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Metallurgic Matter(ing)s: Mirrored Mandalorian Metal-Scapes, Mining(s), and Mimesis

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Abstract

This paper traverses the relationship between wo/man, metal, and the more-than-human world. Drawing for new materialisms, specifically Bennett's (2004, 2009) notion of (metallurgic) thing-power and IJsseling's (1997) conceptualization of mimesis, we entangle our (posthuman) perspectives with scenes from a popular science fiction show, The Mandalorian. Specifically, we are interested in how a fictional metal with extraordinary vibrant properties, known as beskar, reflects/mirrors aspects of identity articulation and formation for the show's main protagonist, Din Djarin. Using a (mimetic) narrative approach, we constructed two composite narratives around two scenes depicting the aliveness of beskar in different ways. We also make an argument for the further interrogation into the way that metals are mined, manufactured, and manipulated and how these processes factor into the making and un-making of what it means to be human in a more-than-human world.

Keywords: *Metallurgy; Posthumanism; Mimesis; Mining; Mandalorian*

Introduction

The human experience takes place within an ecology of non/living actors and materialities. While some are naturally occurring phenomena, others are the result of distinctly human desires and imagination. Regardless, humans have an inescapable relationship to non-humans insofar that non-human bodies are agential and vibrant, thus (re)animating the development and production of human sensibilities and actions (Bennett, 2009; Bennett, 2017; Snaza, 2019). According to Bennett (2009), stuff of the world(s) possesses "thing-power [which] gestures towards the strange ability of ordinary […] manifest[ing] traces of independence or aliveness" (xvi). The aliveness of things specifically extracted and shaped by humans contain affordances in which to examine the co-constitutive and mimetic relationship between people and things. Following Lawtoo (2021a), we consider mimesis and mimetic relationships to be not just imitation and mimicry but also "adaptation and conformism [and] mirroring reflexes, emotional contagion, identification, unconscious influences, psychic suggestibility, and sympathy (sym-pathos, feeling with)—all of which share the characteristic of blurring the distinction between self and others, introducing affective continuities in place of discontinuities" (481). Building upon the tensions embedded within this liminal perspective, this article explores mimetic tendencies buried within traces of (metallurgic) thing-power emanating from intergalactic and fictional matter (e.g., beskar from the Star Wars universe).

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We argue that the relationship(s) between humans and beskar across the Star Wars universe challenge boundaries between the organic and the artificial through a conceptualization of mimesis that is poietic (i.e., production) and non-passive (i.e., replication) (Bennett, 2017).

Metallurgy, matter, mimetics

Specifically, this work considers the curricular and pedagogical implications of media/tions with metal throughout the Star Wars universe (and beyond). That is, the posthuman inquiries made possible from encounters (e.g., treatment, processings, weaponization) with fictional metal (e.g., beskar) showcased in the popular show *The Mandalorian*. This inquiry is also concerned with metal's role in making possible our access to media and the ways the medium of media intersects with international, intergalactic, and cultural boundaries. Analyzing these intersections promotes a deeper understanding of humanity by engaging with what is mimetically reflected by the complex relationship between humans and metal. Perhaps paradoxically, mimesis within this context "does not admit any constituted model; it constructs models [...]It is a creative mimesis" (Lacoue-Labarthe, 1990, 227). Importantly, creativeness in this context is inscribed with various tensions relating to modes of extraction and production which have a mimetic relationship with the social sciences.

As the socially and ecologically devastating implications of humans seeking/harvesting metal are not new, coltan is a perfect (non-fictional) example of a materiality that requires extreme social and ecological wounding(s) in order to acquire, thus cultivating extreme geo-spatial problematics (Nest, 2011). Known as a "conflict mineral," coltan powers our iPhones while being brutally extracted by exploited workers from massive deposits in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Moran et al., 2014). According to a series of reports by The United Nations (UN) (UNSC 2001, 2002, 2003, 2008), extractive processes and profits of/from coltan played a significant role in the manifestation of a civil war in the DRC that led to the deaths of roughly 350,000 people between 1998 and 2001 (Coghlan et al., 2006; Roberts et al., 2001).

