7.116. Left, Website header by international development consultancy *Bodhi: Global Analysis*.



FIGURE 7.117. Right, Microfiber bath towel by *The Little Bodhi*.

26. A fair proportion of this naming might also relate to the popularity of Tara as a female name in the UK.

The term “mettā” refers to “mettāsutta,” which is in Pāli the “Discourse on Loving-Kindness,” one of the most beloved and most frequently cited texts in Theravāda Buddhism (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 538–539). Mettā naming — 51 cases in the UK and twenty in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — includes industries from health (*Metta Health*) to realty (*Metta Homes*), education (*Metta Academy*), creative industries (*Metta Theatre*) and the mindfulness train (*Metta Mindful*) (fig. 7.118). By combining the terms mettā and mindfulness thus, the latter even generates a new market and new consumers. Some labels, like *Metta Health* and *Metta Mindful*, even refer to traditional Buddhist “kindness” concerning body and mind.

“Sevā” is a Sanskrit term that refers to “service” and the “working for the benefit of others” (“Glossary of Buddhist Words.” 2020). Sevā naming — 119 cases in the UK and 23 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises branches like childcare (*Seva Childcare*), realty (*Seva Realty*), transport (*Seva Rail* in Ashford, Kent) (fig. 7.119) or energy (*Seva Energy*), which all tie in with Buddhist traditions, since they consider themselves a “service” which is for the benefit of others, i.e., energy, children, and apartments.

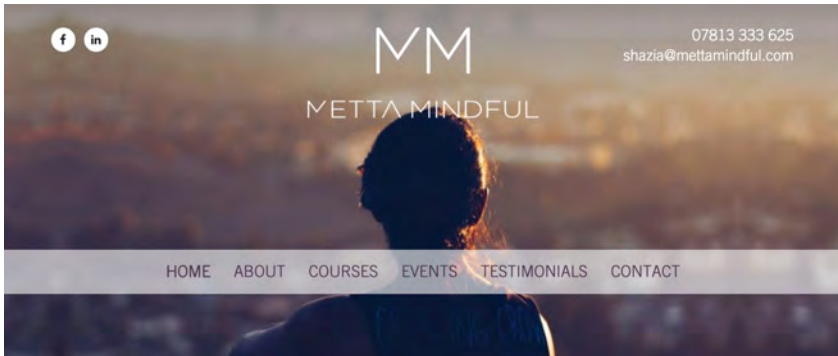


FIGURE 7.118. Left, Website front page by *Metta Mindful*.



FIGURE 7.119. Right, Logo by *Seva Rail*.

The term “sōtōshū” (曹洞宗) refers to one of the three major “schools” — with Rinzaishū and Ōbaku-shū — in Japanese Zen tradition. Sōtō goes back to Dōgen Kigen (1200–1253) (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 845–846). Companies using sōtōshū naming — 1,348 cases in the UK and 346 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — can be primarily found in the finance industry (*Soto Capital*), which has hardly a recognizable reference to the tradition of this Zen school.

“Ahiṃsā” is the Sanskrit and Pāli term for the “absence of harmful intentions,” “harmlessness,” or “nonviolence.” This idea was central in several Indian Śramaṇa traditions —

including Buddhists and Jainas. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “[s]ome of the corollaries of this idea included the precept against killing, the injunction to refrain from physically and verbally abusing sentient beings, and vegetarianism” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 21). Ahimsā naming — 26 cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to strengthen companies’ branches like finances (*Ahimsa Investments*) (fig. 7.120), food (*Ahimsa: The Vegan Café* in Pinner (UK)) and health (*Naturally Ahimsa*).



FIGURE 7.120. Logo with a lotus flower by *Ahimsa Investments*.

From a perspective critical of capitalism, the financial sector, in particular, can be seen as opposed to “non-violence” and thus in contradiction to the Buddhist tradition of the “ahimsā” concept. Generally, the ahimsā naming seems more generic and does not truly reflect the Buddhist traditions.

The Pāli term “anatta” — which is “anātman” in Sanskrit — means “no self” or non-self. It is the third of the “three marks” of existence (trilakṣaṇa), together with “impermanence” (anitya) and “suffering” (duḥkha) (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 42–43). Companies use anatta naming — eight cases in the UK and four in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — to advertise their specific branch, like realty (*Anatta Dawn*) or consulting (*Anatta Consulting*) (fig. 7.121). This particular company is “helping organisations and people thrive” and thus aims to connect to the Buddhist concept, which is also explained on their website: “Anatta is the Buddhist philosophy that we have to constantly evolve in order to thrive. It fits perfectly with our approach to people and organisations” (Anatta 2020). The company thereby combines in its naming the understanding of the non-self with caring for others.



FIGURE 7.121. Logo and naming by *Anatta Consulting*.

“Aniccā” is the Pāli term — which is “anitya” or “anityatā” in Sanskrit — for “impermanence.” In Buddhism, it is the first of the “three marks” of existence — which is “trilakṣaṇa” in Sanskrit and “tilakkhaṇa” in Pāli — together with suffering (duḥkha) and non-self (anattā) (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 47–48). The aniccā naming — seventeen cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used for advertising specific branches like construction (*Annica Construction*), realty (*Annica Holdings*), or media (*Anicca Digital* in Leicester (fig. 7.122), *Anicca Media* in Helmdon (both UK)). These companies do not seem to follow the Buddhist concept of impermanence. Still, especially in the case of the latter — Singaporean — company, a local link to a more traditional Buddhist account may explain why a Buddhist concept such as “anicca” was chosen for its naming.



FIGURE 7.122. Naming on a truck by *Anicca Digital*.

The Sanskrit and Pāli term “āgama”²⁷ for “text” or “scripture” generally refers to the received textual tradition (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 19). The “āgama” naming — 27 cases in the UK and nine in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is rarely used, but for instance, in the branch of security (*Agama Security*). The relation between “text,” “scripture,” and “security” seems unusual. Still, it promotes its market like handicrafts (*Agama Taylor*), finances (*Agama Capital Solutions* in Wickford (UK)), health (*Agama Medicals* in Waterlooville (UK)), consulting (*Agama Consultants* in Potters Bar (UK)), and entertainment (*Agama Entertainment*). These namings hardly refer to Buddhist traditions but build a novel meaning of “agama” in new secular and consumerist contexts.

“Tripiṭaka” is the Sanskrit term — which is “tipiṭaka” in Pāli — for “three baskets,” which refers to one of the most common ways to organize the Indian Buddhist canon (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 924). Tripiṭaka naming — four cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to promote companies’ markets like consulting (*Tripitaka Consultancy*) and the creative industry (*Tripitaka Theatre Company*). They do not refer to the

27. Another possible meaning is the reference to the English term “agamid.”

Buddhist canon and the “three baskets” but build something new by creating a tripiṭaka cinema and a tripiṭaka consulting.

The terms “arhat” (Sanskrit) or “arahant” (Pāli) mean “worthy one,” one who has destroyed all causes for a future rebirth and one who will enter nirvāṇa when she dies (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 62). Arhat naming — eight cases in the UK and four in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises industries like finances (*Arhat Capital*) and consulting (*Arhat Consulting*). These mediated namings are also used to localize the brand to a specific geographic and urban site — here to London — like in *Arhat London*. The etymological reference to “worthy one” seems rather vaguely adapted. There must be reasons other than the mediational reputation of the term “arhat” in a location like London for having this specific naming.

In Sanskrit, the term “ātman” means “self” or “I.” It is “used especially to refer to a perduring substratum of being that is the agent of actions, the possessor of mind and body,” which “passes from lifetime to lifetime.” The Buddha taught non-self (anātman) “as a palliative to this misconception of permanence” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 78). Companies using “ātman” naming — 40 cases in the UK and twelve in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — seek to advertise specific markets like consulting (*Atman Consulting*), business development (*Atman Strategy* in Malvern (UK)), food and drinks (*The Atman Chai Company*), care (*Atman Care* in Kent (UK)), finances (*Atman Capital Partners* in Belfast) or health (*Atman Clinic* in Kent (UK)). In principle, according to Buddhist tradition, “atman” refers to an anti-foil, which is why “self-related” are thus those companies promoting consumption for the sake of consumption, with the sole exception of care services.

The Tibetan term “bar do” means “between two” and is often translated as an “intermediary state.” This can refer to the state between death and rebirth (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 98–99). “Bar do” naming — 51 cases in the UK and twenty in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears, for instance, in dining locations (*Bardo Bar*) and consulting (*Bardo Advisors*). The latter and *Bardo Connection* — from Ilford (UK)— fit perfectly with the traditional Buddhist definition of an intermediary state, making the advisor a mediator and a “connector” between success and failure, profit and non-profit.

The Sanskrit term “ḍākinī” refers to a “cannibalistic female demon, a witch.” They can be female hell guardians who guard secret doctrines, especially in Tantric Buddhism (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 209). The “ḍākinī” naming — thirteen cases in the UK and six in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — initially seems slightly unusual as the choice of a company label and the examples of these are pretty rare. Nevertheless, they appear in specific markets like logistics

(*Dakini Intl Logistics (UK)* in Beccles (UK)), services (*Dakini Solutions* in High Wycombe, *Dakini Concepts* in Weybridge (both UK)), trading (*Dakini Ethical Trading Co* in Bristol, *Dakini Fair Trade Europe* in Bodmin (both UK)) and the creative industries (*Dakini Productions (UK)*). None of these labels and corporations seem to take this hostile demon as a role model; thus, the reference to Buddhist traditions looks relatively minor. However, these companies that put “ethical trading” into the foreground seem to understand “*ḍākinī*” as anti-foil, or they could have aimed for these “secret doctrines” that the Buddhist female hell guardians would guard.

In Sanskrit and Pāli, the term “*deva*” means “radiant one,” “shining one,” “god,” and “divinity” and is one of the rebirth destinies (*gati*) of *samsāra*. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argued that “[w]hen it is said that Buddhism has “gods” but no “God,” the devas are being referred to. The term *deva* derives from the Sanskrit root “*√div*” and is related etymologically to the English word “divinity.” There are between 26 and 28 different categories of devas (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 230–233). Deva naming — 386 cases in the UK and 49 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is to be found in finances (*Deva Financial Planning*, *Deva Financing PLC*), health and beauty (*Deva Beauty*), property (*Deva Property Investors*), construction (*Deva Construction*), the creative industries (*Deva Entertainments* in Chester (UK)) and the food sector (*Deva Wine* and *The Deva Tap* in Chester²⁸ (both UK) (fig. 7.123)). Due to the abundance of companies using deva naming, a direct reference to the meanings of *deva*’s etymology does not seem to take place, but rather the term’s versatility in mediating, naming, branding, and marketing — and secularism in general — becomes clear.



FIGURE 7.123. Bar counter with beer offerings in *The Deva Tap*.

28. Deva naming in Chester might also relate to the city of Chester, located on the Roman fortress Deva Victrix site.

The terms “dhyāna” (Sanskrit) and “jhāna” (Pāli) mean “meditative absorption” and refer to “specific meditative practices during which the mind temporarily withdraws from external sensory awareness and remains completely absorbed in an ideational object of meditation.” Dhyāna means controlling the mind, which does not necessarily imply having insights into reality. The Chinese word “Chan” — and Japanese “Zen” — adopted the term dhyāna as a naming for their Buddhist “schools” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 256–257). Dhyāna naming — twelve cases in the UK and six in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears in consulting (*Dhyana Consultancy*), health (*Dhyana Organics*), and traveling (*Dhyana Touring* in Epsom (UK)). These namings do not seem to refer directly to the meaning of the term dhyāna as a meditative practice that controls the mind, but — again — reinvents the term by combining it with other — seemingly unusual — terms and concepts, i.e., consulting, organics, and touring.

“Jukai” is the most critical initiation ceremony in Zen Buddhism. It is the traditional Buddhist ceremony of receiving the precepts (“Jukai Ceremony [...]” 2017). Jukai naming — two cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is relatively rare and is used, for instance, by *Jukai Agricultural Company* as well as a Hardcore band (*Jukai*) from Long Island, New York (US), which toured to London in 2018. Both do not refer directly to the etymology of “jukai” and seem to have nothing to do with Zen practices. At least *Jukai Agricultural Company*’s combination of “agriculture” with “jukai” is quite creative and unusual. By choosing *Jukai* as a band name, “jukai” is redefined, expanded, and deepened as an expression of a musical genre.

The Japanese term “kensho” — or Chinese “jianxing” — means “one’s nature,” which is a Chan — or Zen — expression referring to one’s own Buddha-nature (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 385). Kensho naming — fourteen cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used for advertising markets like consulting (*Kensho Consulting Services*), sports (*Kensho Karate* in Wallsend (UK)), properties (*Kensho Properties*), the creative industries (*Kensho Media*), health (*Kensho Vitality* in Sheffield (UK)), care (*Kensho Care* in Newton Aycliffe (UK)), education (*Kensho Extended School Services LLP* in Durham (UK)), AI technology, where one can become a “kenshin” (*Kensho* in Cambridge (UK), MA, New York, Washington D.C. and Los Angeles (US)) and travel (*Kensho Boutique Hotels & Villas* in Mykonos, Greece). All of these namings are to be understood as creative reinterpretations of one’s own Buddha-nature and displays that the term “kensho” does not have to be limited to Buddhist traditions but is spreading, expanding, and deepening in a translocally connected world. The Cambridge-located *Kensho* explains the term as a “way of seeing: *Kensho* is a Zen term which means ‘to see nature’” and transforms it creatively as “[f]rom a new vantage point: We believe that our civilization’s newest

technology—machine intelligence—can and should be used to better understand our oldest human systems” (Kensho 2020).

The Sanskrit term “mokṣa” — Pāli “mokkha” — means “liberation,” “freedom,” or “release” from suffering and the cycle of rebirth. It is often used synonymously with “nirvāṇa.” The ultimate form of mokṣa is Buddhahood (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 547). Mokṣa naming — 51 cases in the UK and fifteen in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used in various markets like the creative industries (*Moksha Music*), management (*Moksha Management*), health and beauty (*Moksha-Beauty*), finances (*Moksha Investments* in Stanmore (UK)) and consulting (*Moksha Consultancy* in Woodford Green (UK)). There is no explicit reference to the liberation from the cycle of rebirth. Still, combining Buddhist traditions with neoliberal consumption is to be seen as a new and creative adaption.

The Sanskrit term “mudrā” — Pāli “muddā” — means “seal,” “mark,” or “sign.” In traditional Buddhism, mudrā often refers to gestures made by the arms and hands during ritual practices or in depictions of Buddhas and bodhisattvas (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 551). Companies use mudrā naming — sixteen cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — to advertise a specific marketing branch like services (*Mudra Business Services* in Luton, Bedfordshire (UK), (*Mudrā*) (fig. 7.124)), advertising (*Mudra Ads Private* in Hounslow (UK)), the creative industries (*Global Mudra* in New York (US)) and associates (*Mudra Associates* in Nottingham (UK)). The reference of these namings to the term’s etymology is complex since they are instead expressions of creative reinterpretations of this traditional Buddhist concept.

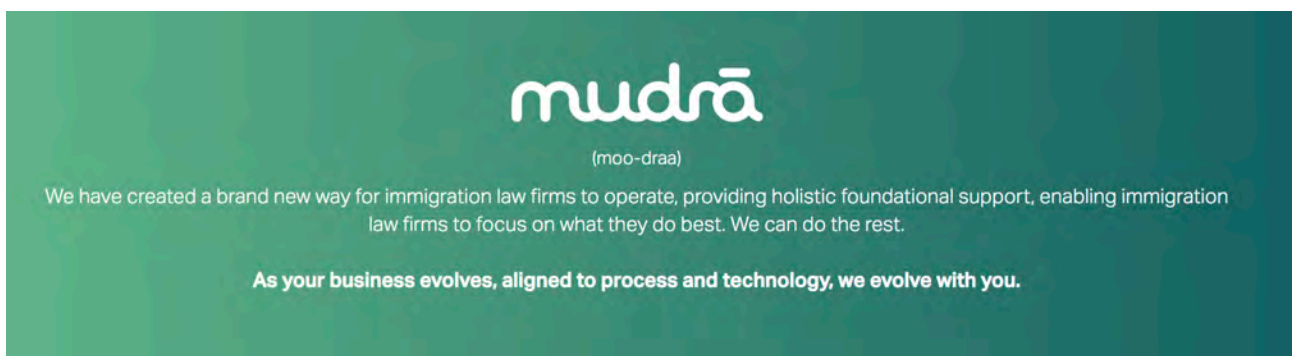


FIGURE 7.124. Explanation of naming and service on *Mudrā*’s website.

The term “namo” means “homage” and refers to Buddha or other Buddhist entities (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 566). Namō naming — 37 cases in the UK and sixteen in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used in businesses like traveling (*Namo Journey*), realty (*Namo*

Housing), technology (*Namo Software*), finances (*Namo Investments*) and eating and drinking (*Namô*) (fig. 7.125). The latter is a Vietnamese restaurant, whereby this naming could probably refer to an “homage” to their homeland Vietnam. For all case studies using this naming, it is pretty conducive to consider this very diverse labeling as an “homage” to the Buddha — and not as a “distortion” of an authentic approach to Buddhist terminology — to gain a better understanding of these new and sometimes very young companies.



FIGURE 7.125. Naming with a black and white logo by *Namô*.

The Japanese term “oshō” (和尚) comes from the Chinese “heshang” and the Sanskrit term “upādāya,” all of which mean “preceptor.” In Japanese Buddhism, it usually refers to a teacher, senior monk, or abbot. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “[i]n the Zen context, oshō refers to those monks who have been in training for ten years or more” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 603). Namings with “oshō” — 21 cases in the UK and six in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — are used by several branches like health (*Osho.London*), the creative industries (*Osho Media International* in Cork), consulting (*Osho Consulting* in Cradley Heath (UK)) and law (*Osho Digital Rights*). The meaning of a “preceptor” seems to extend far beyond Buddhist traditions and can be adapted very well to neoliberal, consumerist, and so-called global conditions.

