

The Sacred Diesel: Infrastructures of Transportation and Religious Art in Manila

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Abstract

This paper describes the development of a vernacular form of religious art upon the surface of the Jeepney, one of the most popular modes of public transport in the Southeast Asian megacity of Metro Manila. Through a focus on the pious visual culture of the crowded streets of Manila, the essay proposes a new way to describe and theorize *paratransit*, or informal modes of urban transportation. By examining the Jeepney and its religious images, the paper demonstrates how this form of paratransit has refashioned the urban landscape into a mobile network of miraculous appearances, communal prayers and divine blessings.

Keywords: art, Christianity, infrastructure, Jeepney, Southeast Asia, paratransit, pollution, prayer, urban transit

The majority of public transportation in Metropolitan Manila, a densely populated South-Asian conurbation, is carried out by the Jeepney.¹ The Philippine Land Transportation Office (2007) estimates that there are around 55,000 Jeepneys maneuvering through the crowded and narrow streets of Metro Manila. The Jeepney is a small bus carrying around 20 passengers seated facing one another on two benches running parallel to the length of the vehicle. In the urban

transportation literature, the Jeepney has been categorized as a form of *paratransit*. This term emerged in the early 1970s to describe unconventional forms of transportation that opposed to city buses and commuter trains, operated outside the conventional fixed-route genre (Cervero 2000; Kirby 1974; Rimmer 1984, 1986). The individual Jeepney operator is not beholden to fixed routes or predetermined stops, but is contingent upon the special “stop requests” and transportation needs of the passengers. At its most basic level, paratransit describes creative forms of mobility that emerge when large bureaucracies and their concomitant infrastructures of transportation fail to meet the demands of the commuting public. With the increasing inefficiency of state sanctioned systems of bus and light rail, the Jeepney has flourished to become a ubiquitous presence on the extremely congested streets of Manila. Over the last three decades, a great deal has been written on the role of paratransit in Asian cities; however, because these studies have

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the international conference, “The Infrastructures of Diversity: Materiality and Culture in Urban Space” sponsored by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity in Göttingen, German (July 9-10, 2015). I would like to thank the conference organizers, Marian Burchardt, Stefan Höhne and Abdou Maliq Simone for their insightful comments and suggestions on the topic of infrastructure and its relation to visual culture. A recent report issued by the Philippine Land Transportation Office (2007) estimates the number of Jeepneys operating within Metro Manila to be around 54, 868. No doubt there has been a significant increase in this number over the last decade.

focused on financial feasibility and transport efficiency, they have neglected the religious dimensions of informal modes of transportation such as the Jeepney. This paper takes a closer look at what might be called pious infrastructures of transportation, in order to describe the Jeepney as a vibrant vehicle of religious representation upon the crowded streets of Metro Manila.²

In terms of its historical background, the Jeepney represents a creative re-assembly of components of the American war machine. More specifically, thousands of all-terrain vehicles known as “jeeps” were abandoned as surplus throughout the Philippines after the Second World War (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Jeep driving up the steps of U.S. Capitol, archival image; unless stipulated, all other photos by author

With remarkable ingenuity, these surplus vehicles were modified with an elongated bed and a new roof in order to provide much-needed public transportation vehicles for a country whose infrastructure had been decimated by the war. Yet, what was only meant to be a temporary fix



Figure 2. Jeepneys queue on Aurora Blvd., Manila

to the infrastructural woes of the Philippines not only persisted throughout the second half of the twentieth century, but the general form of these early Jeepneys still persists as the most popular form of public transportation throughout the country. In terms of historical residues and the religious resonances of the Jeepney, it is interesting to keep in mind that many commentators on the origin of the name “Jeep” cite not only the military abbreviations “GP” or “general purpose” vehicle as the etymological origin of the popular name, but reference “Eugene the Jeep,” a popular cartoon character who first appeared in the Popeye comic strip in 1936 (fig.3).³ By the time the early prototype of the general purpose vehicle was being tested in 1940, the cartoon character Eugene the Jeep would have been a familiar character on the landscape of American popular culture.

For the purposes of the present analysis, it is important to keep in mind that Eugene the Jeep was quite a curious little dog, not only because he could climb seemingly impossible obstacles

² A useful introduction to the anthropology of infrastructure can be found in: (Larkin 2013).

³ See, for instance: (Dumalo 2011).