Copper used in televisions offers another example of the complicated relationship between (non)humans, metals, media, and ingenuity (Parikka, 2015a). Our lives are deeply entangled with the production and consumption of metals as well as the ethics of extraction. These entanglements are a result of the interaction of humans and minerals (i.e., extractionary practices and logics) and intra-action (i.e., "mutual constitution of entangled agencies" [Barad, 2007, 33]) between what is produced during these processes (e.g., technologies, media, ecological and spatial woundings, trauma-based labour). Yet, these metallic composites form the "black mirrors" that serve as our (e.g., human) interface(s) with the technological world; a world that is not neutral, not merely shaped by "a set of tools and not just a know what and know how, but also our way and being in the world" (Buran et al., 2021, 2). Put simply, as Lawtoo (2021b) has suggested, a black mirror "gives us [neither] a transparent window onto the 'real' world outside, nor allows for immediate insights into the technology inside" (525). Media, and our access to it, is quite literally mediated by metals. Copper, coltan, and other violently extracted metals make most of our lives and livelihoods possible—often blurring defined boundaries between thing and human (i.e., cyborg) (Haraway, 2016).

By foregrounding metal and its politics of identity articulation, representation, extraction, and exchange—in shows like *The Mandalorian*—"the geological does not stay on the surface" (Parikka, 2015a, 83). *The Mandalorian* provides a fertile territory in which to w(a/o)nder about ways that wo/man is (creatively) mimetic through and with metal(s) in ways beyond dominant

and static deployments of mimesis that centralize duplicity and reduplication. To this point, this research works within Taussig's (1993) notion that, "as so many moments of the mimetic, what we find is not only matching and duplication but also slippage, which, once slipped into, skids wildly" (115). Mimesis, in turn, becomes an ideal—yet slippery—entry point to interrogating "the double bind between the earth that shapes our media...and the media that, in return, shapes how we see the earth" (Litvintseva, 2018, 110). Following the "the flows of matter" (Parikka, 2015a, 23) and the potentiality of science fiction to further engage with the mimetic turn (Lawtoo, 2021a, b), we argue the role of beskar in *The Mandalorian* is a prime example of how mimesis can be conceptualized as poietic and productive, thus eroding the "ontological distinction between self and others, originals and copies, truths and lies, virtual attacks and real attacks" (Lawtoo, 2021b, 34).

In response to Bennett's (2009) call to "see what a metal can do rather than[...]to know what a metal is" (60), we ask: How might exceptionally vibrant matter(ing)s—such as beskar from *The Mandalorian*—establish a bridge between how humans encounter the more-than-human world(s) and each other? Attending this question, we first situate this research in a body of literature that foregrounds the historical relationship(s) between wo/man and metal (i.e., metallurgy) in several geo-spatial contexts before expounding upon how viewing scenes from *The Mandalorian* through a mimetic lens creates entry points for inquiry and dialogue within the context of (more-than-human) identity formation and expression. We conclude the article with implications for education and offer several concluding thoughts about how (re)conceptualizations of mimesis are capacious in (re)imagining our relationship to the more-than-human world around us.

Review of literature

As a concept, metallurgy offers a complex way of engaging with the relationship between wo/man and metal. Defined by Cotrell (2019) as "the art and science of making metals and alloys in forms and with properties suitable for practice use" (1), metallurgy traverses the limitations of economic contexts concerning metal by prioritizing the various stages metal and metal-making endures over finished metal-based products. It is important to note that despite this focus, the relationship between production and product are always already entangled and cannot be fully separated. Tracing the origins of metallurgical processes to sub-Saharan Africa, Childs & Killicks (1993) explore how methods of forging, smelting, and working with metal offers windows into social practices of humans. For example, "the forge and the crucible as marital relations, witchcraft, and the obligations of the living to their ancestors" (Childs & Killick, 1993, 320) are implicated by the production practices connected to metal. As these practices became more refined, social stratification widened as a result of growing external and internal demand for metal-based commodities. As demand rose, so did the need for larger-scale furnaces in which to mass-produce metal-makings (Roscoe, 1923). Consumption of finished metal products also holds mimetic implications that reveal cultural perspectives relating to metal production and product. For example, Houdsen and Armour (1959) discovered that ancient cemeteries in Zaire contained variegated abundances of copper and iron-based objects, suggesting that the vitality of (after)life was metallurgically entangled with possessing metal objects. As one might expect, the graves containing higher amounts of metal products held a closer relationship to the bloodline of the royal family.