The terms “prajñā” (Sanskrit) or “paññā” (Pāli) are typically translated as “wisdom” but also mean “gnosis,” “awareness,” and sometimes “cognition.” Prajñā “has the general sense of accurate and precise understanding but is often used to refer to an understanding of reality that transcends ordinary comprehension” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 655). Paññā naming — 40 cases in the UK and nine in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears in various branches like consulting (*Prajna Consulting*), associates (*Panna Associates* in Glasgow), health and sports (*Panna Sports Agency*), finances (*Panna Foundation Trust*), clothing (*Panna Fashions* in Luton (UK)), marketing (*Panna Marketing* in Sheffield (UK)), realty (*Panna Properties* in Ipswich (UK)) and eating and drinking (*Panna: Kitchen & Canteen* in Liverpool (UK)). Of course, “wisdom” can mean many

things and does not have to be understood in such an abstract way — of Buddhist traditions — or be restricted to an “understanding of reality that transcends ordinary comprehension.” Still, it can refer to wise handling of marketing, consulting, properties, health, and sports, i.e., creatively applying this “old” concept to consumerist, neoliberal, and basically “secular” conditions.

The Japanese term “rōshi” (老師) for “old master” is an honorific usually referring to a senior Buddhist teacher or monk. In Japanese Zen schools, rōshi designates a senior teacher who offers spiritual guidance and holds higher positions within the traditional Buddhist ranks (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 721). Rōshi naming — seven cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is less common but includes business areas like construction (*Roshi Builders* (fig. 7.126) and *Roshi Construction* both in Sutton (UK)), health (*Roshi-Medical* in Northampton (UK)), dining (*Master Roshi Ramen Bar*) and trade (*Roshi Spices* in Harrow (UK)). These namings can be understood as adaptations of the meaning of “old master” so that — for instance — when preparing sushi or building a house, trust in experience plays an important role, even in entirely different neoliberal, consumerist, and secular contexts.



FIGURE 7.126. House logo and naming by *Roshi Builders*.

The Pāli term “sacca” — Sanskrit “satya” — means nondeceptive “truth.” The term is used in the famous list of the Four Noble Truths (catvāry āryasatyāni), set in the Buddha’s first sermon (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 788). Sacca naming — nine cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is relatively rare. Still, if used, it appears in business consulting (*Sacca Lifestyle*, *Sacca Consultancy*) or realty (*Sacca Properties* in Pinner (UK)). The reinterpretation of “sacca” and its adaption to business consulting and properties as “truth” is quite creative.

“Sanzen” is a term referring to a formal interview with a teacher in many Zen traditions, which means going to a Zen master for her instruction (“Sanzen” 2020). Companies using sanzen naming — six cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertise their market branches like consulting (*Sanzen Solutions*), technology services (*Sanzen*), marketing (*Sanzen Digital Marketing* in High Wycombe (UK)), which — in the neoliberal discourse of consumption — can indeed be understood as creative adaptations of the traditional Zen tradition in the sense of “instruction.”²⁹

“Satori” (悟) is the Japanese term for “awakening” or “enlightenment.” It comes from the Sanskrit term “bodhi” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 787). Satori naming — 152 cases in the UK and 28 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises a multitude of markets like consulting (*Satori Consulting International*), associates (*Satori Associates*), art (*Satori Art Group*), leisure (*Satori Yachting*), sports (*Satori Martial Arts* in Norwich (UK)), health (*Satori Healthcare* in Southampton (UK)), finances (*Satori Investments* in Redditch (UK)), beauty (*Satori Beauty* in London (UK)), AI technology (*Satori* in Cambridge (UK)), analytics agencies (*Satori: Analytics Agency* in London and Athens) and many more. These naming usages of satori represent creative adaptations of the traditional Buddhist concept of “awakening” and “enlightenment.” For instance, *Satori: Analytics Agency* even describes “satori” as a term to describe “the moment of clarity,” which is precisely the service they sell. They describe their business as “to give clarity in decision making through data analytics” (Satori: Analytics Agency 2020).

The Sanskrit term “śīla” — or Pāli “sīla” — means “morality.” These are “those practices whose aim is to restrain nonvirtuous deeds of body and speech, often in conjunction with the keeping of precepts” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 821). Śīla naming — 60 cases in the UK and 22 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used in a variety of branches like dining (*Sila Catering*), shopping (*Sila Supermarket*), care (*Sila Care Services*), handicraft services (*Sila Unisex Hair Salon*), guarding (*Sila Security Guard Services*), moving (*Sila Removals*), finances (*Sila Investments* in Orpington (UK)) and technology (*Sila Motors*). It is pretty fascinating to apply

29. The company *Sanzen* explains its naming in the following way: “A Japanese term, Sanzen is a ritualistic, private interview between a student and a master - repeated until the desired understanding of a teaching is achieved. *But that is not really why we chose it. It is also is an acronym for the countries of birth of the original 3 co-founders being South Africa, New Zealand and England.* All now based in the UK, we brought our diverse backgrounds and experience together and created a high performing team in the digital transformation space within one of the largest integration projects ever undertaken in banking. *In doing so, we also transformed - creating our company and moving beyond banking*” (Sanzen 2017; emphasis added).

—“śīla,” — a concept of “morality,” to conventional neoliberal and consumable companies and services because it is designed to make them more attractive and appealing, despite — moral or ethical — criticism of capitalism.

The term “sukha” — in Sanskrit and Pāli — means “bliss,” “ease,” or “joy.” Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “[i]n order to achieve buddhahood, the bliss consciousness is used to understand emptiness” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 866–867). Sukha naming — twelve cases in the UK and three in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used relatively rarely but is used to strengthen a particular field of business like building (*Sukha Builder UK* in Hayes (UK)), dining (*Sukha Coffee* in Lytham St. Annes (UK)), yoga (*Sukha Life Yoga* in Saint Petersburg (US)) and health (*Sukha London* in Bishops Stortford (UK)) (fig. 7.127). Of course, happiness and bliss are a vast market anyway — one could also speak of a “happiness train” — and this can be achieved in many different ways: building a house, practicing yoga, optimizing one’s health, or eating out. However, to create this naming, the companies had to cut the link to “to understand emptiness,” as this does not play a prominent role in neoliberal consumerist practices. In a — secular — market economy world where happiness and bliss have become commodities, Buddhahood has also been redefined and made affordable for anyone.³⁰



FIGURE 7.127. Buddha logo and naming by *Sukha London*.

30. The company *Sukha London* explains its naming in the following way: “The meaning of ‘SUKHA’: a Sanskrit word which can be translated as “happiness,” “ease” or “bliss.” Its literal translation is often given as “good space,” coming from the Sanskrit words, su (good) and kha (space). Based in the beautiful market town of Bishops Stortford *SUKHA specialises in bringing you the exquisite*. [...] We have done the search for you and with passion and excitement we bring you not only some of the worlds leading beauty brands such as Ren but also new and emerging companies, *these are not simply products to us - this is happiness*” (Sukha London 2020; emphasis added).

The Japanese term “tenzo” — in Chinese, “dianzuo” — means “in charge of seating” and is usually used for a cook at a Buddhist monastery. In Indian Vinaya texts, the term also refers to a “manager” or “service monk” “who assigned seating at assemblies and ceremonies and arranged for the distribution of material objects or donations in addition to food” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 258). Companies applying the “tenzo” naming — three cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appear very rarely, but in analytics and app development (*Tenzo*) or interior design (*Tenzo: Excites Your Living* in Smålandsstenar, Sweden). For instance, on the one hand, interior design, furniture, and chairs in the Swedish *Tenzo* store are a “hypermodern” and secular adaptation of the traditional tenzo meaning “seating.” On the other hand, the app *Tenzo* is to be understood as a modern “manager” of restaurants, not unlike the classic Buddhist “tenzo,” which they describe themselves as: “It has been built to make running a restaurant feel a little bit more Zen” (figs. 7.128–7.129) (Tenzo 2020).

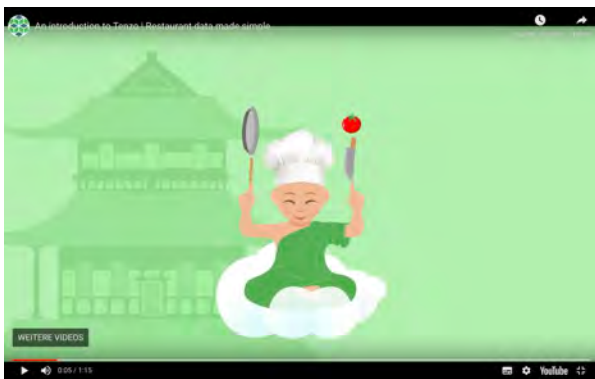


FIGURE 7.128. *Left*, Video still shows a tenzo in a Buddhist monastery by *Tenzo*.

FIGURE 7.129. *Right*, Video still shows how to “make running a restaurant feel a little bit more Zen” by *Tenzo*.

“Thera” is the Pāli term for “elders,” — which appears in “Theravāda,” — meaning “Way of the Elders” or “School of the Elders” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 904–905). Thera naming — 53 cases in the UK and five in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears in diverse fields like biotechnology (*Thera Biotechnology*), medicine (*Thera Pharmaceuticals* in Dublin), health (*Global Thera*), finances (*Thera Investments* in Poole (UK)) and non-profit organizations (*Thera Trust* in Grantham (UK)) (fig. 7.130). Any business seems well advised to portray itself as an “elder,” someone to trust, especially in areas that require *trust* such as technology, health, finance, medicine, or non-profit organization; for instance, by helping people with a learning disability. The choice of “thera” as a label naming seems conscious and creative — sometimes not that far from Buddhist

traditions — even if non-Buddhist outsiders are hardly familiar with the traditional concept. However, it also has an orientalist or exoticizing “aura,” which seems to work well.



FIGURE 7.130. Dolphin logo with Naming by *Thera Trust*.

The Chinese term “tiantai” — and Japanese “tendai” — refers to Tiantai zong, a Buddhist school that takes the Lotus Sūtra as the highest one (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 910 and 912–913). Tiantai naming is relatively rare — two cases in the UK and one in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — but this naming is used for energy services (*Tiantai Sinobase Impex Co.* in London and China). A reference to tiantai as a school taking the Lotus Sūtra important seems unclear. Still, since that company is of Chinese origin, the owners are probably familiar with Buddhist traditions and perhaps wanted a local and religious traditional clue for their label.

“Triratna” or “ratnatraya” are the Sanskrit terms — which in Pāli is “ratanattaya” — for the “three jewels”: Buddha, dharma, and saṅgha. It is often translated as the “triple gem” or the “three treasures.” One of the most common practices as a Buddhist is “taking refuge” in the three jewels (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 924 and 704). The triratna naming — eight cases in the UK and one in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used in branches like the arts (*Triratna Arts*), events (*Triratna Buddhafield* in Winchester (UK)) (fig. 7.131) or trading (*SBC Triratna Trading* in Sheffield (UK)). This naming *updates* the traditional Buddhist understanding of “triratna” in the sense of “triple gems” within the context of neoliberal, secular market consumption, i.e., in art, festivals, events, and trade.



FIGURE 7.131. Floral and colorful logo with naming by *Triratna Buddhafield*.

The Pāli term “virīya” — and its Sanskrit equation “vīrya” — means “effort” or “energy.” Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that virīya can be understood as an antidote to laziness and thus refers to the “enthusiasm to perform virtuous acts.” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 980) Virīya naming — five cases in the UK and one in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises diverse markets such as energy (*Virīya Energy*), consulting (*Virīya Consulting* in Newick (UK)) or services in Thailand (*Virīya Textile* in Bangkok). *Virīya Energy* has creatively adapted the rather abstract understanding of energy in the Sanskrit and Pāli sources to the market and business of an energy provider.

The Sanskrit term “yāna” stands for “vehicle,” “conveyance,” or “any means of transportation.” Yāna can be used in the literal and metaphorical sense of transportation to enlightenment. In this sense, it appears in the terms “Mahāyāna,” “Hīnayāna,” or “Vajrayāna” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1020). The yāna naming — 48 cases in the UK and sixteen in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is utilized by companies to advertise their branches like technology (*Yana Tech* in Bournemouth (UK)), the creative industry (*Yana Media* in Glasgow), realty (*Yana Property Services* in Surrey (UK)), education counseling (*Yana Global Services* in Tarneit, VIC, Australia), promotions (*Yana Promotions* in Worthing (UK)) and beauty (*Yana London*). The usages of these namings are to be understood as a creative adaptation, translation, and further development of a “transport” to the self’s enlightenment: this can include anything from property to an alpaca farm to advertising, education, or beauty.

The Japanese term “zendō” (禪堂) means “meditation hall.” In Chinese, the “sengtang” — Japanese “sōdō” — is the “saṅgha hall” or “monks’ hall.” In the Chinese Chan school, it was the center of monastic practice. The Japanese Rinzaishū called their leading monks’ hall a zendō, not a saṅgha hall. Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. explain that “[u]nlike the Sōtō sōdō, which was used for eating, sleeping, and meditating; the Rinzaizai zendō was reserved solely for meditation” like zazen (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1050 and 793). Zendō naming — thirteen cases in the UK and eight in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to highlight companies’ specific markets like realty (*Zendo Properties*), the creative industry (*Zendo Media*), marketing (*Zendo Marketing*), consulting (*Zendo Consulting* in Aylesbury (UK)), energy (*Zendo Energy*) and sports (*Zendo Kickboxing*). Besides the classical Buddhist Zen practices, zendo naming today means much more than that. The actual “meditation hall” appears today in many adaptations and reinterpretations for a neoliberal, consumable, and secular everyday life in Western societies and urban metropolitan areas.

(iii) Some terms come from a traditional Buddhist discourse but are not perceived as such. In Sanskrit, “smṛti” — Pāli “sati” — means “mindfulness” or “memory.” It is most “commonly used in meditative contexts to refer to the ability to remain focused on a chosen object without forgetfulness or distraction” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 831). The mindful naming — 401 cases in the UK and 105 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — advertises several branches like health (*Mindful Healing*), communications (*Mindful Communications* in Pencader (UK)), technology (*Mindful Machine Company* in Bristol (UK)), the creative industries (*The Mindful Planet* in Farnham (UK)), clothing (*Mindful Luxury Brands*), science (*Mindful Research* in Edinburgh (UK)), property (*Mindful Property Investments* in Milton Keynes (UK)), consulting (*Mindful PM Consultancy*), dining (*Mindful Chef*, *The Mindful Kitchen*), education (*Ingenious* (*Mindful Education*)), sports (*Mindful Running*), yoga (*Mindful Yoga* in Ruislip (UK)), courses (*The Mindfulness Project* and *Cultivate Mindfulness*) and many more.

The sati naming — nineteen cases in the UK and two in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — adds the marketing sectors of technology (*Sati Motors* in Leicester (UK)), property (*Sati Property* in Leicester (UK)), the creative industry (*Sati Design*), holdings (*Sati Holdings* in Leicester (UK)), consulting (*Sati Consultancy Services* in Clitheroe (UK)), finances (*Sati Investments*), dining (*Sati Cuisine* in Glasgow) and clothing (*Sati Takhar Menswear* in Birmingham (UK)). As mindfulness today becomes increasingly popular and appears in companies, schools, and governments, the namings “mindful,” “mindfulness,” and “sati” become progressively attractive. Some connect more clearly with the etymological meaning of “mindfulness” and “memory” and come from a meditative context like *London Mindfulness Project* and *Cultivate Mindfulness*. Others promote their specific profession and market through a creative adaption of “mindfulness” to neoliberal, secular, and consumerist societies, in which focus and not letting oneself be distracted becomes more and more critical in all areas of life, i.e., property, health, technology, education, science, sports, consulting, holdings, and finances. These made a remodeling of the classical Buddhist mindfulness — apparently — imperative.

The lotus flower (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 606–607) refers to the Sanskrit term “padma” or Pāli “paduma.” This aquatic plant blossoming above the muddy water surface is “the most commonly occurring flower in Buddhist art and literature.” Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “the lotus is used as a symbol for the purity of mind that develops out of the pollution that is saṃsāra but remains unsullied by it” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 606).

Mostly the lotus flower is visualized at Buddha’s feet, but Buddhas and bodhisattvas are also often seated within large lotus blossoms, and deities often hold lotus blossoms in their hands (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 606–607). The term “lotus” in company naming — 2,061 cases in the UK and 506 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used to strengthen specific professions like health and therapy (*Little Lotus Therapy*, *The Lotus Room* (fig. 7.132)), contractors (*Lotus Contractors*), finances (*Lotus Assets*, *Lotus Investment Management*), traveling (*Lotus Travel*, *Lotus Group*) and leisure and homes (*Lotus Leisure*, *Lotus Homes (UK)*). In any case, lotus naming is used without reference to Buddhist traditions of the lotus, whereby the incorporation of the lotus semantics seems somewhat random.



FIGURE 7.132. Lotus logo with naming by *The Lotus Room*.

(iv) Some terms are indeed used in Buddhism, but also in other religious traditions of Asia, like Hinduism or Jainism. The Sanskrit term “yoga” means “restraint,” “bond,” or “spiritual discipline.” In Buddhism, it is “a generic term for soteriological training or contemplative practice, including tantric practice” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 1033). Yoga naming — 2,389 cases in the UK and 607 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is very common in London — and beyond — and is firmly anchored within the health sector, but there are also other markets like sales (*Yoga Leggs*). It is most prominent with *Fat Buddha Yoga* since it combines the terms “yoga” and “Buddha” — two marketable namings — with each other. Companies like *British Yoga Clothing* connect the yoga concept with a local reference. They use both terms to promote their — clothing — profession. Yoga namings are not always wholly interested in etymologically “correct” adaptations. Still, they generate dynamic, market-conscious labels by reinterpreting the “classical yoga” to benefit the brand and the company in neoliberal, consumerist, and secular societies.

Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. argue that “[t]here is no single term in Buddhism that corresponds precisely to what in English is called “meditation,”” but some of its meanings appear in terms like “bhāvanā,” “chan,” “dhyāna,” “jhāna,” “patipatti,” “samādhi” and “zuoChan” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 538). Meditation naming — 181 cases in the UK and 41 in London

(CompanyCheck 2020) — has ultimately joined the development of mobile apps, such as the prominent *Headspace* company displays. Companies like *The Meditation Clinic* strengthen and advertise their profession — health and clinics — through the “meditation” label.