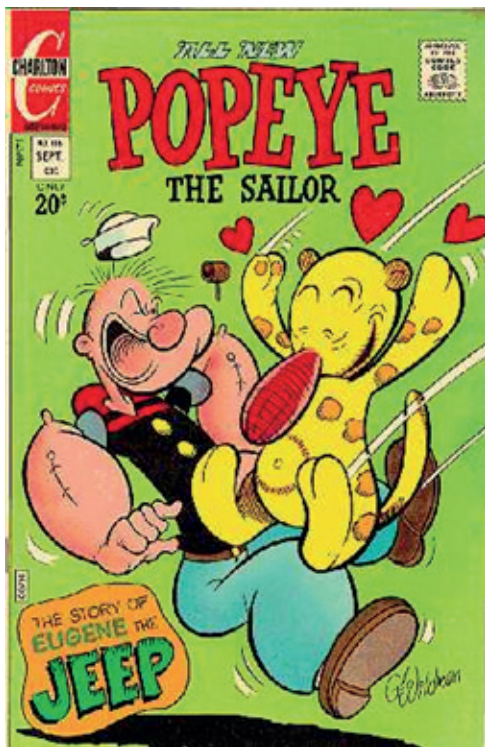


Figure 3. Eugene the Jeep cartoon (1936)

and barriers upon the urban cartoon landscape, but because he demonstrated preternatural capacities to discern the future and become a spectral entity with the ability to cross over into other dimensions. In many ways, the contemporary Jeepney carries on this earlier legacy, not only for its ability to deftly maneuver through the narrow streets and obstacle the ridden terrain of the metropolis, but because it can also be seen as a liminal figure that traffics between the sacred and the everyday. At the very least, many contemporary Jeepneys are covered with fantastic images borrowed from popular comic book characters and animated figures, and thus display a historical continuity with the early naming of the vehicle itself.

The Divine Realm

The Jeepney is not only the dominant mode of public transportation in Manila, but a crucial representational vehicle in the religious life of the city. Since at least the early 1950s, the exterior body of the Jeepney has been an important site of Filipino folk art, featuring symbols of speed and masculinity, such as abstract representa-



Figure 4. Archival image

tions of rooster wings that are creatively “split” around the exterior panels of the vehicle (fig. 4).⁴ This essay describes the development of representational styles and thematic motifs upon the exterior surface of the Jeepney, focusing upon the specific religious aspects of this history of vernacular art. Over the last three decades, developments in the subject and style of Jeepney folk art has been significantly influenced by new charismatic Christian and evangelical religious movements. These new forms of charismatic religious practice packed large coliseums and enlivened new communities of collective effervescence in Manila in the mid-1980s. Directly coincident with these new religious movements, the metallic surface of the Jeepney became filled with brightly colored spray paint lettering proclaiming pious slogans such as “Praise the Lord!”, “Prayer Warrior” and “Power of Prayer” (fig. 5). Likewise, these movements signaled an increasing orientation of the Jeepneys’ exterior space of visual representation around the themes of the Virgin

⁴ For the now classic study of the Jeepney and its folk art, see: (Torres 1979). My project extends a body of work in the field of folklore and art history on the visual culture of the Philippine Jeepney to include an analysis of a significant representational shift that occurred upon the surface of this popular vehicle of urban mass transit after many of the classic interpretations of the “Jeepney as Folk Art” had been published. Although this paper focuses specifically upon the Jeepney as seen and used by the passenger or pedestrian, future studies might include interviews with the Jeepney operators and artists in order to get a more expansive sense this artistic practice.



Figure 5. Phrases of charismatic Christian praise (paint on steel)



Figure 6. Marian apparitions on passenger side door (airbrush on steel)

Mary [Roman Catholic] (fig. 6), biblical characters (fig. 7), and prayer [predominantly evangelical and charismatic Christian] (fig. 8). The increasing prominence of religious vernacular art upon the surface of the Jeepney suggests that this form of “mobile piety” has refashioned the urban landscape of Manila in significant ways.