Significantly, social/ness is embedded within production practices and finished products and constantly fluctuates over time (Guyer, 1986). Childs and Killick (1993) suggest that "an iron hoe, for example, may have multiple uses and meanings, depending on the context of its use, whether as an agricultural tool, a currency, a burial offering, bridewealth or dowry, or political regalia" (330). From this perspective, material artifacts perhaps should be thought of as being mimetic insofar that they express specific temporal reflections of ethnicity, economic status, gender, political/religious orientation, and power (Blier, 1984; Herbert, 1993). Moreover, and notwithstanding the rarity and value of metals (i.e., having them often signaled extreme wealth), "the mysterious transformation from ore to metal, usually likened to the human processes of gestation and birth, undoubtedly made metals especially appropriate symbols of fertility and productivity" (Childs & Killick, 1993, 331).

In another context, Linduff and Mei (2009) suggest that the historical relationship between wo/man and metal fosters conditions that lead to social complexity. Accordingly, in a study of metallurgy in ancient Eastern Asia, Linduff and Mei (2009) identify several crucial factors allowing for the development of metallurgic practices including "the presence of ores and the corollary existence or creation of adequate trade networks; the presence of local and/or itinerant artisans knowledgeable about metals and their properties; a community able to support such workers, or with a degree of social and/or ritual complexity to create a demand for metal products; [and] the ability to create high temperature furnaces for smelting and refinement of ores and final castings" (266). When these conditions are present, societies are able to advance at exponentially high levels thus accelerating the cultural trajectory of members of the community (Linduff, 1997, 1998; Linduff et al., 2000, Linduff & Mei, 2009). In this way, wo/man has always already had an intimate relationship with metals *and* metal-making within the (cultural) contexts of learning, being, and becoming.

Regardless of the social and cultural affordances metallurgy offers, mining metals has devastating consequences on the environment (Kelly et al., 2012; Norgate et al., 2007; Sengupta, 2021). These ecological hazards are both direct (i.e., mining and processing of metal which change the biosphere) and indirect (i.e., consumption of utility-based materials such as electric power by mining technologies) (Norgate et al., 2007). Furthermore, once the (social) life-cycle of metal-based products ends—despite the potential to be repurposed indefinitely—most attempts at recycling of metals falls short of making a significant impact on the environment (Wernick & Themelis, 1998). Considering the central role metals play in global production and consumption, and the formation of cultural identities, "improving resource efficiency and reducing losses in the metals sector cannot help but influence positive environmental change throughout the fabric of industrial society" (Wernick & Themelis, 1998, 493). Along with this optimistic positioning of (re)casting metallurgic practices, Norgate et al. (2007) suggest that only a "dematerialization will reduce the amount of metals required in most products" (847), thus altering the trajectory of destruction caused to the planet.

Gallagher (2020) builds on the idea of Anthrobscene (i.e., conceptualization of the world as being an environmental wasteland saturated with/by media [Parikka, 2015]), by asking us to rethink human relationships with technology. By making the case that dominant discourses about "using" or interacting with technology are framed around privileged and Western perspectives, Gallagher (2020) suggests that such positions are rife with problematic limitations that occludes "embodied relations with media materials in the phases that come

before and after use, in the production of technologies and in their decomposition" (372). Specifically—and perhaps ironically—while children in North America and Europe use technology on a daily basis, it is the children mining for coltan in the DCR, for example, that are being used *by* and *for* technological purposes. As part of an "underground turn" in modern technology media (Parikka, 2017, 170), Gallagher (2020) encourages us to become more attuned to what happens "behind the screens" (385), not just what unfolds on them.

Conceptual framework

Our approach to this Mandalorian and metallurgic inquiry is primarily informed by two intersecting concepts: Bennett's (2004, 2009) notion of (metallurgic) thing-power and IJsseling's (1990) conceptualization of mimesis.