The Sanskrit and Pāli term “māna” means “pride” and “conceit.” Māna is one of ten “fetters” (samyojana) that keep beings bound to the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra). It is also known as the “asmimāna,” meaning “I am conceit.” According to Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr., “pride arises from comparing oneself to others and manifests itself in three ways: viz., as the feeling that one is equal to, inferior to, or superior to others. Pride is a deep-seated and habitual affective response to other persons” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 522). Māna naming — 211 cases in the UK and 64 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — strengthens specific professions like finances (*Mana Capital*, *Mana Holdings*), dining (*Mana in Manchester*) (fig. 7.133), and communications (*Mana Communications*). The latter refers to the desire to communicate with others and compare oneself. Māna naming fits perfectly into this Buddhist tradition: pride in the self, pride in comparing with others, and pride in having, consuming, and purchasing things. Manchester’s *Mana* restaurant — displaying its logo with people sitting in the Lotus seat — explains its naming as the “power of the elemental forces of nature embodied in an object or person” (Mana 2020).



FIGURE 7.133. Logo and naming by Michelin-starred restaurant *Mana*.

The term “maṇḍala” — coming from Sanskrit — can mean “circle” but is a polysemous term and has many different meanings in South, East, and Central Asia, but it mainly refers to a circle, “where a boundary is demarcated and increasing significance is accorded to areas closer to the center” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 523–524). Maṇḍala naming — 105 cases in the UK and 23 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — seeks to strengthen companies’ professions like technology (*Mandala Electrical Services*, *Mandala Internet*), business coaching (*Mandala Leaders* in London,

York, and Edinburgh (all UK)), finances (*Mandala Trading*) and the creative industry (*Mandala Media*). In practices that link capitalist financial trade with the term “maṇḍala,” the direct reference to the etymological meaning is not apparent.

The Sanskrit term “mantra” means “spell,” “charm,” or “magic formula.” A mantra is “a syllable or series of syllables that may or may not have semantic meaning, most often in the form of Sanskrit, the contemplation or recitation of which is thought to be efficacious” (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 529). Mantra naming — 281 cases in the UK and 67 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is connected with the most diverse sales industries like music and entertainment (*Think Mantra*) (figs. 7.96–7.97), consulting (*Mantra Consultancy & Capital*) and event organizers (*Mantra Event*), which can be seen as a “charm” or “spell” and therefore adapt the etymological meaning very well.

The Sanskrit word “sūtra” — Pāli “sutta” — means “aphorism” but was translated into Buddhist traditions as “discourse,” “sermon,” or “scripture.” A sūtra is a “sermon said to be delivered by the Buddha or delivered with his sanction.” Probably initially referring to sayings of the Buddha that his followers preserved, sūtras evolved into a Buddhist literary genre (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 875). Sūtra naming — 60 cases in the UK and 22 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — appears in companies that have seemingly nothing to do with the sermons Buddha is said to have delivered, like record label *Sutra UK* (fig. 7.134) — from Bristol and Devon — or *Sensual Sutra*, who promote themselves as “[t]he Specialist in Sex Toys.” They combine “sūtra” with the term “sensual,” which is meant here mainly sexually, and thus generates an entirely new field and addresses a quite specific and unique audience.



FIGURE 7.134. Lotus logo with naming by *Sutra UK*.

The Sanskrit syllable “om̐” is used by many Indian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, or Jainism. Its meaning very enormously varies depending upon the “school” in which it is used. In Buddhist traditions, it is part of the famous mantra “om̐ maṇi padme hūṃ,” meaning an “homage to the Jewel-Lotus One,” which is one of the most prominent Buddhist mantras, significant in Tibetan Buddhism, where it is most commonly recited and most often placed in prayer wheels (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 603). The om̐ naming — 841 cases in the UK and 237 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — is used for advertising industries like software (*OM Software Solutions* in High Wycombe (UK)), health (*OM Surgical (UK)*), eating and drinking (*OmNom*) or voice casting and recording (*OM*), which seem to have little to do with Buddhist traditions. *OmNom*’s — a dining and yoga store in London — slogan “Enlightened eating” even supplements the term “om̐” with the term “enlightenment,” referring directly to the Indian and mainly Buddhist tradition and thus *generates* a company that wants to appear exciting and young.

6.3.1.2. Namings II: Non-Buddhified

(v) Finally, some terms do not come from Buddhist traditions but are often attributed to Buddhism by popular cultural discourses. “Religion” is not a Buddhist term from Buddhist traditions but is usually applied to Buddhism. Some companies carry “religion” on their label — 72 cases in the UK and 26 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — and are selling products with Buddhist mediators like the *Religion* clothing store (fig. 7.135). Then California-based *True Religion* even adds to the term “religion” a kind of valorization: “true.” Combining Buddhist mediators and the term “religion” seems to increase sales for local and translocal operating companies.³¹



FIGURE 7.135. Logo and naming by the *Religion* clothing store.

The phrases “chill/chilling” or “chill/chilling out” obviously have no origins in Buddhist traditions but are repeatedly omnipresent in today’s popular culture. They often connect to discourses like mindfulness, lounge, yoga, and Buddhism. Chill naming — 582 cases in the UK and

31. The *Religion* store explains its mediator, naming, and branding in the following way: “Religion is devoted to the pursuit of individual style; lyrical quotes, musical muses and British heritage have always been heavy influences behind each collection. Inspiration from London’s east end and international street culture has been integral in shaping the brand’s much loved signature” (Religion 2020).

97 in London (CompanyCheck 2020) — can be identified in various companies and markets and mainly supports a specific profession, which is often to be found in the health discourse (*Relax and Chill*) (fig. 7.136) or entertainment (*London Chill Productions, The London Chill Squad*).



FIGURE 7.136. Logo, naming, and slogan by *Relax And Chill*.

Buddhist mediators and brands are *constructed* within translocal and transtemporal networks: they are translated by local, “global,” regional, and national movements of people, “things,” and ideas. Buddhist mediators are — or secularism, generally — about the transfer and transformation of formerly so-called “religious things.” Each transfer, translation, and transformation of Buddhist mediators into something “secular” hints that this very *secularism* is simultaneously religious and secular and, thus, a *composition*.

6.3.2. Inclusion through Hyper-Positive Exoticism

The second mode of dealing with the other in Buddhist mediators can be identified as hyper-positive inclusive exoticism. Latour has defined “exoticism” as “the attribution of a false difference in order to try and capture the otherness of others, a false difference which is, more often than not, the result of a misunderstanding of oneself.” He has put occidentalism first and exoticism second, while he distinguishes between “exoticism of the nearby” (i.e., occidentalism) and “exoticism of remote beings” (i.e., orientalism) (Latour 2013c; “Exoticism”). Buddhism in branding and marketing is not just a neoliberal Western “thing” — prohibited in non-Western and traditionally “Buddhist” countries and — addressed primarily to so-called “secularized” actors. Playing with Buddhist things is also part of Buddhist traditions, but in a more conservative and prohibiting way, defending its supposed authenticity. However, why do Buddha figures — in the so-called “West” — always have to smile and be happy, like in front of or inside restaurant entrance halls (figs. 7.137—7.138)?



FIGURE 7.137. *Top left*, Smiling Buddha figures in the entrance hall in *Buddha-Bar* at 145 Knightsbridge, London.

FIGURE 7.138. *Top right*, Laughing Buddha figure in front of *Gasthaus Gutenberg* in Karlsruhe (Germany).

FIGURE 7.139. *Bottom left*, Buddha figures for sale in a Japanese garden in an animal park (*Tierpark Bretten*) in Bretten (Germany).

FIGURE 7.140. *Bottom right*, Can of *Bee Zen*, iced and sparkling herbal tea in rose and honey flavor, with the label, bee logo, and floral ornament in Strasbourg (France).

Why do Buddhas for sale appear in animal parks and Japanese gardens (fig. 7.139)? Why is branding with Buddhist mediators so hyper-positively framed that the pun — of “Be Zen” — “Bee Zen” with a bee as its logo surrounded by a floral ornament works for a company producing iced and herbal tea (fig. 7.140)?

Why is the troublesome and war-waging Buddhism (Jerryson and Juergensmeyer 2010, Jerryson 2017, 2018) mostly absent in Buddhist mediators and Buddhist branding, except as the dichotomy between “true, positive and peaceful Buddhist mediators” and “traditional, not always peaceful mediators”? The ideological³² construction of super-positive Buddhist mediators can be evidenced almost anywhere. Buddhist mediators are consistently ideologized since mediators are not objective nor neutral, just like consumption and capitalism are not. Since religious studies in its disciplinary history fundamentally had to develop as a critique of ideology (McCutcheon 1997, Fitzgerald 2000, 2007a) — especially in differentiating from the discipline of theology — it is equipped to deal with the ideology of Buddhist mediators. In a Žižekian and Marxist sense, Buddhist mediators in its *simplifying* mode of naming and hyper-positive exoticism is ideological due to its “constitutive *naiveté*” about its presuppositions in capitalism, consumerism and neoliberalism, its effects in constructing *selves* and *others*, and of course regarding the gap between reality and fake news. When Marxian “criticism of ideology” can be called “symptomatic” (Žižek 1989, 16) and a *symptom* has to be understood as the subversion of “the ideological appearance of equality, freedom, and so on” (22) — how should this *symptom* be dealt with? According to French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan — at the end of the psychoanalytical process — one should identify with the *symptom* since the alternative to it is “nothing” or “pure autism, a psychic suicide, surrender to the death drive, even to the total destruction of the symbolic universe” (81).

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how Buddhism-as-mediators — beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm — generate the *articulated* and rhetoric translation of Buddhist mediators into neoliberal, consumerist branded mediations. These Buddhism-as-mediators *gather* various actors within network, multiplicity, and simplification forms.

32. This thesis follows the ideology critique that Žižek formulated in 1989 in *The Sublime Object of Ideology* and again in *Mapping Ideology* (1994) — an anthology that united many “ideology critics” such as Theodor W. Adorno, Louis Althusser, Terry Eagleton, Pierre Bourdieu and many more — where he has defined “ideology” in the following way: “[I]deology is not simply a ‘false consciousness’, an illusory representation of reality, it is rather this reality itself which is already to be conceived as ‘ideological’ — ‘ideological’ is a social reality whose very existence implies the non-knowledge of its participants as to its essence — that is, the social effectivity, the very reproduction of which implies that the individuals ‘do not know what they are doing’. ‘Ideological’ is not the ‘false consciousness’ of a (social) being but this being itself in so far as it is supported by ‘false consciousness’” (Žižek 1989, 15—16; emphasis added).

To Karl Marx’s famous phrase explaining ideology, “they do not know it, but they are doing it” (Marx 1867, 38; translated by author), Žižek adds that “[t]he very concept of ideology implies a kind of basic, constitutive *naiveté*: the misrecognition of its own presuppositions, of its own effective conditions, a distance, a divergence between so-called social reality and our distorted representation, our false consciousness of it” (Žižek 2008, 24).

(i) Buddhist mediators are *networked* by building associations in complex and heterogenous courses of action. This includes Buddhist traditions and terms adopted in the so-called “West” and using Buddhist mediators in iconic forms, leading to processes that destroy, change or multiply these icons.

(ii) Buddhist mediators are *multiplied* by interpreting aesthetics in many ways. They can be (in)visible or parts of simulating and mediating *other* worlds. Buddhist mediators are also very much about language and images in the form of logos and slogans.

(iii) Buddhist mediators are *simplified* and thus formalized through displacements without transformations. This chapter has tried to identify these processes in the namings of consumerist companies and products and inclusivist hyper-positive exoticism, for instance, in the *Buddha-Bar*.

Buddhist actants — not just human actors, but mediators, aesthetics, products, corporations, and much more — come together in all those encounters this thesis has investigated so far, which would traditionally not be framed as “Buddhism.” Still, they *gather*, *mediate* and *assemble* all kinds of actants, creating *new* and *articulated* Buddhism-as-mediators. This new “thing” could be identified as a *compositionist* engagement protecting multiplicity, form, or practice with Buddhist mediators, including network, multiplication, and simplification discourses.

PART III

From Material Religion to Quantum Religion

Chapter 7

Reset Realism in Religious Studies!

Introduction

The final chapter of this thesis discusses why scholars of religion should reset realism. Josephson-Storm 2021¹ has delivered an alternative to the realism² vs. antirealism³ debate in a style of going beyond it, or in his words, “metarealism” (21). When metarealism is defined as realism in modes and without contrasts (43–44), this resembles Latour’s modes of existence; Latour would agree Josephson-Storm’s resistance to equating the social constructedness of reality with emptiness, non-existence, and nihilism (73). Josephson-Storm rejects “scientism-masquerading-as-realism” (284), which is also true for scientism in religious studies. Although Josephson-Storm’s work is brilliant, this chapter tries to add on this very “metarealism.”

However, as this chapter will try to show, it is about the emptiness of realism, or in Latour’s words, “real realism” (1999a, 15). He defends a particularly far-reaching variety of (im)metaphysical⁴ realism, which simultaneously includes and excludes subjects, objects, foundations (like essences and self-beings), truths (i.e., facts), as well as worlds by replacing any

1. This was reviewed in 2022 by Craig Martin. Although Martin accepts many of Josephson-Storm’s arguments, one specific critique is fascinating: “By contrast, I think almost all the claims that Storm presents as metamodern can actually be found in the writings of those “postmodern” philosophers themselves, if only we were charitable enough to read them more carefully. Metamodernism might, in effect, be a clarification of “postmodernism” rather than a movement beyond it” (Martin 2022, 422).

This is also true for Latour, whom Martin and Josephson-Storm categorize as “postmodern.” However, Latour has criticized this very term for at least three decades, and in *We have never been Modern* (1993), he opted for the term “amodern.” In fact, many of the arguments for metarealism could also be found in Latour’s oeuvre.

2. An excellent introduction to the topic of realism is provided by Westerhoff (2011).

3. Latour has repeatedly been associated with (social) constructivism (Gertenbach 2015) and thus with an antirealist (a phrase coined by Michael Dummett 1978, 145) camp, or even beyond realism and antirealism (Kneer 2009a, Kneer 2009b, Holzinger 2009a, Holzinger 2009b). He has a complicated relationship with constructivism, to say the least (Latour 2003).

4. Latour’s work has already been connected to metaphysics by philosopher Graham Harman (2009), who has also underlined his importance for philosophy in general, primarily for his work on actants, irreduction, translation, associations, and something Harman calls “a new occasionalism” (2007). In addition, Latour (2010d) has also outed himself as a philosopher.

metaphysics with ideology⁵. The realism debate about science has been a central topic within the philosophy of science since at least the 1970s (Liston, n.d.). Which realism is religious studies interested in? There are dozens of realisms around, like (i) scientific realism, structural realism, antirealism, or (ii) explicitly referring to Latour like “pragmatic realism” (Salinas 2016) and “realistic realism” (Watson 2016), and (iii) Latour identifies himself with either “radical realism” (1999a, 17), “constructivist realism” (1999b, 135) or “real realism” (1999a, 15). They all share the question of what science *does* and what its relation is to the “outside world”: does it portray the external object world, what is the role of subjects in this world, and does it display just structures of that world like relations or causations, or does science construct that outside world all by itself, and what kind of truth can science portray? The conclusion of this chapter connects Latour with ancient Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna by advocating a different form of realism: *empty realism* or *irrealism*.

With the help of Latour, a new approach called quantum religion can be determined to make more precise how mediational Buddhism can be studied and how scientific progress⁶ can be made. To modify the material religion approach via mediational Buddhism to a solely relational approach of quantum religion, three philosophical themes are addressed: (1) the relation of parts and wholes, (2) the absence of intrinsic properties and instead the presence of relations only, and (3) the absence of ultimate truth and in its place inconsistent truth versions⁷. The quantum religion approach — illustrated by the “Quantum Buddha” figure of Julian Voss-Andreae (fig. 8.1.) — follows the question of how religious things⁸ are *made* durable relationally and thus strongly resembles the more than 40 years of work by Bruno Latour. This allows religious studies scholars to improve their

5. Although the word “ideology” has a strong negative connotation in religious studies, first, an ideology-free space is a utopia, and second, ideology is — in Latour’s words — “more realistic” than metaphysical concepts such as foundations, subjects, objects, truths, and worlds.

6. Following philosopher of science Bas van Fraassen (1980), scientists can distinguish between observable (O) and unobservable (UO) phenomena. There is O (via concepts like material religion, quantum religion, or even world religion) and UO Buddhism. The first is indirectly possible, and the latter is directly impossible. Advocates of different forms of realism focus on either O or UO: realists vote for studying O and UO, antirealists only for O and agnostic towards UO (like van Fraassen himself), fictionalists are atheistic regarding both O and UO (Rosen 1990, Thompson 2022), instrumentalists have no opinion on both, but focus on their respective usefulness, and finally irrealists (like Westerhoff and Latour) think that UO is simulated in and depends on O, and vice versa.

7. This is vaguely consistent with Paul Feyerabend’s (1999) quest for pluralism.

8. Religious things include Buddha statues or figures (including Buddhas one decoratively puts at home), texts on Buddhist atheism within internet forums, or any songs, scents, or tastes associated with Buddha or Buddhism.

material religion approach to a quantum physicists approach used by physicists and philosophers (Barad 2007, Kohl 2007, Kohl 2008, Stengers 2011, Naber 2021).



FIGURE 8.1. “Quantum Buddha” artwork by Julian Voss-Andreae. 2015. 62*47*28cm. Stainless steel. Part of the *Figures VII* series.

7.1. Of Parts and Wholes

Latour is famous for his actor-network theory, which essentially tries to split each unified entity into several agents, i.e., smaller entities: one whole becomes innumerable parts. This corresponds to the idea — called “gunk” in metaphysics and mereology (Lewis 1991, 20, Sider 1993) — that things can be further broken down into parts. At the end of this fragmentation process, there is no final part, and there are always more parts than wholes. For Latour, parts never merge into wholes; they possess their resistance and are always more than wholes. By contrast, a “junk” categorization (Schaffer 2010, 64) would attempt to assign parts to wholes, yet wholes would always be more significant than parts. Only a “hunk” conceptualization (Bohn 2009, 193) attempts

to combine the two: it is controversial whether this is even possible, but Latour might offer a way to accomplish this.