While this paper explores the religious dimensions of Jeepney vernacular art, it should be noted that the pious images herein described coexist alongside a vibrant assemblage of artistic representations depicting secular scenes of power, family relations, sports figures, and, as

previously mentioned, images from American popular culture. As if to mimic the mechanical capacities of the vehicle itself, many Jeepneys prominently display illustrations that evoke the theme of technological power and instrumental control. Glistening images of polished motorcycle engines and zooming fighter jets connote speed, while illustrations of massive container ships evoke remarkable carrying capacity and the global movements of the Philippine sailor and “overseas” worker. Alongside the scintillating image of mechanical power, one might find the warm and gentle hues of a child’s face smil-



Figure 7. Biblical story on side panel (paint on galvanized steel sheeting)

ing above the windshield, an outward reminder of familial relations and the daily struggle on the streets to provide for the family. In a country where the sports of basketball and cock fighting reign supreme, a pedestrian often sees images of muscle-bulging basketball stars soaring to the hoop or furious feather-ruffled roosters brandishing their razor sharp spurs. Finally, images from American popular culture are also prominent themes upon the Jeepney, especially wild, macabre characters, such as the Joker from the popular comic book and movie series, *Batman*. While religious images are some of the most popular visual motifs found upon the exterior of the Jeepney, these pious images often comingle and interact with the other popular figures just described. On the streets of Manila, the sacred image of piety subsists within a visual assemblage of images creatively gleaned from popular culture, family life and technologies of mobility.

These mobile Marian apparitions reflect the shrines located just to the side of the road in residential neighborhoods throughout Manila (fig.6). Many of these shrines display a ceramic statue of Mary adorned with silk flowers and surrounded by the residual traces of wax from the burning of votive candles. From her niche of cobblestone and mortar, Mary casts a plangent gaze toward the crossroads. At night her shrine is anointed by the sallow luminescence of a soot-stained light bulb: a sacred beacon on streets prone to accident, contingency and breakdown.



Figure 8. Manual gestures of charismatic prayer (paint/spray paint on steel sheeting)

As a vehicle of religious representation, the Jeepney marks the proliferation of pious visual culture within urban public space. Through the mobile surfaces of the Jeepney, the presence of pious imagery has transitioned from the private devotional shrine of the domestic interior and the candlelit space of the Cathedral and, quite literally, has taken to the street. As an apparatus of mobile piety, the Jeepney takes the annual festival procession of the saints and plunges this pious imagery into the vibrant circulation of *everyday* life.

This urban transit research describes how these new forms of pious imagery are not merely a passive reflection of religious movements occurring around them in the spaces of churches, cathedrals and public coliseums; rather, these vibrant images themselves actively refashion the urban landscape into an enchanted mobile network of miraculous Marian apparitions, fervent communal prayer, and pious exhortations. In this

way, the infrastructure of public transportation becomes an apparatus of urban belief, mapping the grid and the informal economies of everyday life that take place upon its asphalt surface with sacred visions shrouded in plumes of dust and diesel fumes.

In terms of infrastructure and materiality, the Jeepney is not only a 'vehicle' of representation, but the form of the technology is itself 'quickened' or actuated by the force of religious community and the experience of sacred presence. For an example of the way religion is fabricated into the very materiality of the infrastructure, we could take the flying dove, a symbol of the immanent power of the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition, descending through the polished steel surface of a Jeepney side panel (fig. 9).

In this instance, religious representation and instrumental function become indistinguishable within the shimmering form of "stainless" steel. Thus the idea of divine communication and the miraculous traffic between the sacred and the everyday has become so sedimented within the history of the Jeepney that it is now "fabricated" into the structure of the machine in the independent manufacturing and assembly garages located around the city. This "stainless" steel suggests a promising method to describe and theorize urban infrastructure in many developing countries, not merely as an assemblage of bureaucratic practices and technical instrumentalities whose functions can be calculated, consciously managed and rationally controlled, but as a machine ensemble whose "functioning" is undergirded by an excessive underbelly of miraculous appearances, prayers, and prestige.

A passenger hoisting him or herself up into the rear entrance of the Jeepney would grip the stainless steel bar located just below the image of multiple hands superimposed in a charismatic gesture of communal prayer (fig. 8). This technique of prayer, also termed the laying on of hands, or manual imposition, is performed within Charismatic Catholic and Pentecostal spaces of worship throughout Manila. Combined with the vocal articulation of prayer, this intimate



Figure 9. Stainless steel side door panel with dove

communal experience of tactility organizes powerful experiences of healing and consecration within the charismatic milieu. By strategically placing this image above the pull-up rail of the passenger entrance, the designer of this Jeepney has refashioned the mundane experience of entering a vehicle of public transit into a gesture of prayer and divine intercession. The everyday gesture of "hoisting up" becomes reinscribed within a communal performance of prayer that, like a leaking oil pan, anoints the street with an unction of blessing and divine protection.