(Metallurgic) Thing-power

Bennett (2009) reminds us that perhaps (re)positioning metal away from normative orientations of rigidity and inert-ness can be generative in denting *human* exceptionalism. When (re)imagined as vibrant, agency becomes metallurgically recast and metallics become significant agents within the human experience. Nested within vital materialism—a branch of new materialism—Bennett (2009) applies "vitality" to everyday objects or things. Defined as "the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (Bennett, 2009, viii), vitality, in this way, correlates to an affectual momentum of things. From this perspective, metal is "bursting with a life" (Bennett, 2009, 55) and contains (metallurgic) thing-power. While this form of agency is complex, we understand the theoretical alloy of metallurgy and thing-power to be underpinned by all aspects of the machinic assemblage (i.e., abstract machine from which the two forms derive [Deleuze & Guattari, 1987]). To this point, (metallurgic) thing-power implies that production practices (e.g., mining, smelting, refinement) and products involved (e.g., forge, crucible, metal-based objects) are co-constitutively melted into the human experience. Moreover, (metallurgic) thing-power contains affective capacities to "to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle" (Bennett, 2004, 351) on the assorted ways in which humans make sense of the more-than-human world.

Mimesis

According to IJsseling (1990), "man, it is said, is a mimetic being" (31) holding the desire and capacity to imitate each other and aspects of the more-than-human world. Being said—and despite the ambivalence of mimesis—"in mimesis other possibilities lie hidden which cannot be reduced to the opposition between real and unreal, or original and not original" (IJsseling, 1990, 34). In this way, factors relating to identity are perpetually masked, unmasked, and re-masked through various stages of imitation. We understand mimesis in this context as being a way to consider the reflective nature—and according to conceptualizations—of identity formation and expression. Mimesis draws attention to how people (creatively) mimic each other and nature. Important to IJsseling's (1990) approach to mimesis is the entangled relationship between mirrors and appearance(s). Specifically, IJsseling (1990) energetically states that "the mirror, and it is *the* example of mimesis, is seen as the place of appearance (*doxa*) but also as the place of appearing, and perhaps appearing is another word for being" (38).

We see both of these concepts working harmoniously in at least the following ways. First, as (metallurgic) thing-power draws our attention to intra-active/ness and intersections of *fictional* human (e.g., The Smith and Mando from *The Mandalorian*) and non-human entities (e.g., beskar), mimesis further complexifies the entangled nature of how certain *Mandalorian* identities—that are linked to metal and metal-making—are obtained and (re)produced. Second, this conceptual approach implicates the various *non-fictional* repercussions of metal production and consumption and serves as a framing for grappling with the wake of ecological destruction resulting from the mining of metals, metal-making(s), and metal-based objects.

Mandalorian/Beskarian context and modes of inquiry

Mandalorian context

Leaning into the aforementioned theoretical concepts, we created an inquiry-based framework to aid our analysis of several scenes from *The Mandalorian. The Mandalorian,* a live-action "space western" debuted on the Disney Plus streaming service in the United States in November 2019. A second season aired a year later. The show stars Pedro Pascal as "The Mandalorian" Din Djarin among the last of a race of storied warriors displaced from their home on the planet Mandalore. At the time depicted in the television show, Mandalorians are dispersed across the galaxy, many having gone underground. Djarin himself was adopted into the Mandalorian culture as a foundling. The Mandalorians are notable for their fighting prowess and their armor made of the highly prized metal beskar. Notably, their strict code of personal conduct means Mandalorians never show their faces to other humans. One of the show's themes considers how strictly these kinds of practices should be adhered to, circumstances for violating one's code of conduct, and what it means to be a "true" or authentic member of a communal order.

Beskarian context

The highly recognizable armor worn by Mandalorians (see Composite Two: The Entrance), a warrior people known for their hunting acumen, is composed of beskar. The Mandalore metal is an iron alloy that is notable for its durability. Its durability and high-melting point meant it could withstand both blaster fire and lightsaber attacks, making the Mandalorians one of the few real opponents of the Jedi (i.e., multi-species characters with extraordinary abilities including psychokinesis and the ability to read/control minds who are considered by many to be the moral safe-keepers of the Star Wars universe), whose lightsabers could cut through just about anything. The series features Djarin as an adult making his living as a bounty hunter in the immediate aftermath of the fall of the Galactic Empire (featured in the original Star Wars trilogy). His home planet Mandalore and its people have been all but destroyed by the Galactic Empire (i.e., ruling dictatorship of the galaxy often led by antithetical beings to the Jedi, known as Sith). As the Armorer (see Composite One: The Armorer), an important Mandalorian puts it, "the Empire is no more and the beskar has returned" (Favreau & Chow, 2019, 10:36). Moreover, Mandalore is uninhabitable and its people, as well as its beskar, are scattered about the universe. Cast into easily transferable and transportable ingot form stamped with Imperial insignia, beskar is what Din receives as payment for his bounty hunting activities, which he takes to a Mandalorian armorer—whom is also the (spiritual) leader of Mandalorians—to be fashioned into a suit of armor (see Composite One: The Armorer). In this way, the complex relationship between humans (e.g., Mandalorian, The Armorer) and non-humans (e.g., beskar) represents a "sort of return of the various materials to a geosynchronous orbit" (Parikka,