According to a classical “junk” conception, a Buddha figure would be part of something called “Buddhism,” which in turn would be part of something called “religion,” etc. According to “gunk,” this Buddha figure is to be broken down into material components (material, color, visuals, acoustics, etc.), these again into atoms, quanta, etc. Moreover, a dismantling into artistic styles, craftsmen, artists, or payment processes leads at some point over to atoms, quanta, etc., i.e., to smaller and smaller parts. Either this process leads endlessly down or closes itself circularly and runs endlessly further.

Having no foundations makes quantum religion consistent because of “gunk” and the fact that parts are more than wholes: it is “parts all the way around.” When religious things are not conceived as “junk,” thus as being a proper part of something, but having endless parts, and these parts having endless parts, and so on, then religious things in no way have any stability, “thereness,” timelessness, essence, solidity or fundamentality, which would not circularly depend on itself. Quantum religion’s dependence chains seek no well-foundedness in some basic foundation, and they do not “go down” infinitely, but they “go around”; they can form loops (of coherence). Latour has, for instance, worked on this idea with his “gunman” figure (1999a, 176—180): when a man uses a gun to kill a deer, who has killed the deer, the man or the gun? Latour elaborates on this thought and concludes that both — gun and man — team up, influence each other, and can no longer be distinguished.

According to Latour, it is about both gunk and junk: hunk. There is a search for ever smaller and other parts and how these are entangled and mutually depend on each other. In Latour’s more recent studies (2013), fifteen modes of existence can be determined, i.e., “wholes,” not parts, thus quite different from his ANT project, where he searches for parts, not wholes. Therefore, one could argue that he is implementing something like “hunk” when one takes ANT and modes of existence altogether: (i) wholes are to be further and further grounded into parts, and (ii) parts can be assigned to fifteen specific wholes. This is to be seen as an attempt to avoid ultimate foundations and allow foundations to be used by agents. The advantage — as is typical for Latour — is not to have to choose one of the two worlds but to have both simultaneously. For quantum religion, religious or Buddhist things are both gunky and junky: they are hunky.

Quantum religion is also material religion, but in a more modern physicalist sense: here, materiality is not about fixed material *building blocks*, but as the quantum level (or quantum

mechanics) illustrates, materiality is about relations, mediations, vectors, and modalities, i.e., *building processes and building parts*. There are building wholes and building parts.

7.2. No Intrinsic Properties, but Relations Only

Other disciplines have theorized about questioning their specific foundations, like quantum physics, mathematics, transcultural studies theories, and the actor-network theory. Although the term “material religion” comprises two parts — *material and religion* — astonishingly, material religion scholars seem more interested in the religion part — i.e., to understandably overcome an essentialist or textualist understanding of religion within the academic field of religious studies — while not entirely being interested in the question of what materiality or material reality is, does, constitutes, and hardly anyone will be interested to study material religion physically or mathematically. When quantum physics or quantum mechanics is the study of the smallest physical entities, smaller than atoms, then quantum entanglement makes the distinction between objects and subjects and the idea of human agents as dominant creators obsolete. Religious things seem to behave not solidly or robustly and do not have any foundation but instead have a vector or a direction: quanta are relational and entangled. Macrophysical and microphysical things are circularly dependent on each other.

Religious foundations are always relations only, which are themselves relations, and so on. Therefore, it is “relations all the way around” and not (a) infinite regress by “relations all the way down,” whereby each ground is grounded by another ground, and so on. There is also (b) no ungrounded/unconstructed religious entity like God, society, discourse, semiotics, science, materiality, etc. Constructions do not require the unconstructed. This would only be true in a modern world of binaries and dichotomies like religion vs. non-religion, Buddhism vs. non-Buddhism, and constructed vs. non-constructed, which this thesis may have shown is not valid for Latour. Alternatively, the quantum religion approach tries to overcome foundational concepts by subsuming them with non-foundational ideas like circular regress and relational, mediational, vectorial, and entangled quanta.

“Relations all the way around” means that a Buddha figure or any religious thing or mediation is just that: relations. There are no *relata*, which are not themselves relations. Any religious thing is also circularly causally dependent on micro- and macrophysical relations and entanglements. When religious things are studied, one can not assume to meet an entity that “is just

there,” which has specific fixed properties and functions and waits for scholars of religion to describe, discover, construct, or do whatever they want with it.

Quantum religion is not a radical break with material religion but a radicalization of its core ideas: materiality is still at its center, but not in a solid, fixed, and stable sense. However, it is inspired by the material quantum level based on parts, wholes, relations, and versions. Mediation, in this sense, means that the religious thing on which something is mediated is not stable. It is a mediation, a nexus of relations, where relations — in Latourian words — *gather*.

Quantum religion allows the scholar to study religion way beyond the narratives of world religions, literate religions, and even material religions. The critical starting point lies in religious things, mediations, or mediators, and then one has to follow all threads. As a result of the research on Buddha brands in London conducted in Part II of this investigation, the following advice can be given:

1. Choose any mediation, and follow where it leads.
2. There can be subjects (i.e., people) who have “created” the mediation. Follow them.
There can be subjects who have made other people “create” the mediation. Follow them. And so on.
3. There can be objects in the shape of the mediation. Follow them. They may be resistant, i.e., crumble when being touched, etc.
4. There can be truths associated with the mediation, or better: gathered by the mediation. It is important to note a plurality of truths, not just one. For instance, a Buddha figure sold at *Walmart* is not just a symbol of late capitalism (which is, of course, true). However, it is also a reference to historic Buddha figures (which can be followed), and it is also an easy-to-consume mediation, etc.
5. There can be foundations connected with specific mediations. However, usually, these foundations are not unfounded but also founded by other foundations, and these are founded again, and so on. Follow these foundational threads. Prove that any foundation is just the beginning of the story, not its end; finally, mediations do not have foundations, but rather only relations.
6. There can be worlds around these mediations. Not just one world in which some mediation is true, but several worlds with several truths (Goodman 1978).
7. One has followed the mediation, not just in its “materiality” like sounds, visuals, and smells, or its mediatory function as a plain surface whereon other mediations project

themselves or their conceptions, but a modal entanglement between different building processes (Bennett 2017, Thompson 2018, Thompson 2019): *subject-making, object-making, truth-making, foundation-making* and *world-making* (Westerhoff 2020).

8. As a religious studies scholar, one follows mediations as building processes (quantum religion), not as finished, unfounded and timeless entities (material religion).

In metaphysics, there is the idea of rejecting intrinsic properties regarding the relation between (religious) objects and properties (Priest 2009, 2014). The classic example often cited for this is the ship of Theseus (Plutarch 1967, 49): there is this ship that has to be repaired with new parts after a storm. After further storms, it is repaired again and again with new parts until, at some point, no old component is left in Theseus' ship. If one names the first ship T_a and the last ship T_n , it can be argued with Priest that all ships in between both correspond to and contradict Theseus' ship, i.e., they are both true and false. Should old parts of the ship reappear later and a new ship is built from them, is this still the ship of Theseus? Undoubtedly, the new ship — that could be called T_j — would be somewhere on the scale between T_a and T_n . This contradiction — which Priest calls *dialetheism* — must be endured and is not a logical problem. According to Westerhoff, no entity remains constant throughout these exchange processes of gains and losses, which leads him to argue that the ship is “a mere empty placeholder to which various relations attach” (2020, 208–209). Accordingly, the ship of Theseus can be considered nothing more than its relations to other objects. This is precisely what Latour and Heidegger mean by the *gathering* of a thing (or mediation).

When Buddhism now replaces the ship of Theseus: at the beginning, one assumes a community of the historical Buddha (which is called B_a), followed by endless other communities, including Western Buddhism with monasteries and schools in Europe and the US (B_b), as well as including Buddha brands (i.e., consumable Buddhism in the form of Buddha figures in one's garden, etc.) (the latter is called B_n). Should old elements of Buddhism be rediscovered, translated, and built into a new Buddhism, is this still Buddhism? This B_j would be somewhere on the scale between B_a and B_n . As with the ship of Theseus, so with Buddhism, all versions of Buddhism between B_a and B_n correspond and simultaneously contradict Buddhism. No Buddhism remains constant through these transcultural processes, but Buddhism is “a mere empty placeholder to which various relations attach” (Westerhoff 2020, 208–209); so far, Buddhism can be considered nothing more than its relations to other things.

The same is true for religion: at the beginning, there might be a definition of religion or a community that defines XYZ as a religion (R_a), then there may be different communities (e.g., world religions) that are accepted as a religion by the majority society (R_b), and other ideologies (such as capitalism or Marxism) that are only understood as a religion by certain groups of people like scholars of religion (R_n). All of them, R_a , R_b , and R_n , are religion and non-religion simultaneously. Moreover, if old, more “fundamental” versions of religion appear, these are R_j , and therefore religion, but not more or less than all other versions. Religion — like Theseus’ ship and Buddhism — is nothing that remains constant through cultural exchange processes, which makes religion “a mere empty placeholder to which various relations attach” (Westerhoff 2020, 208–209): religion is solely its relations to other things.

As this subchapter may have illustrated, quantum religion does not assume any intrinsic properties: tables do not *naturally* have four legs, nor do cats *essentially* have one tail or religions (like Buddhism) *fundamentally* comprise believing in God (or Buddha). Properties are extrinsic to things. This thesis has tried to clarify this argument in Part II (Buddha brands in London): mediations are everything there is. If a given religious thing (i.e., Buddhism) changes, it is not that the thing changes, but the relations and mediations that make it change. The importance of relations in any religious thing goes so far as those religious entities or so-called “relata” become relations only. This means religious or Buddhist things are “relations all the way around.”

7.3. No Ultimate Truth, but Inconsistent Versions of Truth

As this thesis has tried to demonstrate, quantum religion is multi-modal: there are different inconsistent versions of each religious thing. Like Schrödinger’s cat — dead and alive — religious things come in versions, possibilities, relations, and mediations (and not in essences and facts). Religious mediations only refer to other religious mediations, and so on: there is an endless (circular) loop of reference. Quantum religion believes that mediations are everything and everywhere. Mediations do not just project on plain surfaces; they are the multiplicity of modes and versions, the modal and versional face of any specific *thing*. Following a Buddha figure is like following mediation and its various faces (truths, foundations, subjects, objects, and worlds). Following one face but not several at the same time does not take the materiality of *things* seriously. Of course, not all of its faces can be followed, but one can at least try, for instance, by using a multitude of material images and examples.

Quantum religion is about the plurality of truths, foundations, worlds, subjects, and objects through the multi-modality and multi-versionality of tradition, transformation, practice, technology, innovation, knowledge, politics, law, religion, passion, organization, ethics, network, multiplicity, and simplification.

Any statement, narrative, or fiction can be true if it is coherent. Religious things are true when they are coherent, resistant, and relate to other true things. Religious things are true when a specific context advocates their truth. Latour has famously shown in his comments on the multiplicity of historically changing death causes of Ramses II (2000) — for instance, tuberculosis — or the question “Where Were Microbes before Pasteur?” (1999c) that context dependency of truth denies ultimate truths. This is also the case for a theory of religion that changes when discourses, contexts, and relations between agents change to frame specific things as “true.” Thus, religious truth is pluralist, versional/multi-modal, and processual.

The critical difference between a multi-modal approach of quantum religion regarding material religion is that things *are* not things in and for themselves. However, they *appear* in a multitude of ways. A Buddha figure from 13th-century Myanmar is not just a “representation” of Buddhism of that time or the handiwork of skilled craftsmen. This Buddha figure *appears* in fictional ways (i.e., craftsmanship), as well as in political ways (the king who ordered it), as well as in religious ways (the specific “school” or network of Buddhists associated with it), as well as in referential ways (being used as a role model for Western Buddha figures sold for living rooms). To sum it up: one Buddha figure delivers not just one world (the traditional Buddhist world) but a multiverse of versions. As seen with Buddha brands, everything is connected: the past, contemporary, and future are not separated.⁹

One can summarize that quantum religion comprises different layers of things: subjects, objects, foundations, truths, and worlds (Westerhoff 2020). All of these share the characteristics of multi-modality and mediality. They all come in different versions, all entangled with each other.

For instance, (i) a Buddha figure (*object*) is a mediation made by (ii) *subjects*, but also exceptionally resistant and having its vectors and directions. There is not one real or fundamental thing, but mediations only. This figure will look differently viewed in different modes and will be

9. Similarly, Albert Einstein wrote in his letter to the children of his recently deceased friend Michele Besso in March 1955: “For people like us who believe in physics, the separation between past, present and future has only the importance of an admittedly tenacious illusion” (Venning 2017).

attributed with different functions in different modes, so there are there different versions of it, i.e., the religious mode, the political mode or the fictional mode, etc. (iii) This thing does not represent a singular real *world* — nor does an apple or a table — but it is fully mediational, it is constructed and real at the same time (Latour and Roßler 1997, Latour 1999b, 2003), and it represents not just one world but many alternating, inconsistent world versions or worlds. Again, these worlds come in versions; they are multi-modal, i.e., religious, political, fictional, etc. (iv) This Buddha figure has no foundation since it only comprises mediations that are primarily relational, i.e., the subjects had “made” it did that for being paid by somebody, who again wanted to beautify their living room, and so on. The regress of who or what grounded the Buddha figure is endless and (in a Latourian cosmos mostly) circular. Due to this regress and constructedness, there is nothing ungrounded or unconstructed. Since this figure neither has any properties that are intrinsic to itself, but properties come from external. They are attributed to it by others, perhaps about other things that are again different in various versions/modes (i.e., religious, political, or fictional, etc.). There are inconsistent versions of countless true Buddha figures, but not one true (or “authentic”) one is more true than the others. It is not about the substance of the Buddha figure, but its subsistence, how it is made durable. (v) Finally, the Buddha figure or any religious thing has pluralist, processual, and contextual truths since there is no single truth. These truths — again — change respectively of which mediation and which mode/version one chooses.

First, this quantum religion approach changes — more radically than the material religion approach — to view so-called material objects, not as soul-*less* things, made by soul-*full* subjects. However, first of all, subjects and objects make each other. Second, the narrative of things having origins and foundations that can be fixed is theoretically and physically wrong since quantum physics has demonstrated that things are not solid but relational and multi-modal. Third, there is no inherent ultimate truth attached to specific things, but several truths change according to mode, version, and context. Fourth, things do not enable reaching the one real world, but there are rather many world versions, which are all constructed but real (Latour and Roßler 1997, Latour 1999b, 2003) since one does not have anything other than that.

According to Latour, there is no world-in-itself or “being-in-itself” but world-as-other or *being-as-other* (“alteration”), which refers to multiple mediated world versions. Quantum religion is more a Heideggerian and Latourian approach to “things,” which *gather* (i) objects, subjects, truths, worlds, and foundations (without choosing only singular objects, subjects, truths, etc.), (ii) multiple modes/versions (religious, political, fictional or referential), and (iii) mediations (i.e., how the thing appears to actors in different shapes, colors, and sounds).

Latour agrees with metaphysician Jan Westerhoff (2020) that material objects — i.e., religious or Buddhist objects — are heavily concept-dependent, and these concepts are themselves dependent on other concepts, and so on. According to the latter, there are no objects solely made by subjects, and there is no Kantian “Ding-an-sich” somewhere in the numinous ether. There is no self-sufficient self since the idea of a self is a modern simulation or illusion. Religious objects have their vectors, are resistant to subjects or other objects, and are left to themselves. No subjects are independent of objects because actants or religious things include subjects, objects, foundations, truth, and worlds. Religious things cannot be ultimately true because their truth depends on generating coherency and changes with local contexts. It cannot account for *all* religious things, ever or in any specific type. Thus, religious things are multi-modal; they have versions and several truths or no truth¹⁰. Ultimately, religious or Buddhist things are inconsistent.

Conclusion, or: Nāgārjuna 2.0 — Bruno Latour as Buddhist Philosopher of Empty Realism

In the end, quantum religion is a fully mediational approach skeptical towards unveiling reality but is centered on emptiness and argues that religious things are simultaneously true and untrue, subjective and non-subjective, objective and non-objective, foundational and non-foundational, as well as worldly and non-worldly. Latour’s solution is not to have to choose one of the sides but to vote for pluralism: truths, subjects, objects, foundations, and worlds, which can be perfectly applied to the academic study of religious *things*.

Especially Latour’s ANT — but also his modes of existence — bring Latour¹¹ close to the Indian Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna (c. 150–250 CE)¹² and his central concept of emptiness¹³

10. Philosopher Hartry Field, in his *Science without Numbers* (1980), famously argued that mathematics could be practically used even without assuming its truth. In this study, mediational Buddhism can be pragmatic without considering its or (the historical) Buddha’s only truth.

11. Connections between Nāgārjuna and Alfred North Whitehead or quantum physics have already been drawn by other authors (Inada 1975, McFarlane 2004, Kohl 2007, 2008, 2016).

12. A particular reading of his thought — the so-called Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka — became the official philosophical position of Tibetan Buddhism.