The placement of this image is significant not only because it implicates the experience of urban transit on a basic level—the space that one must move through to enter the vehicle—but also because the layered hands are arranged just above the brake lights of the vehicle. In this way, the staccato rhythms of stop-and-go traffic on the streets of Manila also become enmeshed in the prayer-performance of manual imposition. The red-flashing of the break light (if indeed it is functioning) draws attention to this image, and communicates a sentiment of solidarity and "psychological momentum" with other drivers, pedestrians and passengers on the road (Mauss 2006). In terms of traffic and the mechanized rhythms of the street (stop lights, break downs, traffic jams, police check points, and so on) the strategic positioning of the praying hands provides a striking visual example of the way practices of charismatic prayer structure the flow of everyday life on the street. This flow of urban mobility

is constituted through the punctuated rhythm of *prayer brakes*: the morning prayer voiced by the Jeepney driver before he begins his route; the hoisting up onto the vehicle carriage; the grabbing of a rosary dangling from the rearview mirror as one passes a significant shrine; the gesture of crossing oneself when passing a Cathedral.

As an element of public visual culture and a performance of communal prayer, the image of the superimposed hands illustrates what some scholars of Charismatic Christianity in the Philippines have recently termed “populist religion.” Through their analysis of the explosive growth of Charismatic Catholic organizations such as El Shaddai in the early 1980s, Kessler and Rüländ demonstrate how popular religious movements in the Philippines have adopted strategies of political mobilization. Through media spectacles broadcast over radio and television, and an anti-elitist orientation emphasizing the everyday needs and interactions of the masses, charismatic groups such as El Shaddai provide a framework for their members to engage the modernization process and negotiate the precarious terrain of the neoliberal city (Kessler and Rüländ 2006; Tremlett 2014). The surface of the Jeepney has become a significant public space through which this new style of populist religious mobilization reclaims the increasingly privatized and gated spaces of the metropolis. Likewise, the Jeepney has become an important site of pious *mobilization* that re-enchants urban space through a mechanized network of communal prayer. It is in this seemingly mundane or unremarked space, just above the pull-up rail and the brake light of a popular vehicle of urban transit, that charismatic communities have begun to refashion the urban landscape.

This methodological focus on the quotidian gestures of street prayer reflects a broader trend in the study of Philippine Catholicism, what Jayeel S. Cornelio terms “the turn to everyday authenticity” (Cornelio 2014). As a concept, “everyday authenticity” attends to the ways in which religious communities and pious performances are mobilized on the ground in order to

provide frameworks for political activism, the cultivation of the self, and economic activity. Like the proliferation of paratransit, everyday authenticity highlights robust religious practices that are enlivened outside or beyond the official strictures and orthodoxy of the Catholic church. Cornelio’s promising method for the study of everyday religious practice in the Philippines marks that moment when devotion leaves the orthodox space of the cathedral and, so to speak, *takes to the street*.

Recent scholarship in anthropology and urban studies has identified the automobile as an important site of everyday religious practice. In his beautifully illustrated *On Wings of Diesel: Trucks, Identity and Culture in Pakistan*, Jamal Elias describes how elaborate religious paintings on trucks in Pakistan refashion the automobile into a “mobile talisman” that protects the driver and his livelihood from theft, accident, breakdown and other misfortunes (Elias 2003, 2011). Similarly, in a project describing “vehicular religiosity” in Nigeria and Ghana, the sociologist Ebenezer Obadare explores how everyday religious practices flourish in urban traffic conditions prone to both deadly accident and boredom-inducing traffic jams (Obadare 2013; Klaeger 2009). Although in different urban environments and religious traditions, all of these studies emphasize the theme of religious mobilization, or the specific ways in which everyday religious practice becomes intimately intertwined with the vehicles of urban transportation.