13. There is an enormous amount of literature on emptiness, such as Lopez Jr. (1996) and Garfield (2002).

(“śūnyatā”)¹⁴. It is also important to note at this point that “śūnyatā” is not the same as a “floating signifier”¹⁵ or “empty signifier” (Laclau 1994, Nehring 2006), which are highly popular in semiotically inspired cultural studies.¹⁶ Being empty necessitates — like Thích Nhất Hạnh (2022) has argued — the *emptiness of something*, and this something is described by the Sanskrit term “svabhāva.” This term is most often translated into “inherent existence,” “intrinsic nature,” “own-being,” “essence,” and “substance.” Essentially, it is about the idea that a thing is totally by itself without needing any exterior. These exteriors for Nāgārjuna are causes and conditions, i.e., dependence relations. Finally, in Nāgārjuna’s and Latour’s thinking, nothing exists by “svabhāva”; nothing exists by itself. For Westerhoff (2017), the emptiness argument rests on two things: (i) causality (which is not simultaneous but successive) and (ii) momentariness (all things are momentary and will eventually die and be superseded by other distinct things, and all things exist

14. Many have written on “śūnyatā” like on the relation between śūnyatā and bodhisattva (Bhikkhuni Gioi Huong 2022), a philosophical comparison between Nāgārjuna’s “śūnyatā” with Plato and Dōgen (Jäger 2018). The Sanskrit term “śūnyatā” is often translated into “emptiness” and is most commonly associated with the Madhyamaka school of Mahāyāna philosophy. In earlier usages, emptiness (as “śūnya”) is the third of four aspects of the truth of suffering (“duḥkhasatya”), which again is the first of the Four Noble Truths: “the aggregates (skandha) are (1) impermanent, (2) associated with the contaminants, (3) empty of cleanliness, and (4) non-self.” In the early usages, it is mainly about the absence of cleanliness or attractiveness in the body, which leads to understanding the body as “mine,” which means there is an emptiness of an independent soul (“ātman”) in the skandhas. In the later usage of the Madhyamaka, coined by Nāgārjuna and his commentators, emptiness is expanded from the no-self (“anātman”) beyond the person and the skandhas for subsuming all phenomena (“dharma”). Then, emptiness is about the lack of any intrinsic nature (“svabhāva”) in all phenomena. Common to all different interpretations by Madhyamaka authors, emptiness is not nothingness nor the absence of existence, but rather the absence of a specific (false and imagined) type of existence, which is “svabhāva.” When all phenomena have dependently arisen, they are empty of an intrinsic (independent or autonomous) nature. The Yogacāra school introduced the concept of the “three natures” (“trisvabhāva”) to deepen the meaning of the lack of intrinsic existence (“niḥsvabhāva”): (1) the imaginary nature (“parikalpitasvabhāva”), (2) the dependent nature (“paratantrasvabhāva”), and (3) the consummate nature (“pariṇaṣvasvabhāva”). Parinīṣanna, in the Yogacāra interpretation, is the emptiness of a difference between object and subject (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014, 871–872).

15. This term originates from Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987, 63).

16. Following Siderits 2022, one should distinguish between “local anti-realism” (“empty signifiers”) and “global anti-realism” (“śūnyatā”). While Laclau’s “empty signifier” claims that signifiers are empty, i.e., can be filled with any content, “śūnyatā” radicalizes this emptiness. According to it, all things are empty and can be filled with anything, but precisely because there can be no specificity or substance of any specific thing (also not of a signifier). Things and signifiers exist only relating to each other. This means the signifiers and the signified are empty; the actors using them are empty, and even the emptiness is empty: everything is empty. However, this does not mean that they are meaningless or nothing (i.e., nihilist), but just without substance, without foundations, and instead solely relational.

only in the present, not in the past or future). Like Latour, Nāgārjuna has no “master argument”¹⁷ for achieving this svabhāva-lessness (Westerhoff 2018).

Latour, like Nāgārjuna, defends irrealism, which means that he does not deny *that* things, events, objects, subjects, this world, etc., exist (they are both not nihilists). However, he emphasizes that their existence *differs* from what is usually assumed. This is called the “Middle Way” (“madhyamā pratipad”), which refers to Madhyamaka, one of two primary schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism in India besides the Yogācāra. For Nāgārjuna, this means (i) no eternalism (things would have eternal essences) and (ii) no annihilationism (things would have essences while they exist, which then cease once they stop to exist). The Madhyamaka school, in turn, denies that things have inherent natures, i.e., all things are empty of intrinsic existences. This doctrine of universal emptiness of substances (“svabhāva-śūnyatā”) is central to Madhyamaka (Hayes 2019).

While different Mahāyāna traditions have understood — the central metaphysical argument of Mahāyāna Buddhism, which is — the view that everything is empty (“śūnya”) differently, the Madhyamaka has often been criticized, mainly because it would be nihilist, i.e., nothing exists, which in turn is denied by Nāgārjuna and other Madhyamaka theorists, an accusation that Latour would also reject. When “śūnyatā” is mainly about the argument that nothing has “svabhāva,” i.e., intrinsic existence or self-existence, this means that if other things (like non-Buddhism) would not

17. The recently deceased Vietnamese Thiền (Zen) Buddhist monk, teacher, and peace activist Thích Nhất Hạnh (1926–2022) has referred to the Heart Sūtra, according to which form is empty of self but full of everything else. He has coined the term “interbeing” to explain that thing A (a piece of paper) exists because things B (a cloud), C (the sunshine), D (the logger who cut the tree), E (the wheat the logger ate in the form of bread), F (the logger’s parents), G (the minds of the author and the reader), as well as many other things (time, space, the earth, rain, minerals in the soil, rivers or heat), coexist. For Thích Nhất Hạnh, being is interbeing because things are when they interbe with every other thing. Extracting just one element out of this interbeing relationship makes thing A (the piece of paper) disappear. A piece of paper is made up only of “non-paper elements.” The tiniest things contain everything in the universe, and the tiny thing disappears by removing elements from them.

According to the Heart Sūtra, the sheet of paper is empty. But empty of what? Like everything else, it is empty of a separate self because it cannot exist alone. It has to coexist or interbe with everything else. Being empty of a separate self means being full of everything else. This applies to all five skandhas (five elements comprising a human being): form/body, feelings, perceptions, mentality, and consciousness. There is no separate existence to any of these. They are all interbeing. One specific thing (like a mustard seed) contains the whole cosmos, meaning “everything is just one.” Being empty does not mean being nonexistent, but when something is not empty, then it would not exist. It is an optimistic concept. Emptiness grounds everything. If thing A is empty, it can exist. Because thing A exists, thing B exists too. All things are marked with emptiness, meaning that nothing can be born or die because everything is interbeing with everything else (Thích Nhất Hạnh 2022). For Western philosophy, Naomi Thompson has developed a similar concept to Thích Nhất Hạnh’s “interbeing” and calls it “metaphysical interdependence.” According to her, things ground other things infinitely. It is both consistent with “gunk” and “junk,” and it solves the problem concerning whether the grounding is itself grounded (Thompson 2016).

exist, certain things (like Buddhism) would also disappear: “[n]othing exists in and for itself,” but only concerning other things, i.e., everything has “relational existence” (Priest 2009, 467), and “things that have relational existence are simply loci in a field of relations and are individuated by that location.” (Priest 2009, 468). For Madhyamaka, not just specific things are empty (and thus have only relational existence), but everything (Priest 2009, 469–470). This fits perfectly with Latour’s ANT,¹⁸ in which things like Buddhism only exist through networks and not themselves. He does not describe even the modes of existence with inherent properties, but these only arise concerning other modes of existence. Perhaps these modes of existence are one level more fundamental than mere empirical phenomena, but they are not foundationless; they have a relational existence. For Latour, this is not relativist but “relationist” (Latour 2013c; “Relativism, Relationism”). In this sense, non-fundamental grounding (i.e., the idea that things are built out of more primary things) is not a chain but a web, which makes grounding infinite since nothing is more fundamental than any other thing because everything is grounded interdependently. For instance, Buddhism is grounded not just in Buddha but also in materiality, language, and money, and Buddha, in turn, is grounded in atoms, sunlight, food, etc. These entities, again, are grounded in countless other things, and so on and so on.

Religious studies scholars should focus on appearances, and appearances only (i.e., without the idealistic dichotomy of the “thing” and the essentialist and almost transcendent Kantian “Ding an sich,” or in other words: just the phenomenon, not the noumenon, and thus opposed to the noumenologist so-called “phenomenology of religion,” which instrumentalizes the phenomenon for reaching the fundamental or real stuff like religious experience, religion sui generis, etc.).¹⁹ Religious studies should be practiced *irrealistically* or as an *empty realism*, i.e., not as a realistic

18. The non-fundamentality of immanentist process philosophical approaches (Alfred North Whitehead, Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Gilles Deleuze, Étienne Souriau, Henri Bergson, William James, Gilbert Simondon, Gabriel Tarde) is very similar to śūnyatā theorists (Madhyamaka, Nāgārjuna, Thích Nhất Hạnh).

19. The Kantian “Ding an sich,” thing-in-itself or noumenon (Latour’s *being-as-being*), and the thing-as-other or phenomenon (Latour’s *being-as-other*) form an interdependent pair of twins. On the one hand, the thing-in-itself — or thing-as-itself — possesses foundations and suggests that smaller things merge into larger entities; it is based on regress, would not self-refute, and forms a transcendent “beyond.” On the other hand, the thing-as-other has no foundations. It suggests that larger things always have smaller parts; they are characterized by coherence-formation, infinite regress and circularity, version-ness, extrinsic properties, contextualism, and relational quantification (openness and unfinishedness). Finally, the interdependence of thing-as-itself and thing-as-other enables both smaller things to be absorbed into larger entities and larger things always to have smaller parts. In the end, a thing — only in the conjunction of thing-as-itself and thing-as-other — is primarily a *thing-as-as*, i.e., characterized by an *as*-structure, not an *is*-structure. For Latour, this means relational thinking in prepositions (like *as*, *before*, *after*, *to*, or *in*).

representation or correspondence of “true reality in itself” but an investigation only of things as they are found and how they specifically produce coherence in specific contexts, no more and no less. This kind of religious studies is open to open-endedness, incompleteness, extrinsic properties, and inconsistent appearances (or versions). In this respect, religious studies scholars should aim to be agnostic as to whether and how these things exist. All that one investigates is not the true reality of things, which could be *discovered*, but only reality’s structure, which actors build through their beliefs and explanations, which in turn *project* these back onto reality, which means that reality is access-dependent. An unrealistically conceived religious studies is not interested in metaphysics but ideologies (Westerhoff 2020).

Therefore, instead of investigating objects, subjects, foundations, and truths, one should aim to investigate only at the level of *appearances* of objects, subjects, foundations, and truths: these appear in explanations, concepts, predicates, relations, properties, terms, and notions, and are interdependent (i.e., they come from outside, not inside) (Westerhoff 2020, 35 and 118).

In the spirit of Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), this chapter has tried to illustrate that the study of mediational Buddhism is relatively new. It is not wrong to speak about Buddhism as if it were limited to world religions. However, it is a necessary fiction (Rosen 1990, Thompson 2022) or fictionally real, just like Harry Potter; his fictional story and experiences are consistent, coherent, and true. While this reality projection allows fitting things like Buddhism together to make sense of the world, it is about appearances “all the way down.”

Therefore, what does this all change for religious studies? The motto should be: keep it up, but different! Sometimes religious studies scholars think they need fundamentals (like Buddha, religion, science, materiality, etc.), and the discipline would vanish without them. However, this emptiness is not that dangerous: yes, there might be no foundations that are not empty, but the scientific work goes on pretty much unchanged (Westerhoff 2020), only knowing that every investigation is not a description of an ultimate reality out there with solid essences, foundations, and truths, but simply of appearances and mediations, nothing more.

Religious studies scholars might — sometimes — suppose things like Buddha, religion, or Buddhism²⁰ to have self-existence. However, a *thing* like Buddhism has various characteristics: it originated at a specific geographical location in Asia, it globalized through time to Europe and the United States, it is associated with Siddharta Gautama Buddha, it is named “Buddhism,” etc. Being Buddhism is simply being “the bearer of these characteristics” or — in Latour’s words — being nodes within specific actor-networks. Thus, Buddhism has no intrinsic nature: to be (identical with) Buddhism is to be relative to these very properties or networks. It may not be necessary to have *exactly* the same characteristics that Buddhism has, maybe just some essential ones. Being Buddhism is to be related to specific properties; thus, Buddhism has a relational existence. Otherwise, one could argue that there is something to being Buddhism that is independent of having any properties. Then Buddhism would be the substance bearing all these properties. Perhaps different substances bear precisely the same properties, one might be Buddhism, and the other might not. However, being Buddhism would be considered being that very substance. Buddhism’s existence is, therefore, not independent of the bearing of these properties. Thus, being Buddhism is being the bearing of these characteristics. When everything is empty of essences or inherent natures, existence is open for anything and is a “relative characteristic” (Priest 2009, 470).

The Madhyamaka insists that emptiness is not nothing: “it has a determinate structure, one of pure form”²¹ (476), which is an argument that Latour would also agree with about the constructedness or building of reality. Just because everything is constructed and thus empty, this does not mean everything is nothing and meaningless. A good metaphor for the non-foundedness, interconnectedness, and constructedness of all things is the famous image of the Net of Indra, which

20. There are several — partially false — phrases related to Buddhism that are usually considered to be more or less unproblematic: “Buddhism refers to or is grounded in X (i.e., Buddha, Buddhist traditions, relics, etc.),” “Buddhism is a peaceful religion,” “Buddhism is equal and can be integrated to science,” “Buddha is a role model for us today,” “Buddhism is superior to other religions if it can be considered a religion at all,” “Buddhism exists,” “only religious science or Buddhology may study Buddhism,” “Buddhist traditions should remain authentic and unchanged,” “religious science primarily studies Buddhist traditions, but only secondarily Buddhist transformations (i.e., Buddha brands),” “Buddhism and science are separate,” “gods do not exist in Buddhism,” “science studies Buddhism, but not Buddhism science,” “no religion (not even Buddhism) has social privileges” and “Buddhism is secular.”

21. This is reminiscent of the famous Heart Sūtra, which argues that form is empty, and emptiness is form (Priest 2009, 475).

is part of the Flower Garland (Sanskrit: Avataṃska) Sūtra²²: the Vedic deity Indra possesses an infinite web of cords within his palace on Mount Meru; the web contains a multifaceted jewel at each node, and each jewel is reflected in all the other jewels; since the net is infinitely large, these are also the jewels and again the reflections (Priest 2015, 113–114). When reality is a net with jewels at each node, while each jewel reflects all the other jewels, ad infinitum (Priest 2009, 477), then there is no doubt that Latour could only have approved. Within this thesis, this means that Buddhism is a net with built mediators at each node, while each of those built mediators reflects all the other built mediators, and so on. When Buddhism is de-ontologized and immetaphysicized — or, in Latour’s words, *reset* — and is studied as something empty, all that is left is pure structure, pure form (480), which again is the same as Latour’s — somewhat Madhyamaka Buddhist — relationist and contextualist concept of *mediation*: unlike material religion, quantum religion is not about riverbanks, but just the river flowing, again and again.

22. Fazang has a beautiful poetic version of this in his *Treatise on the Golden Lion*: “In each of the lion’s eyes, ears, limbs, joints, and in each and every hair, there is the golden lion hair, there is the golden lion. All the lions embraced by all the single hairs simultaneously and instantaneously enter into a single hair. Thus in each and every hair is an infinite number of lions, and in addition all the single hairs, together with the infinite number of lions, in turn enter into a single hair. In this way, the geometric progression is infinite, like the jewels of Celestial Lord Indra’s Net” (Chan 1969, 412).

Conclusion

This concluding chapter will present the main findings of this study concerning the research questions formulated at the beginning, discuss the extent to which this work hopes to have fulfilled them, and some of their main implications. The chapter continues with a discussion of the limitations of this work and offers some brief suggestions and recommendations for future research.

1. Objectives

In a recapitulation, the research question of this work was, therefore: how can it be assumed that Buddhism is to be conceptualized beyond the Buddhist traditions, world religions, and the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm? This thesis has tried to investigate Buddhism-as-mediators and Buddha brands as if nothing had been known about Buddhism. At the beginning of this research, Buddhist mediators were defined as anything connected or networked with Buddhist materialities. This study then wanted to examine how these Buddhist mediators could be studied beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm. Thus, the main research interest was to investigate how Buddhism-as-mediators is a massively colonizing agent through a variety of — primarily Western — relations, discourses, materialities, icons, and mediators, which are not covered adequately by this very paradigm, and what indications this could have to finally understand what “Buddhism” could be and what it means to study “Buddhism.”

2. Findings On *Mediating Buddhism*

For most people, Buddhism seems like an essentially religious “thing”: However, beyond being or acting “religious,” actors seem to be obsessed with Buddhist images and mediators. They surround themselves with millions of Buddha figures and other Buddhist mediators to be put into the simulated sites in which they live: living rooms, shops, websites, etc. Buddhist mediators — like Lego bricks in the shape of the Buddha — are built to fit into *any* context (fig. 9.1). These mediators do not just build bridges between companies and consumers or *fill* specific gaps, but they essentially *are* the gap, which enables any further action to proceed, because there is always a message that tells actors to change themselves, how to be a better person and how to — better — *live in the end of time* — not sometime after death, but — *in time* and now, so that this specific dreamland or simulation can be experienced as the end of progress and assumed “beyonds.”



FIGURE 9.1. Buddha as a Lego brick, graphics based on *3D Printing: Muckychris*.

However, at the same time, Buddhism has gone wrong when one only considers it religious (traditions). Buddhism can be regarded as a *thing*¹ in the way that Heidegger (1951) or the *Oxford English Dictionary (OEC)* (“Thing, n.1” 2021) have defined it. After the *OEC*, when combined with the word “play,” “thing” becomes “plaything,” which means a toy or a *thing* to be played with (“Plaything, n.” 2020). Thus, Buddhism is *playing with things* since it gathers people, events, meanings, and differences; Buddhism is also a *plaything* because since there is not one true way of what Buddhism *is* (for instance, religion or secularism), actors *play* with Buddha and Buddhism as a *thing*, which thus *gathers* in a sevenfold way. Inspired by Deuber-Mankowsky (2017a), Buddhism means that both Buddhist traditions and Buddhism-as-mediators in the so-called “West” — popularized through Buddha branding — *play* with Buddhist mediators since they both involve

1. Etymologically, “thing” is an Old English term inherited from the Germanic “thing,” “ting,” or “Ding,” which from very early on included the meaning of a meeting, a cause, an object, or matter. Germany still has many ancient “Thingstätten” where huge stones are arranged within a circle to build an assembly space. In this sense, a *thing* brings actors together because it divides them. In many Scandinavian countries, this meaning remains prevalent (Latour 2005d, 22–23).

processes of creating homes, desires, movements of joy, repetitions, tiny changes, different techniques, and globalization, as well as the search for more intense feelings, including actors (not just single, but in masses), who are not culturally isolated, but translocally entangled with each other.

When Latour said in 2019 that “pluralism is still something that lies way ahead of us” (14), how could one add a pluralism of templates and modes to the themes of Buddhism — beyond being *religious* or *secular* only — as well as to the themes of religious studies? First, a compositionist and multiplicative view of modes, templates, and perspectives must *reset* Buddhism’s current understanding and philosophies. What is the primary function of *resetting things*? (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a)? Latour suggests it is about meeting others differently, where everything — from space and time to sitting and breathing — changes (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 406—407).² Thus, this thesis has aimed to *reinvent* a situation where Buddhism is not self-explanatory religious nor secular, which aims at “moving you forward (that is backward!) to the sixteenth century”, where one — equally and collectively — starts to “discover” a foreign land “in the midst of equally fragile entities”: the middle ground (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 407, Latour and Leclercq 2016c). When religious studies scholars have *reset* their instruments, they will look “terribly clumsy” when trying to introduce a new diplomatic vocabulary³ (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 408; emphasis added). This thesis has tried to avoid this *clumsiness* by not introducing many new words but by reflecting on how existing words could be redefined. The following three remarks on the relation between Buddhism and the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm can be made:

- (1) The paradigm does not represent what the secular and the religious are because both have no opposite.
- (2) It misses Buddhism’s mediatory and pluralistic functions of acting in fifteen, not just one (the religious vs. secular) mode.

2. In *reset Modernity!*, Latour (Latour, Guinard-Terrin, Leclercq, Jansky, and Havemann 2016a) explains the idea of a reset in the following way: “[T]he whole idea of the procedures of reset is to prepare the former moderns to meet others in another way. It is to warn them: beware, those you are going to encounter will no longer look like the other of the past when you believed you knew yourself to be superior to them. From now on they will appear as those who require you to deeply recompose what you hold to. *You are not welcoming them to your space, inside your epistemological database.* Space is being disputed, and time too, and the way to sit, to salute, to breathe, to exchange gifts, to wage war” (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 406—407; emphasis added).

3. Latour’s argument follows: “[T]hey hesitate, they parley, they fight for the exact words. And they are open to ridicule in face of the others who, themselves in their turn, don’t know how to address them” (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 408).

(3) Actants using Buddhism-as-mediators and vice versa are largely not represented in what is commonly called “Buddhism.”

As Latour suggests, religion is more like a specific mode of existence (2013a): a mode to tell the truth in a specific tone (2015c), which makes Buddhism not *just* a religion but something that consists of at least fifteen modes, tones or scales (fig. 9.2): tradition, transformation, practice, technology, innovation, knowledge, politics, law, religion, passion, organization, ethics, network, multiplicity, and simplification.



FIGURE 9.2. Illustrating Buddhism as a puzzle in fifteen modes, graphics based on the artwork “Buddha Army” by Metis Atash.

Thus, Buddhism-as-mediators is not just a monolithic block, which one is used to calling “world religion” and which would represent the most *authentic* version, but it is more like a puzzle. Suppose the lowest common denominator of Buddhism is Buddhist mediators, which appear in a wide variety of modes and discourses (like religion, politics, law, transformation, etc.) and form something that could be called Buddhism. In that case, the world religions puzzle piece represents only one piece of the puzzle. Buddhism — or a new/different conception of it — is much more pluralistic and multimodal than the notion of dichotomous world religions. Thus, it combines Buddhist mediators’ “authentic” and “inauthentic” hybrid usages.

This thesis has tried to display how all case studies share the notion that actors, products, language, markets, mediations, and interpretations come together by becoming and creating something else, mainly something *new*. Nevertheless, this quite different conceptualization of Buddhism — which is not religion or secularism only — does not contradict the “old, traditional meanings,” which is why Buddhist mediators, without causing any problem, can mean a “thing” as well as its opposite: for instance, the same Buddha image can be used by traditional Buddhist devotees as well as by neoliberal, consumerist companies in the United Kingdom. From a mediational perspective, the relation between *Buddhism-as-Buddhist-mediators* and *Buddhism-as-Buddhist-traditions* is not something wherein the prior is “inauthentic,” false, or anything pejorative, but rather something that is not finished, but always open and to which new content can always be added. Buddhism is not represented through a “traditional” version of Buddhism alone. However, these entirely different additions to Buddhist “things” *mediate*, *gather*, and *assemble* actants from traditional Buddhist discourses and contents to any possible collective, like neoliberalism, capitalism, and secular contexts. This composite framework can be understood as a *compositionist* — bricolaging and continuously expandable — engagement and dealing with Buddhist mediators while protecting multiplicity, and thus rejects to choose sides like religious vs./or secular, Buddhism vs./or non-Buddhism, capitalism vs./or non-capitalism, etc.

The project of investigating mediational Buddhism as quantum religion undertaken in this thesis results in the insight that “Buddhism as world religion” — as well as “Buddhism as secularity” — is only a fraction of the (possible) dimensions of Buddhism. To be sure, for example, the world-religion mode intertwines with other modes (such as politics, law, etc.), and yet Buddhism, world religion, and religion appear to be inextricably linked. The narrative, therefore, goes like this: Buddhism is, at its core, a (world) religion (or its secular counterfoil). By the way, “Buddhism is religious” not only means “Buddhism is a world religion” but that Buddhist mediators can be used by other converting and missionary — i.e., religious — discourses, such as branding, neoliberalism, or capitalism. Then, Buddhism may well have religious aspects, but these should never be (mis)understood and (mis)interpreted as dominant or “essential.”

However, if one takes it seriously that quantum religion is empty and — like all other concepts, ideas, and medialities — has no substantial core — neither religion/secularity nor any other — and if one also takes the results of ANT seriously, Buddhism is an exceedingly complex web of actants like scientists, believers, museum visitors, art collectors and many more in network relationships. However, if each mode through which any specific *thing* exists acts equally — assuming fifteen modes or scales here — this means that religion/secularity is only 1/15 of the

scope of Buddhism (fig. 9.3). Therefore, it might be concluded that neither “Buddhism” nor scholars of “Buddhism” have ever truly existed in the sense of the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm’s primacy and dominance over the other modes.

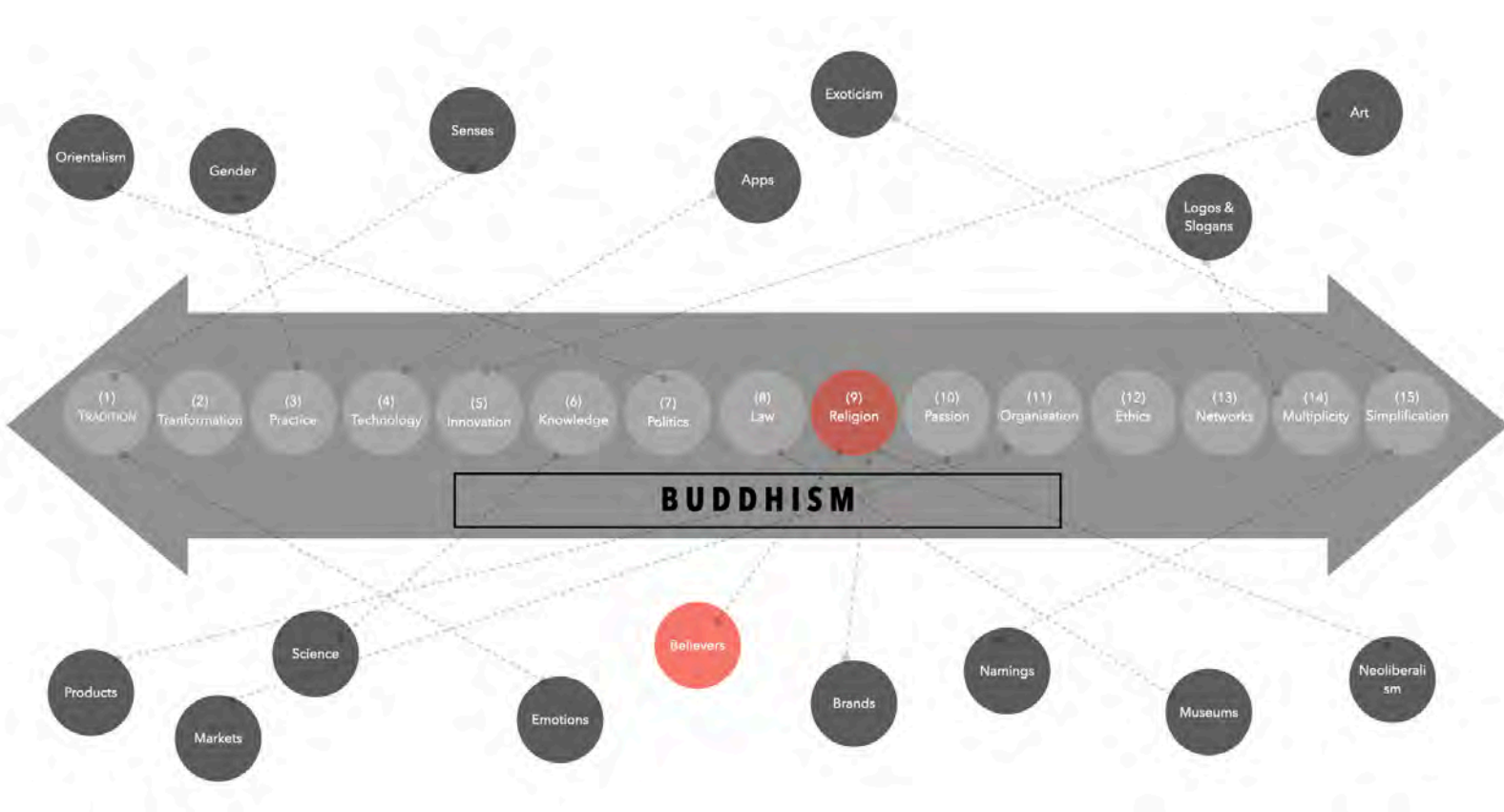


FIGURE 9.3. Diagram illustrating Buddhism in fifteen modes and scales correlating the religion mode and various actants.

It is precisely through (neo)liberal, consumerist, and “Western” developments that transformations of Buddhism — in the so-called “West” but also globally — have occurred that made Buddhism something more than the “religious/secular” narrative. Therefore, Buddha brands, Buddhist artifacts in museums, and other myriad places where Buddhist mediators appear are not to be grasped in terms of “impurity,” “inauthenticity,” or “mixture” because these have no safe haven in “religion” or “secularity,” but instead these hybrids form the majority — namely 14/15 — of all existential modes. These need a place and do not find it, or find it insufficiently, in the narratives of “Buddhism is a world religion,” “Buddhism is the only secular religion,” or “Buddhism is secular and not religious, isn’t it?”

The irrealist contribution of *Mediating Buddhism* to the scientific investigation of Buddhism is eightfold and has begun with the “simple” starting point: One does not know what the entity named “Buddhism” actually is! The application of Latourian theories (e.g., actor-network theory

and modes of existence), as well as the concept of material religion on Buddhist mediators, has led to the following insights and answers to the research questions mentioned in the introduction:

- (1) The investigation of Buddhism does not focus on religion alone but is instead concerned with Buddhist mediators, i.e., any images, concepts, or events that refer to Buddhist aesthetics.
- (2) The study of Buddhist mediators leads to understanding Buddhism as ontological pluralism, where multiple truths — religious/secular, scientific, technological, or ethical — are synchronously true.
- (3) The study of Buddhism-as-mediators leads to the redefinition of the discipline of religious studies as mediator studies or the science of mediators.
- (4) Research on mediational Buddhism has allowed the strengthening of the material religion approach into a non-foundational and solely relational quantum religion approach.
- (5) Buddhism is empty, relations-only, and fully mediational.
- (6) Buddhism as a religion plays, of course, an essential part of Buddhism, albeit only a tiny one, which is why Buddhism, Buddhists, people interested in Buddhism, and Buddhism researchers should be more adequately understood as Buddhist mediators within mediation processes, which in turn point to the ever-existing gap and play, which gathers Buddhist actors, things and events. Buddhism is pluralistic and, therefore, not an “object” of neoliberal and consumerist users (academics as well as laymen) since these actors (humans, animals, and objects) can be considered Buddhist themselves, i.e., interwoven in networks that feature Buddhist mediators.
- (7) With the help of applying theories by French sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher Bruno Latour (1947–2022), this investigation of mediational Buddhism hoped to bring new insights into how mediations (defined as a gap between substances and the movement between several mediations, thus, a thing and its opposite) work: how Buddhist things exist, if they do, and how they represent intrinsic properties and tell ultimate truths. For more than four decades, Latour’s work appears to be without alternative since it has provided infinite gains over alternative theorists like French poststructuralists (Foucault, Derrida, or Lacan) through his innovative and groundbreaking thinking on networks (an infinite network of relationships), mediations (a river between two banks) and pluralism (the multimodality of things) — i.e., actor-network theory or modes of existence — which is why this study makes

a strong case for his inclusion into the canon of the discipline of religious studies to refine and improve the investigation of any social (and religious) phenomena.

(8) As chapter 7, “Reset Realism in Religious Studies!” has tried to show, religious studies should not adhere to a naive realism à la representing raw religious reality “an sich”; nor should it be antirealist or even nihilist in the sense of that religious things do not exist; but go beyond the “realism vs. antirealism” debate in a Latourian and Nagarjunian way, similar to Josephson-Storm’s metarealism (2021): religious things exist in an empty and network way, in this sense they do exist, but there is no “real,” “authentic” or “true” version of reality. In this sense, it is no question whether Buddha brands are Buddhist, religious, and so on; of course, they are, so it is the task of the discipline not to gatekeep access to specific areas (religion, Buddhism, etc.), and — true to its irrealist and agnostic mindset — remain openminded. Thus, religious studies should stay agnostic regarding realism.

3. Implications for Religious Studies

The beginning and end point of all research on Buddhism — as has been argued — cannot be religion/secularity, but Buddhist mediators (fig. 9.4) in all conceivable forms — advertising banners, websites, statues, clothing, etc. — as well as all (!) ways that these take. Scholars of religion have long focused on Buddhist texts, and lay people usually think that “Buddhist tradition” lies in “Buddhist texts.” However, once (1) the focus is on Buddhist mediators in general (texts, materialities, aesthetics, senses, namings, figures, statues) and (2) Buddhism is not reduced to faith and religion, then the actants — both human and non-human — who *access* Buddhist mediators become diversely multiplied (scholars, museologists, politicians, adventurers, corporations, hipsters or consumers). Buddhism, in this respect, is always about everything that Buddhist mediators “touch” since they — like King Midas’ hand turning everything into gold — jinx everything they touch and turn it into “Buddhism.”

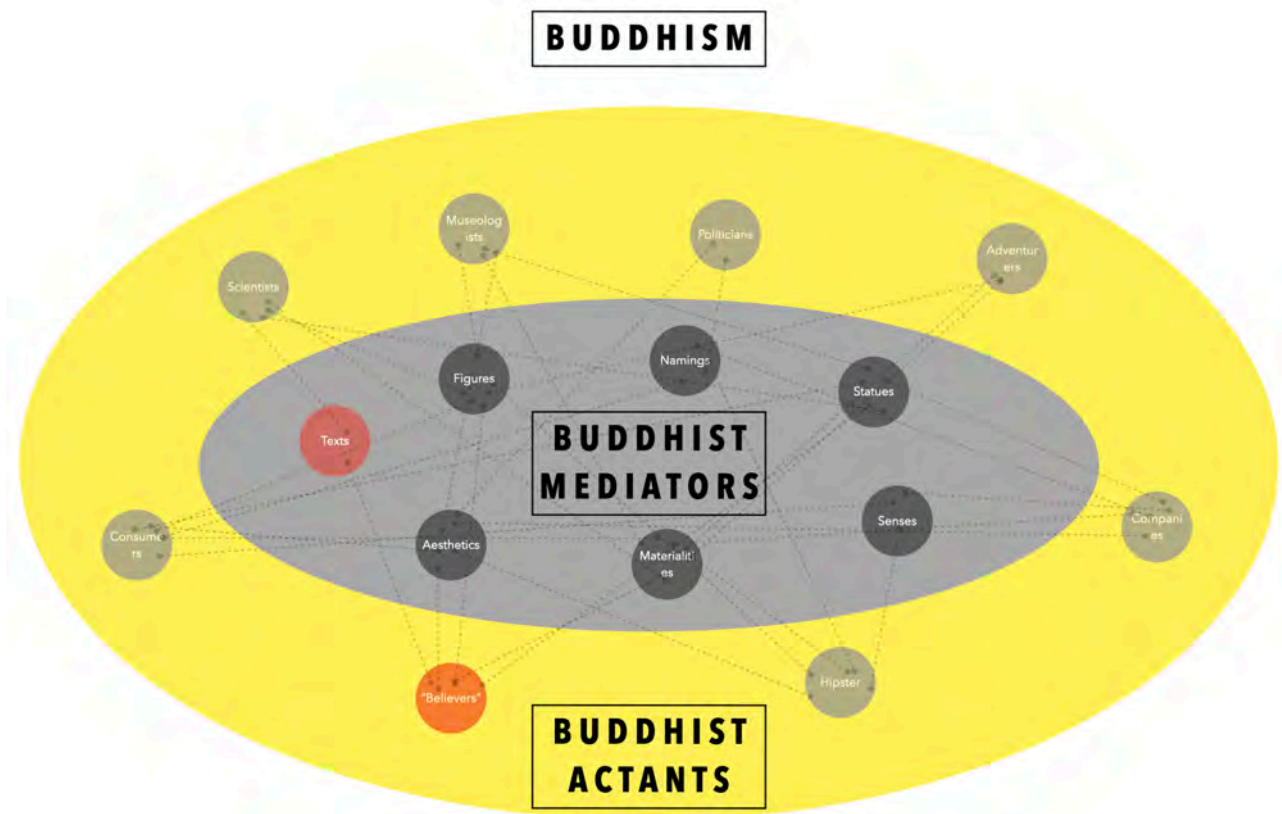


FIGURE 9.4. Diagram illustrating how Buddhism relates to Buddhist mediators and Buddhist actants.