In a much earlier study, the folklorist Munro S. Edmonson explored the proliferation of pious phrases on Mexican trucks during a research tour through the country in the early 1950s (Edmonson 1968). Interpreting phrases of “bumper mottoes” hand painted in gothic lettering, the folklorist concludes that the preponderance of mottoes such as “Faith in God and Mary” and “Pray for us” suggest that the truck driver in this country is, in general, “immensely pious.” The Philippine Jeepney was becoming popular during the period of Edmonson’s research, and given the colonial intimacies between Mexico and the

Philippines, it should come as no surprise that the pious phrases painted upon the Mexican truck would, in some way, portend the proliferation of religious iconography upon the surface of the Jeepney years later. Prophecy aside, it is interesting to consider the similar ways in which everyday piety is expressed upon the surface of the truck in these seemingly disparate settings.

Down to Earth—Everyday Transactions

After the boarding passenger has climbed into the narrow rear opening of the Jeepney and negotiated her way through a sea of knees and the baggage of seated travelers, she takes a seat on one of the two crowded rows and exclaims “byad po!”, (meaning “take it, friend”), extending a fist of coins – usually no more than 15 pesos per person (about 33 US cents), depending on the trip – in the direction of the driver. If the payee is not located within reach of the backwardly extended hand of the driver or his front seat assistant, other passengers will assist in the passing of the coins to the front of the vehicle. In an age when the collection of transportation fares and tolls is mediated by sophisticated systems of analysis and calculation increasingly abstracted from the communal experience of the passengers (electronic swipe cards and remote barcode scanners, for example), the collection of fares within this space initiates a unique form of urban sociality through exchanges of hand.⁵ Not only are 3-5 individuals physically involved in this payment process of passing coin to and from the payee, but this communal payment structure elicits the attention of the other passengers not directly involved in the process – who are so cramped and facing one another on the opposed benches that they cannot help but observe this transaction. This gesture of payment, and the concomitant act of grasping and letting go, culminates in the clinking sound of coin as it falls into a hand-made box located in the center of the dash board (fig. 10).



Figure 10. Black cashbox, with driver I.D. located beside the driver's elbow (note the numerous Catholic icons located on and near a rearview mirror)

Guarding over this coin box is a reliquary of devotional objects: rosaries swaying to the rhythmic ensemble of combustion engines and traffic lights, a small statue of the *Santo Niño* in his gesture of divine blessing, perfumed garlands of freshly-blessed flowers, printed images of the saints, and small woven curtains featuring pious phrases such as “God is Love.”⁶ As previously mentioned, the communal practice of fare collection culminates at the base of this shrine, an offering that not only ensures that one maintains a legitimate space within the Jeepney, but a metaphysical insurance of safe passage on urban streets prone to accident, breakdown and contingency (fig. 11).

Moreover, in this space of mobility saturated with the theme of divine blessing, can we not see the metaphysical presence of money and its promise of miraculous accumulation? If these silent witnesses and sacred objects of the shrine are not enough to dissuade thieves and passengers who would attempt to elude the honor system of fare payment and jump off before they have fulfilled the rite of coin passing, one often finds a written warning located in the space between the driver and the passenger. Ever attuned to word play and the force of allusion, the phrase forcefully reads: “God Knows *Hudas*

⁵ For a useful introduction to the history of systems of fare collection see: (Miller 1960).

⁶ An analysis of the remarkable history of the *Santo Niño* in Philippine devotion and political movements can be found in: (Bautista 2006, 2010).



Figure 11. Close-up of shrine located above cashbox



Figure 12. Urban surveillance (paint on steel)

Not Pay” [Spanish-Tagalog word play on the biblical character Judas]. – Is there any need for a transportation security camera when a form of automobility such as the Jeepney is surveyed by an all-seeing divine eye (fig. 12)?

The explosion of pious Jeepney imagery in the 1980s coincided with the proliferation of outdoor advertising media such as the billboard. During this time, large-format print technology enabled the production of gigantic images of scantily clad bodies, glistening alcohol bottles and frost-covered milkshakes. Just as the proliferation of the pious Jeepney image facilitated the emergence of new charismatic Christian publics, authors such as Gomez describe how the prodigious increase of billboard advertising signaled a new appropriation of urban space through the “aggression of private commercial interests” (Gomez 2013: 190).⁷ With over 8,000 large billboard advertisements crowding the skyline of Metro Manila, many politicians and academics have lamented the “billboard blight” that has

⁷ For another insightful account of billboards and morality in Manila see: (Cornelio 2014).

flourished within circumstances of bureaucratic graft and lack of governmental regulation.