Latour distinguishes two anthropological approaches to encountering *other* cultures, the scientific and the diplomatic. The first believes in the solid ground and ultimate truth of science over the cultures studied. The latter remains agnostic regarding that truth because there would be no solid ground (Latour and Leclercq 2016f, 405). Following Latour, one has to be very clear here: scientists — including religious studies scholars — want to separate themselves from the *religious world* of spirits, gods, souls, etc., but this is not because they have substituted the former for a “purely material world,” they have just substituted some religious things for other religious things: certain gods by *other gods*, specific entries to the world by *other entries* to the world and certain assembled types of actors by *other assembled types of actors*. The secularism of science is not about *nature vs. belief*, “but one political theology against other political theologies.” The idealized materiality of scholars is often only existent in “a *style of writing* about science” (2015d, 50—51).

Following Latour (1993, 120), religious studies scholars have exaggerated (i) the universality of science — by avoiding focusing on networked practices, instruments, and institutions that made it possible in the first place — and (ii) the size and stability of their science and the society in which they live. They, therefore, broke with all local loyalties and missed the

originality of their invention: a topology that enabled going everywhere by the occupation of “narrow lines of force” and the bricolaging between *things* and societies through the proliferation of nonhumans.

In the context of the so-called “cultural turns” (Bachmann-Medick 2006), the concept of religion was transformed into a “discursive concept of religion” (Kippenberg and Stuckrad 2003), which does not presuppose a fixed definition of religion (McCutcheon 1997) but examines what is understood as religion in respective discourses. However, this carries the dangers of (i) not grasping *something specific* about religion and (ii) losing the necessity of a discipline of scientific studies of religions. To prevent this from happening and in favor of disciplinary research practice, definitions of religion were formulated that combine a discursive concept of religion with a definition of religion (Riesebrodt 2007, Lincoln 2003, and Prohl 2006, 39) that Prohl has called “the sacred reloaded” ten years ago (Prohl 2012a, 380—381). This thesis’ Latourian perspective, by avoiding a discursive⁴ approach and by giving religion the *specificity* needed, has tried to identify that all classical approaches, as well as the discursive one, are united in (i) the existence of a research object named Buddhism and — in sharp contrast — (ii) a discipline of subjects/scholars studying this very object. At the same time, when defining *religion*, one synchronously defines *non-religion* — i.e., the secular — in an idealist, irreversible and naturalizing manner (Latour 2020h, 465–468), and by defining religion, one also defines the study of religion as well as what constitutes a specific political collective as the “we” of religious studies scholars. Inken Prohl (2012a) has already warned

that by abandoning a definition of religion, reflections and findings about the specificity of religion in cultural studies are lost. As a consequence, it is to be feared that the study of religion could dissolve as a discipline. (380—381)

The fear of dissolving the discipline of religious studies is understandable, but is religious studies not well-prepared to resist the dangers of naturalization by focusing on — what Latour has called — the *reversibility of conceptual characters* (2020h, 467) like religion, secularism, and Buddhism? They have to be reversible to avoid *naturalization*. Following Latour (1993, 127), religious studies scholars are not radically different from religious and Buddhist people since secular and supposedly non-Buddhist science is not least a theological as well as a Buddhist project.

4. For a Latourian approach, *discourse* is very similar to Durkheim’s concept of *society* and bears similar problems: discourse is a monotheistic God in new clothing — a secularized Yahweh — who, like a master puppeteer, works as the explanation of almost everything (Latour 2019, 3).

Religious studies scholars are not exotic, unique, or strange, but just ordinary, the same as the “others.” One might say that “they” are like “us.” Secular scholars are not radically different from the “religions,” “secularisms,” and “Buddhisms” that they study.⁵ Following his insights on symmetrical anthropology (103), once (religious or) Buddhist people are considered symmetrical to religious studies, Buddhism offers a better analysis of religious studies scholars than religious studies offered of Buddhism or the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm. Alternatively, the “us vs. them” dichotomy could be dropped entirely, and even the distinction between religions and religious studies scholars or Buddhism and religious studies scholars, because having built communities on secularism and religion does not respond to actual lived practices. There is only one symmetrical, “seculartheology” or *non-Buddhist-Buddhism*.

If religious studies — or “Religionswissenschaft” in Germany — is just “culturtheology,” “societytheology,” “seculartheology,” or just mediator studies, one becomes able to denaturalize the *secular* science of “religious studies,” as well as the connection between the — supposedly — separate fields of science and religion. These findings do not mean that one loses one’s discipline. By starting to admit that one is *not* a secular scientist of a separate field named *religion* or *Buddhism* but proclaiming that this specific science, this very secularity is also religious or Buddhist, one does not lose one’s field or discipline. However, when one drops the *naturalization* and *idealization* of “religious vs. secular,” the discipline’s safe haven, — as Donna Haraway (1988, 581) has put it — one loses the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere [...] to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation”. Haraway’s mantra should be the mantra of scholars of religion: “[o]nly the god trick is forbidden” (589). To put it in more positive words: nothing is lost, but the discipline wins an *irrealist* and *pragmatic* view of Buddhist things and Buddhist mediators.

Against the background that Buddhism cannot be conceived religiously alone but as clusters of networks of Buddhist mediators, the discipline of religious studies is thus faced with the task of studying Buddhism-as-mediators, and not — alone — Buddhism as a religion. Entities such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam are commonly part of the repertoire of scholars of religions, but this must not lead to reducing them to religion or understanding religion/world religion as dominant

5. Latour has argued on the great divide between “us” and “them”: “My hypothesis - once again too simple - is that by devoting themselves to conceiving of hybrids, the other cultures have excluded their proliferation. It is this disparity that would explain the *Great Divide between Them — all the other cultures - and Us - the westerners* - and would make it possible finally to solve the insoluble problem of relativism” (12; emphasis added).

elements of these entities. The objects of religious studies, such as Buddhism, are only fractionally religious and simultaneously have many other functions; since the discipline is a sociologically and anthropologically working science, it should perhaps more correctly be called mediator science, i.e., the science of media, mediations, and mediators. This mediator-science could then deal with entities like Buddhism in its mediatizing and wholly pluralistic forms and thus finally begin to understand what it might mean to speak of “Buddhism.” When the scientific study of Buddhism becomes empty, i.e., “Buddhist” itself, one may genuinely begin to study “Buddhists,” to be “Buddhist,” and to understand “Buddhists.”

By problematizing the subject-object dichotomy, Buddhism may not appear as an object that is somewhere “out there.” It could therefore be studied and described by subjects (i.e., religious studies scholars). Quantum religion is mediational, empty, and pluralistic and — since it involves transformations and fictions in art and advertising, reproductions of politics and law, as well as references within sciences — therefore not an “object” of neoliberal, consumerist users (academics as well as laymen), since these actors (humans, animals, and objects) can be considered Buddhist themselves, i.e., interwoven in networks that feature Buddhist mediators. As a result, Buddhism as a religion naturally represents an integral part of Buddhism, but only a tiny one, which is why Buddhism, Buddhists, people interested in Buddhism, and Buddhism researchers should be more adequately understood as Buddhist mediators within mediation processes, which in turn point to the ever-existing play involved, which *gathers* Buddhist actors, things and events by — which Deuber-Mankowsky (2017a) in a Deleuzian, Guattarian, and Benjaminian potpourri has called — (a) creating a home, (b) constructing a structure of desire, (c) moving back and forth as well as jumping with joy, (d) doing something again and again, (e) varying a little, (f) focusing on technique and cosmopolitics, and (g) intensifying, reproducing and moving masses. This playful redefinition of Buddhism may lead to the quite Latourian claim that (mediational) Buddhism has never been studied.

4. Relevance and Limitations:

The Significance of Employing Bruno Latour in Religious Studies

The importance of *Mediating Buddhism* lies in its irrealist approach to studying Buddhism, which challenges traditional scientific realism in religious studies and explores the role of Buddhist mediators beyond the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm, ultimately shedding new light on

understanding what Buddhism *is*. *Mediating Buddhism* has aimed to challenge traditional views of Buddhism by exploring its empty nature and how to approach it, with the support of Bruno Latour's theoretical framework, which offers new perspectives and insights into this exciting field of study.

As already indicated in the introduction, the actual reason for the relevance of this work lies in its irrealist approach. Studies on Buddhism-as-mediators, its simultaneous religiosity and secularism, and a multi-methodological Latourian version of secularization processes need to be included in religious studies. Moreover, this study combines a transdisciplinary approach heavily focused on images — or material religion — and a Latourian approach, which is rare in religious studies. Thus, this work tries to offer an irrealist approach to the analysis of mediational Buddhism, which suggests that religion and secularism can be found in Buddhist mediators and brands, changing the understanding of what Buddhism *is*.

This thesis has tried to demonstrate how Latour's "empty realism" or "irrealism" can be an alternative to scientific realism in religious studies. This has been used to develop a new approach to studying mediational Buddhism called quantum religion. This approach emphasizes the relational nature of "religious entities" and the absence of ultimate truth (either in discourse, social sciences, or anywhere else), which can be useful in improving the material religion approach in religious studies. The significance of this approach lies in its potential to help religious studies scholars understand any phenomena by focusing on the relational nature of reality rather than the idea of inherent natures and intrinsic existence.

Many limitations of this work were already discussed in previous chapters and are summarized here again. The most distinctive feature of this thesis — which at the same time can be its main limitation through setting the goals too high — is that since its inception, it has been understood as an attempt to offer an irrealist approach, present different perspectives, disciplines, and theories, actively use material religion and ANT through a multitude of images and photographs — which is quite unusual in religious studies — and generate reflection. Furthermore, the combined application of a transdisciplinary theoretical framework and the dominance of the work of Bruno Latour might be called *risky*, and I hope this risk will not be perceived as a *limitation* or a *loss*. Nevertheless, despite its many risks or even limitations, this work hopes that — to a certain extent — it has achieved its primary goal: to provide an irrealist contribution to religious studies by proposing new ideas for understanding contemporary secular consumerist and neoliberal societies, and above all by illustrating and discussing various historical and contemporary perspectives, variations, forms and transformations of Buddhism-as-mediators.

5. Suggestions for Further Research

Of course, there are many possibilities for further research based on this work, theoretically and empirically. For this purpose, five general suggestions seem to make sense: future research could (i) privilege case studies in which urban and rural areas are compared, such as London and smaller cities or villages around London; (ii) study how other forms of — not just Buddhist — mediators can testify the mediality and multiplicity of all kinds of concepts, ideas or materialities — transcending the “religion vs. secularism” paradigm — which can include “world religions” like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism or companies like *Google*, *Apple* or *McDonald’s*, but also any other practice like science, art, technology or modernity in general; (iii) investigate — for instance — modernity or science as premature unifications of activities “according to transcendent epistemological categories” like nature, society and the economy, wherefore Latour — in the words of Timothy Howles — has diagnosed “a sublimated religious thematic is to be found at the heart of modernity” (2018, 318) — this field of application of Latour’s *political theology* would try to illustrate how transcendent images are produced, how collectives are created around it, whether they are explicitly aware of it or not (Howles 2018, 318); (iv) follow political theology into the discipline of religious studies, to investigate the supposedly secular politics and its underlying theologies and *reset* the discipline, but not only into a “non-theological” discipline and not even into a kind of cultural studies, but into a non-religious and non-secular discipline, a science of empty relations, i.e. media, mediations and mediators; (v) implement Bruno Latour’s theoretical framework of actor-network theory and modes of existence into other areas of interest for any religious studies scholar; and finally, (vi) as the most interesting and probably most rewarding idea, research how religious studies wants to position itself metaphysically in relation to “realism”, i.e. how and whether (religious) “things are *anyway*” independently from actors (Siderits 2022, 2), and what consequences follow from an application of empty realism or irrealism (à la Latour and Nāgārjuna) to other research fields (than Buddhism) by conceptualizing things as always empty of inherent meanings, but full of relations and mediations.

ADDENDUM

Frequently Asked Questions

In response to the dissertation, both supervisors have added several comments for improvement, further reflection, and clarification. This chapter is intended to anticipate critical evaluations and, therefore, (a) clarify any misunderstandings, (b) answer open questions, (c) strengthen weak arguments, and, all in all, (d) round off the work. Instead of hiding this part in the previous seven chapters, this chapter is attached as an addendum following the conclusion to avoid disrupting the structure of the main text and disturbing its argumentation. The addendum aims to address the Frequently Asked Questions in a separate section in a clear and concise structure, which also functions independently from the main text and is representative of the dissertation by providing quick access and overview. The comments have been numbered, sorted, and answered in ten major thematic areas: (1) “Mediators and Networks,” (2) “Emptiness,” (3) “Emic vs. Etic,” (4) “Latour,” (5) “Philosophers vs. Religious Studies Scholars,” (6) “Truth,” (7) “Science,” (8) “Religion,” (9) “The Secular,” and (10) “(Non-)Essentialism.”

(1) Mediation and Network

(I) King Midas Metaphor I: Isn't the King Midas metaphor used by the author to define Buddhism as including “everything Buddhist mediators (i.e., images, branding, artifacts, etc.) touch,” not “over-generously ambitious and operationally extremely challenging?”

It is correct that the King Midas metaphor is ambitious. But whether it is that operationally challenging is arguable. In the sense of an ANT network, recording all the *actants* within that network is operationally straightforward. So, instead of discussing whether or not Buddha branding is part of Buddhism, the network can be (a) mapped as a flat surface and then (b) intensified in different dimensions and appearances in depth. So, the King Midas metaphor is synonymous with the ANT network, and its structure is quite direct as long as you are willing to follow it.

(II) King Midas Metaphor II: Is everything Buddhism “touches” really Buddhism?

If one is willing to follow the Latourian ANT notion that actors come together in networks, then the statement that everything that Buddhism touches *is* Buddhism is accurate. The statement says that all sorts of things can come into contact with Buddhist things in Buddhist networks. These are then part of a specific Buddhist network, sometimes closer, sometimes further away, sometimes more often, sometimes less often, but simply part of the network. This statement is a very stoically descriptive one.

(III) Criteria: *Which criteria were decided to qualify Buddhist mediators constituting “ephemeral Buddhism” as Buddhist?*

The criteria mainly follow the actor-network theory (ANT), i.e., the assumption that all actors (people, things, animals, trees, etc.) are connected to each other in networks. This means that Buddha branding or “ephemeral Buddhism” is also Buddhism. The distinction between true/false Buddhism, authentic and ephemeral, no longer applies. See also the answers to (26)-(29).

(IV) Remote vs. Close Relations I: *Are there no differences between companies using words having remote (and perhaps unintentional) relations to Buddhism and Buddhist texts, buildings, and agents?*

If you follow ANT ideas, the only difference is that within networks, specific nodes are further or closer apart or have more or fewer lines of connection. Now, one can claim that the nodes with more lines of connection, which are also closer to each other, are more part of that very network than the nodes that are further apart and have fewer lines of connection with certain other nodes. However, since this investigation has no interest in distinguishing between real and false, closer and more distant, authentic and less authentic nodes, and all nodes are therefore of equal value, there is no difference between companies that use words from remote and perhaps unintentional Buddhist contexts and “actual” Buddhist texts, buildings, etc. The “actuality” and “genuineness” are entirely undermined and bypassed if one is still willing to follow the ANT principles.

(V) Remote vs. Close Relations II: *Are companies that use words with potential, but not necessary, relations to Buddhism also “Buddhist”?*

As mentioned in (26)-(28), the issue is whether the researcher is willing to follow ANT ideas: By entering the network, each node is connected to the other nodes. When a particular node comes into contact with a Buddhist node, they are reciprocally related. Latourian speaking, they build a crossing. For instance, connecting “finance” and “karma” means that both a finance brand uses the Buddhist term “karma,” i.e., becomes part of the karma network, and karma also becomes part of the “finance” network. It is noticeable that the criticism is more about whether companies that use Buddhist content are “Buddhist,” not whether this Buddhist content becomes “company-like.” The former is probably questioned more often to protect essentialist Buddhist content unrelated to companies from the hybrid “company Buddhism”/“Buddhism company.”

(VI) Buddhist Mediators 1 vs. Buddhist Mediators 2: *When Buddhist mediators include all networks of producers, users, objects, processes, etc., isn't there a challenge to differentiate companies using Buddhist images and technology, also described as "Buddhist mediators" (123)?*

If one follows ANT ideas, then "Buddhist mediators" are part of ANT networks with infinite *actants* (producers, companies, users, objects, and images, and technology). This results in the most diverse hybrids of Buddhism and technology, Buddhism and companies, etc. These ANT networks can be easily mapped, the nodes marked, the connecting lines drawn, and the various nodes described in-depth.

(VII) "Fictional vs. Real": *If everything is "Buddhist mediators," does the dichotomy of "fictional" (123) vs. "real" make any sense?*

(1) It is true that all content can become "Buddhist mediators," i.e., be part of networks with Buddhist content. (2) Whether point 1 is accepted or not has nothing to do with the fact that the term "fictional" is not used at any point in this work as a contrast to "real." The term "fictional" refers to the world of fiction, art, and culture, which is no less real than a hypothetical "non-fictional" world.

(VIII) Consumerism and Neoliberalism: *How can "all Buddhist things" disappear in consumerist and neoliberal processes (137) when everything is part of "Buddhist mediators"?*

Following Latour's concept of "mediation," the *mediator* is indeed ephemeral or transient: it is there during the mediation process and dissolves, so to speak, after the job is done. Perhaps the statement should be understood more clearly as "Buddhist traditions disappear." Neoliberal consumer practices are so all-encompassing that they use all kinds of content as well as traditional Buddhist content. Hence, Buddhist mediators are everywhere because consumerism and neoliberalism are everywhere. The line between Buddhist traditions, texts, buildings, and the rest of the world is blurred; the dichotomy between "traditional Buddhism" and "Buddhism is everywhere" is no longer.