Although the pious Jeepney image and the billboard have both emerged within the same historical period of increasing urbanization, it is interesting to contrast these two instances of urban visual culture in regard to the everyday realities of life and movement on the street. While the billboard draws the visual attention of the urban commuter “up” into a skyline populated with images strategically designed to organize desire for middle class commodities, the representational surface of the Jeepney circulates on the level of what might be called “street vision.” As opposed to the elevated gaze, street vision is immersed in the buzz of the urban crowd, at one moment frenetically scanning the landscape and its mobile images, pedestrians and automobiles, while in the next arrested in the crowded confines of stalled traffic and congested pedestrian flows. The billboard organizes its capitalist desires above this flow of everyday life while the Jeepney’s images weave in and out in precipitous proximity to other bodies and machines in motion on the street. Likewise, the billboard is

visibly accessible through the windshield of the middle-class car or private taxi, while the majority of the 12 million daily commuters in Manila are crowded within Jeepneys, whose small windows and crowded orientation allow for limited visibility outside the cab.

In addition to this visual orientation, the images featured on the Jeepney are, so to speak, able to “fly under the radar” of state censorship, a tactic that is impossible for large stationary billboards. Although much controversy has been fomented as of late from large outdoor advertisements featuring images of “sexualized” bodies and verbal sexual innuendo, these visual examples pale in comparison to the highly eroticized images of women often featured on the side panels of the Jeepney. In fact, the voluptuous images of anime cartoons and other figures of male fantasy often appear alongside images of the Virgin Mary. In a kind of surrealist profanation, the ecstatic countenance of the erotic cartoon image suggests an expression that is also visually depicted on the face of many Jeepney images of the Virgin. These basic differences in the visual orientation of urban visual culture emphasize the power and intimate proximity of the pious Jeepney image within the vibrant networks of everyday life on the street. Unlike the billboard, the Jeepney image does not inhabit a static space above the crowd; it circulates in traffic and presses close to life on the street.

The remarkable public exposure of the Jeepney to thousands of pedestrians, commuters and street vendors each day has also been identified by professional advertising agencies. In this regard, miniature billboards advertising cellular phone service plans and providers have begun to appear on the roof of some Jeepneys. The presence of professionally produced advertising upon the exterior of the Jeepney suggests the ways in which the pious imagery upon its surface can be seen as “mass media.” Just like the mass distribution of a newspaper or magazine, the pious images of the Jeepney are physically circulated to thousands of metropolitan spectators each day. Like an illuminated or flashing billboard,

these “moving images” organize their own special effect as they careen through the crowded networks of the city belching smoke and projecting amplified music as well as sounds of chirping, howling, and cackling. As a form of mass mediation, both in terms of moving images and the physical movement of bodies, the religious imagery of the Jeepney signals another development in the recent history of Charismatic Catholicism and Pentecostalism. More specifically, the miraculous appearances upon which these new religious movements subsist have become intimately and inextricably linked with media technologies such as radio, television and cellular phone (De La Cruz 2009, 2014; Wiegele 2005). The mass medium of the Jeepney and its surfaces of visual representation re-enchants urban space through religious images whose mobile agency exerts an attentive demand upon street vision.

Viewed from this perspective, the pious visual culture of the Jeepney marks a struggle to reclaim an urban public space that has become increasingly organized by private advertising and development interests (Tremlett 2014). In terms of the organization of the metropolis on a basic perceptual and attentive level, the spray-painted images of the Jeepney mobilize a “prayer warrior” in a contest to reinscribe diversity into a public space whose very atmosphere and visual horizon is becoming dominated by massive billboards. In terms specifically related to the infrastructures of diversity, the surface of the Jeepney marks a forceful medium of political critique. Through everyday forms of artistic production and informal transit, new attentive demands are organized on the street in order to create a space of mobilization—both in terms of politics *and* public transportation. From her mobile shrine in the street, the blessed Virgin gazes out upon a smoggy horizon dominated by billboard advertisements. In this contested space between the vision of miraculous appearance and the magical spectacle of advertising, many city dwellers locate a space of critical momentum to negotiate the current neoliberal reorganization of the urban landscape.

The Underworld

The threat of thieves and dangerous accidents takes this analytical trip down into the darker, more subterranean aspects of the Jeepney. Like a traveler descending into Hades, a look under the Jeepney's hood reveals a mythical landscape of heat and flame, strange bodies transformed by the blackness of oil, grease and soot, and the noxious sulfur-tinged smell of death. Indeed, it is heat itself, or the constant threat of an overheated engine that reveals these dark worlds, forcing the driver to pull to the side of the road and bathe the boiling, steaming radiator in a steady stream of water (fig.13). Here, in this fiery underworld, sits the king in his unction of grease and soot – the Isuzu 4BC2 diesel engine (fig.14).

Already expired and outmoded when they reach the Philippines, these second-hand engines have been imported from Japan and have been rebuilt multiple times. These motors are a remarkable testament to creative ingenuity and resourcefulness in the face of poverty and the failure of state organized infrastructures. Yet the extreme inefficiency of these outmoded engines, coupled with the use of low-quality diesel fuel whose sulfur content is many times that of diesel standards in Europe, unleashes a deadly pall of particulate matter upon the urban landscape. This particulate matter, or “black soot,” is not only the direct cause of the premature death of thousands of city inhabitants each year, but it creates an occupational environment for the Jeepney driver that places his life expectancy among the lowest of the city dwellers (Balanay and Lungu 2009; Fabian and Vergel 2001). Moreover, this black soot has recently been identified as the second most important contributing factor to global warming. As a crucial mode of urban transport in Metro Manila, the Jeepney traffics between two worlds – while significantly contributing to the vibrancy of urban life by delivering millions of poor and middle class commuters to their place of work each day, it also belches deadly pollutants into the metropolitan environment.



Figure 13. Cooling the engine



Figure 14. Isuzu 4BC2 diesel

Resurrection

Recently there have been many strategies proposed by the transportation agencies of the Philippine government and various NGOs to help ameliorate the environmental crisis created in part by the Jeepney and its outmoded diesel engine. Given the exigencies of both the commuting public and the current environmental crisis, one immediate and practical response to the Jeepney and its noxious soot would be the implementation of an inexpensive system of exhaust pipe capping. This simple device can be attached to the end of the exhaust pipe and is capable of filtering up to 40% of the particulate matter that is emitted into the atmosphere through the diesel combustion engine (Gallardo 2003; Krupnick et al. 2003). In addition to the strategy of exhaust filtration, the immediate situation of environmental pollution in Metro Manila calls for new diesel fuel standards with greatly reduced sulfur content. This higher-quality fuel will decrease the amount of particulate matter that is created through the process of outmoded diesel engine combustion. These immediate pollution control strategies may not instantiate the kingdom of heaven upon earth, as they say, but they will provide the first necessary steps toward a more sustainable transportation infrastructure in this expanding Asian megacity.

In conclusion, I have attempted a novel description of urban transit infrastructure as powered not only by outmoded engines and low-quality diesel fuel, but greased through the gestures of prayer and enlivened by the appearance of the miraculous in a reflection of stainless steel. The current proliferation of religious vernacular art upon the surface of the Jeepney suggests the ways in which everyday practices of piety on the street are literally *mobilizing* new public spaces. These informal infrastructures of transit and artistic production, in turn, can be read as a critical contestation of the current reorganization of urban public space by neoliberal economic



Figure 15. "Resurrection" Jeepney parked on the side of Aurora Blvd., just below the overcrowded light rail transit elevated railway line

forces. Viewed against the massive backdrop of the billboard, the surface of the Jeepney has become a space of critique against the increasing visual and attentive organization of the metropolis by private advertising firms (fig. 7). In this way, the stainless steel canvas of the Jeepney has become a representational space where visual diversity is reinscribed into the urban landscape. At very least, the Jeepney has become a prominent space of religious representation upon the crowded streets of Manila. This new form of mobile piety not only "represents" the presence of new charismatic movements in the urban context, but it actively performs a sooty benediction upon the everyday life of the street through the sacred gaze of Saints and the healing gestures of Pentecostal prayer. Mimicking the Jeepney drivers' creative capacity for world play, we might begin to theorize the informal networks of transportation in Manila not in terms of paratransit, but *prayer-a-transit*.

Reference Information

Figure 1 (jeep on Capitol stairs): first published in an article by Katherine Hillyer, „Jeep Creeps Up Capitol Steps“ Washington Daily News, February 20, 1941

Figure 3 (image from wikipedia)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_the_Jeep

Figure 4 (archival image) located in the American Historical Collection, Rizal Library, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola Heights, Quezon City, Philippines

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