(IX) Transformations only in the "West"? *Are Buddhist mediators only transformed in Western neoliberal contexts (126)?*

This dissertation focuses on London, UK, and beyond, where translocal flows go globally. Examples were also shown in Myanmar to show that the "transformation," or hybridization between Buddhism and consumption/market/branding, is also happening there. However, the huge difference is that it is met with much more rejection there, partly by traditional Buddhists, monks, or the state. Other Asian neoliberal states have processes similar to the UK's, for instance, Japan. Buddhist content is probably "transformed" or "hybridized" wherever it is present (in Africa, it is perhaps less

current), and the reactions to it are probably more favorable if the reactions to neoliberalism, branding, and capitalism are also more positive. In Western neoliberal nations, this is the case, which is why the Buddha figure on the living room floor is not a problem; in Japan, probably not either, but in Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia, it is a problem. The hybridization of Buddhism and branding is more strongly combated there, and the boundary between Buddhism and consumption/branding is more strongly maintained than in neoliberal societies.

(X) Reductionism: *Can Buddhist mediators be reduced to “the repetition of neoliberal societies and consuming practices” (81) and a matter of Western colonization (315)?*

“Reduction“ is too harsh a word. The quotations are to be understood more as pluralistic explanations than as reductionisms: they add further levels of explanation to the spectrum of Buddhism and Buddhist mediators; they take nothing away from “real” Buddhism. The hybrid combination of Buddhism and branding now takes place in a context that can be described as “neoliberal” and “consumer-oriented.” The use of Buddhist semantics and images for Western, “non-Buddhist” ideas and projects has undeniably colonial predecessors. These two points alone are probably not enough to explain “Buddhist mediators,” but they already provide crucial points of explanation. In addition, there are also power asymmetries (e.g., in gender issues) and many more.

(XI) Errors? *What if “jukai” does not refer to the Buddhist jukai ceremony (279), and other terms (kensho, sila, sukha, and tenzo) are also not referring to Buddhist vocabulary?*

It is certainly possible that specific terms refer to both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts. For example, “Tara” has both Buddhist content and is also a popular British first name. For certain terms mentioned, it is difficult to rule out a small margin of error regarding whether the reference to Buddhist content was deliberate. This could only be determined by directly questioning or interviewing members of each of these companies. However, other terms such as “tenzo” (figs. 7.128 and 7.129) and “sukha” (fig. 7.127) refer to Buddhism, as the imagery also supports this.

(2) Emptiness

Communication with Others: *How can the findings about the emptiness of concepts (such as Buddhism, religion, and secularism) be communicated in exchange with colleagues, other disciplines, and the general public?*

The formation of emptiness or openness can be understood as studying relationships and their fluidity. This can be used for interdisciplinary cooperation (e.g., material religion, art history, archaeology, etc.). Material objects themselves, shown by insights from transcultural studies, do not adhere to disciplinary boundaries since relationships between objects and their environment

transcend disciplines, inviting inter- or transdisciplinarity. The Oxford Buddha figure from the 17th century invites scholars of religious studies as much as art historians, archaeologists, material scientists, chemists, as well as artisans, stonemasons, goldsmiths, etc. Material artifacts that transcend borders, countries, disciplines, etc., thus representing their emptiness/openness, can also be presented to the public in this way.

(3) *Emic vs. Etic*

(I) *Why no Differentiation? Why does the author not differentiate between insider and outsider perspectives?*

With the help of Latour's ANT, when everything is *networks*, distinguishing between emic and etic, subject and object, a central Western fallacy falls apart to subvert any essentialist ideas and power inequalities. Following Borup (2020), both positions are taken into account: a "hardcore objectivist stance is highly problematic" because scholars have histories, values, and experiences that shape their work (245). What is a problem is "automatically universalizing subjective experience" and "ignoring the high possibility of ideological bias, cultural inauthenticity, and psychological mischievousness" (246). The work was not written from an internal/emic perspective but rather from an external/etic one. However, Chapter 7 was intended to explicitly criticize the objectivity of the outside world, not only of the researcher's objectivity (as Borup 2020 notes), but of the outside world and the separation between the researcher and the world in general. In other words, the tendency of the work is also directed beyond the dichotomy of "emic vs. etic," where the application of Latour is suitable.

(II) *Emic Statement or Truth Claim? Is the following statement an emic statement or a scientific truth claim? "[R]eligious things are true when they are coherent [and] when a specific context advocates their truth" (306).*

The quote is preceded by assuming a plurality of truths, i.e., there are countless correct versions instead of "true vs. false." The quote adds to the conclusion that truths must be told coherently and logically and are context-specific. I.e., the world of Harry Potter is coherent and therefore true, and makes sense in the context of the UK, but even beyond that, globally, and draws its success from that.

(4) Latour

(I) Materiality: *Why is the agency of materiality, highlighted by Latour, not further considered?*

Many theorists, especially archaeologists like Ian Hodder, argue for material agency and have solid arguments and justification. It is important to emphasize once again that, with the help of Latour, a Buddha figure is not an object, and the maker of the figure is not a subject; both are nodes in the network of Buddhist *actants*. Everything is an *actant*: Buddha figures, people, animals, trees, etc. It is not so much about whether materiality has agency or where, but the present work is based on the assumption that everything has agency. Taking this seriously subverts, among other things, the subject-object dichotomy.

(II) Operationalizing Latour: *Why haven't more contemporary scholars and critics of postmodern scholars been included to get a "more balanced view" to rethink the operationalization of Latour and its consequences in religious studies?*

The author has tried to use various other theorists, especially those from outside religious studies, offering an inter- and transdisciplinary focus, including sociologists, anthropologists, archaeologists, and philosophers. This was an attempt to get out of any "Latour" niche and establish a broader cultural studies base. A profound attempt was made to achieve this "more balanced view."

(III) Hardcore vs. Softcore Latour: *Is it possible to distinguish a "hardcore"/radical vs. a "softcore" Latourian approach, while the latter uses Latour as inspiration without ending up in "a total abolishment of the discipline"?*

Distinguishing between "softcore" and "hardcore" Latour is interesting. Perhaps the "softcore" version is even more accessible to implement from a pragmatic point of view. The interest of this work, however, was to get everything out of Latour and to think of him in a more radical way than he thought of himself, to show the limits of the discipline of religious studies more clearly, and to offer alternatives. Nevertheless, "softer" alternatives would also be conceivable and recommendable for research work by other researchers. To make it clear again, even the hardcore version of Latour is not about the "abolishment" of the discipline! Above all, it is about denaturalizing its functioning and work areas, asking uncomfortable questions, etc. Scientific work, also in religious studies, was never in question.

(IV) Latour & Quantum Physics vs. “Post-Essentialism:” *Is the connection between Latour and quantum physics opposed to post-essentialist and secular theories in religious studies using discourse, constructivism, materiality, genealogy, and thick description?*

Latour and quantum theory are not “opposed” to “post-essentialism,” but the question instead is whether “post” adds much more to the discussion. There are similarities, as mentioned several times in the work, especially to theories of constructivism, materiality, and discourse. But definitely to secular: Latour's theories are not secular, simply because he takes the distinction between secular and religious ad absurdum in many places.

(5) Philosophers vs. Religious Studies Scholars

Tweed vs. Westerhoff: *Why is Thomas Tweed not explicitly mentioned in Chapter 7, and rather philosophers like Jan Westerhoff, when the author suggests following the mediations, the actors who created them, and their various dynamics?*

It is correct that Thomas Tweed is mentioned in other contexts of this dissertation but not in Chapter 7. Nevertheless, he would undoubtedly be appropriate here, as he similarly advises following the “flows,” mediators, actors, and various dynamics. What goes beyond Tweed in Latour and especially Westerhoff is perhaps the reference to the reality of the things examined. With Westerhoff, these are real and empty, i.e., open to any content, in fact, complete appearances and mediators.

(6) Truth

(I) Inconsistency = no Truth? *“If “religious or Buddhist things are inconsistent” (308), are they not “true”?”*

“Inconsistency” is not the same as untruth. To be clear, Chapter 7 and the dissertation generally are not about “true vs. false”: there are no false statements but multiple truths. The term “inconsistency” here means that Buddhist materialities go beyond a consistent framework (e.g., Buddhist traditions, scriptures, etc.): Buddha brands are, to that extent, inconsistent and yet true, just as true as “consistent Buddhism.”

(II) Descriptions false? *How can descriptions of Buddhism be false, as suggested in footnote 20 (313)?*

This is similar to the use of “wrong” (316) for Buddhism, which only includes religious traditions. As is argued there, instead, Buddhism is a *thing* “gathering” various contradictory meanings and contents. In this sense, Buddhism, as in the footnote mentioned (313), gathers

ascriptions of Buddhism that may contradict each other, be more simplified or more precise, but in the end, are all correct and “true.” The word “false” (313) means being wrong about denying the plurality that all this is simultaneously true. Perhaps the word “false” (313) is ambiguous in the context of this footnote since it suggests that the designated Buddhism is false or wrong.

In contrast, the reduction to a single, only true Buddhism was intended to be labeled “false” here. “Inaccurate,” “one-sided,” or “selective” would be better words. As has been argued, descriptions of Buddhism cannot be false but represent other truths. A description of Buddhism from the 18th century and a religious phenomenological study of religion by Mircea Eliade are not false but entirely another, different truth that made sense in specific social and historical contexts and still does to some extent today.

(III) Emic Perspective false I? When the dichotomies “religion vs. non-religion” and “religion vs. scholar of religion” are negated, how can an “emic religious insistence of the reality of such separation be negated?”

The emic perspective is not “negated” but perceived as another “true perspective.” Buddhist actors can, and perhaps must, have different assumptions than the researchers who study them. But no one is more right than another.

(IV) Emic Perspective false II? When branding and consumption of Buddhism (advertisement, tattoos, bars) in Myanmar are interpreted by agents as “denigration of religion,” are they “wrong” and why?

This dissertation represents the view that a “true vs. false” dichotomy is not constructive. With the help of Latour, this and many other binaries have been abandoned. Actors in Myanmar who make this statement are making a “true statement,” as are those who claim the opposite. This dissertation argues that these two contradictory statements can and must be simultaneously true.

(V) Emic Perspective false III? Has their Buddhism “gone wrong” (316) if they understand Buddhism as religious?

Their Buddhism is just as correct as that of an actor who thinks Buddhism is secular or anything else. There is no valuation here, no hierarchy of more authentic vs. inauthentic Buddhism, etc.

(7) Science

(I) (Need for) Science? *When scientific investigations are simply appearances and mediations (312), is there any need for science (of religion) at all?*

Here, the arguments of Westerhoff and Feyerabend were followed that scientific criticism does not mean scientific dissolution. Why should a scientific investigation that examines mediations and is also mediational be meaningless? Westerhoff was quoted in Chapter 7 to clarify that scientific progress, and thus science, is still possible and, of course, necessary. Irrealism does not mean anti-realism; in other words, “ir-science” is not “anti-science.” Science continues more or less as before, when the investigation follows realist or anti-realist paradigms, except that there is an awareness of the openness or emptiness of the results.

(II) Dissolving Religious Studies? *When Buddhism-as-mediators leads to redefining religious studies as mediator studies or science of mediators (321), does this dissolve religious studies?*

The new definition of religious studies as media studies gives religious studies additional functions, tasks, and fields of activity; it does not take anything away from it but adds something new. The dissolution of a discipline is different and would not be achieved through its transformation and redefinition. It is redefined, not terminated.

(III) Analytical Frameworks Outdated? *Are analytical frameworks (concepts, theories, modern versions of phenomenology of religion) necessarily outdated, and why?*

The question is perhaps whether, in the sense of Feyerabend, the so-called methodological constraint or “Methodenzwang,” i.e., privileged methods, are not a problem. For example, the phenomenology of religion is still present and is experiencing a revival in some places. Therefore, these methods, their functions, necessities, and links to academic power relations should always be questioned.

(8) Religion

(I) Everything becomes Religion? *When the attempt to transgress the “religions vs secularity” dichotomy also leads to dissolving the differences between “religion as an object” and “scholar as a subject,” the latter becomes religious also (5, 64). This includes branding (164, 169), modernity (70), and neoliberalism (185). How can this be further argued for and unfolded?*

Many others have already pointed out that branding, modernism, neoliberalism, and many other things can be labeled as *religious*, depending on which definition of religion one is willing to accept. As Inken Prohl also repeatedly argues, religion then appears everywhere. If this is the case,

the separation between “religion and non-religion” is increasingly difficult to maintain. Precisely speaking, however, not only everything becomes religious, but also everything becomes simultaneously non-religious. The complexity consists of enduring both at the same time. For instance, a company named *Zen Capital* can be considered both religious and non-religious at the same time. If this dividing line between “religious and non-religious” becomes blurred, it is only natural to ask what this means for professional groups who seem to adhere to it: religious scholars, theologians, and other cultural scientists with “religious objects of study.” The researchers become religious, but at the same time also secular, just like the objects. However, investigations, definitions, etc., remain necessary, meaningful, and important; no disciplines or concepts are dissolved. They can only be understood somewhat more widely and openly.

(II) Abandoning Religion? Should the concept of “religion” be abandoned or stretched to mean anything?

No concept should be dissolved, neither religion, god, culture, state, democracy, or anything else. As Chapter 7 has tried to show, definitions, terms, categories, and concepts are always used and needed, even following Latour and irrealism. What should be dissolved, which, with the help of Latour, has been tried to suggest, is the dichotomization of concepts! The problem is not “religion” nor “secularity” but their dichotomy; likewise, true vs. false, culture vs. nature, etc. dichotomization creates two sides between which nothing may exist. Latour has shown, however, that these hybrids between A and B are so prevalent that the dichotomy cannot be meaningfully maintained. For example, Buddha branding exists between religion and secularism and cannot be meaningfully assigned to one of the two sides. The Latourian and quantum-theoretical understanding of “religion” tends to include everything, which is why the terms “emptiness” or “openness” were used. The dissertation shows that religion can encompass capitalism, branding, art, and culture if religion and non-religion are not distinguishable.

(9) The Secular

(I) Defining and Distinguishing the Secular I: Why haven't the terms “secular,” “secularism,” “secularization,” “secularized,” “secularizing,” or “secularity” actually been defined or distinguished, although note 1 in Chapter 1 gives some references?

The “secular” was defined as part of the dichotomy with “religion.” Historically, this has been and still is its core function, as Chapter 1 attempted to show. This core function of dichotomizing it to religion has been questioned. Different versions of “secular” were understood as a network, which is why “secularism,” “secularization,” “secularized,” “secularizing,” or

“secularity” are part of this very network. These were each described in more detail at specific points in the work, if necessary. But generally speaking, they belong to the same network.

(II) *Defining and Distinguishing the Secular II: Why does the introductory Chapter 2.1.2. not define “secularism?”*

In the introductory Chapter 2.1.2. and throughout the dissertation, the “secular” is understood as inseparable from “religion.” Therefore, Prohl’s concept of “triple religion” is used to show that it already contains non-religion/secularity. The introductory chapter argues that secularity is to be understood as religious. Chapter 1 deals with the relationship between “religious and secular,” whereby no attempt is made to define secularity individually, which would be pointless, according to Latour, Fitzgerald, and many others.

(III) *Which Secular is it? It is also unclear whether the examples in the introductory Chapters 1.2. (“The opposite relationship between secularism and religion” and 1.3. (“Critiques of the religion vs. secularism paradigm”) relate to “secularism” only or the “secularism vs. religion” binary, or is it identical to “secularization” (which is sometimes identified as neoliberal consumption and as an ideology)?*

The examples in these chapters are diverse but can be narrowed down to one area: a relational problem of “religion vs. secularity.” All other terms, such as “secularity,” “secularization,” etc., are derived from this relationship. However one defines “secularization,” either way, it will somehow refer to a “secular level” impact on (religious, Buddhist, etc.) areas that were not “secular” before. This presupposes that these two areas exist and that transformations are now happening between them and their relationship. As the chapter points out, these transformations are manifold and manifest in areas like consumption, capitalism, ideology, etc.

(10) (Non-)Essentialism

(I) *Monolithic Block: Are “conceptions of Buddhism as an a-historian and monolithic block” (12) also representative within the modern academic study of religion?*

This idea of Buddhism as a world religion, and thus a consistent, coherent, and in a certain sense essentialist block, is at least present in German-speaking religious studies (i.e., the infamous *Yggdrasil* mailing list). To say that it dominates may require independent research.

(II) Buddhism vs. Buddhisms: Does the use of the term “Buddhism” in the singular necessarily imply essentialism, where the only plausible alternative is the pluralist “Buddhisms” (13)?

(1) “Isms” (as Lopez Jr. has shown) suggest holistic, essentialist systems that “are X at their core.” Buddhism, nationalism, humanism, etc. Historically, at least since the 19th century, it has been shown that Buddhism is “at its core” linked to the religion/secularity discourse. Buddhism outside this discourse would then be non-essentialist. Whether this is “anti-essentialist” or “post-essentialist” would be further questions. (2) Whether “Buddhisms” in the plural is the only plausible alternative can be answered with “yes,” at least by Lopez Jr. In the sense of Latour and Feyerabend, the answer to essentialism is often pluralism. The term “Buddhisms” is definitely a plausible alternative, but whether it is the *only* alternative is probably not the case, but it is probably one of the best alternatives.

(III) Realism and Non-Essentialism: Does the “traditional scientific realism in religious studies” (8) or the “traditional study of Buddhism” also include recent decades’ constructivist, discursive, post-Orientalist, postcolonial, and critical studies of Buddhism?

Traditional, classical research on Buddhism tends to come from the realist camp. More contemporary study of Buddhist includes constructivist, discursive, post-Orientalist, postcolonial, and critical studies of Buddhism that can come from both realist and anti-realist (e.g., “everything is discourse” or “everything is constructed”) camps. Although both defend opposing truths, this dissertation focuses on a third way, the irrealist approach, which was supported in Chapter 7. Parts of the anti-realist camp are also interesting for irrealists, but the solutions differ: even if everything is constructed, empty, open, etc., it is still real; concepts, terms, definitions, and academic disciplines are still important, and nothing has to dissolve.

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