2015a, 127). Notwithstanding the particular skill needed to work with this fictional metal, beskar appears in several forms throughout the TV series. Most notably, in Din's and other remaining Mandalorians' armor and later in season two—a spear used during the final confrontation between Din and the show's primary light sabre-wielding antagonist, Moff Gideon.

Modes of inquiry

During this inquiry, we (re)watched both seasons of *The Mandalorian* looking for mimetic moments involving metal. That is, those instances when metal and mimesis seem to matter in and through media. In this way, we follow Parikka's (2015a, 2015b, 2017) suggestion that our current media era is deeply connected to geology and that in order to gain a more complex understanding of media, we must reconcile and analyze the (ecological) conditions that precede and follow its perpetual creation. Put simply, we attend not just to how things are but how they are known (Parikka, 2015a). In this case, we considered the devices implicated (e.g., television sets) in how we came to know both the show *The Mandalorian* and the titular character Mando (e.g., Din Djarin). We also contemplated how all Mandalorians and Din Djarin come to know themselves and are recognized through their association with beskar. Said differently, we approached this inquiry from the perspective that media, metal, and wo/man are irrevocably fused together.

To assist with mapping the "geological terrain from which the film emerges" (Litvintseva, 2018, 109), we created a set of guiding questions to compose our posthuman and mimetically-themed composite narratives (Wertz et al., 2011) about each of the selected scenes. Scenes were chosen in a way that attempted to represent/highlight beskar in two distinct ways (e.g., metal-making, finished product). Specifically, of each scene we asked:

> 1) How does the form of beskar contribute to the identity of all those connected to its creation and use?
>
> 2) To what extent does beskar act as a mirror and how does its presence/absence (re)animate those that come into contact with it?
>
> 3) What might we learn about non-fictional uses, creations, harvesting(s) of metals through the prism of science fictional universes?
>
> 4) How might centralizing the vibrancy of metals/beskar lead to an erosion of human exceptionalism?

After using the aforementioned questions to guide our shared and critical dialogue about each scene, we then created composite narratives that reflect "personal and professional experiences, memories, scholarly research, historical accounts, recent events, and fiction (Bell, 1987; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)" (Griffin, 2016, 367). While Willis (2018) substantiated the case for composite narratives in research constructed around the presentation of data gleaned from interviews, we were especially interested in the way that composite narratives hold the potential to prompt "contextualized and personalized accounts, [that] can help to build understanding of particular people and groups, in ways that are accessible to non-academic audiences" (477). Paired with our conceptual framework, taking such an approach allowed us to immerse ourselves in the relational textures (e.g., affects, relationships, animations) existing between wo/men and metal in *The Mandalorian*.

Composite one: The Armorer

Beskarian armor is what makes a Mandalorian a *Mandalorian*, and throughout the series, the metal—and all processes involved—becomes *the* symbol of (non-human) vitality (Bennett, 2009). As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) put it, "[m]etalworking, jewelry making, ornamentation, even decoration, do not form a writing, even though they have a power of abstraction that is in every way equal to that of writing" (401). If mimesis is a kind of manual, as IJsseling (1990) suggests, then in the armorer, we have a kind of manual-maker. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), smiths are neither nomadic, nor sedentary and invoke an ambivalence of feelings. Moreover, "the smith is simultaneously honored, feared, and scorned" thus existing in a non-symmetrical relationship with the nomads and sendentaries [and] the type of [metallic] affect they invent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 413). In *The Mandalorian*, the smith embodies this contradiction and further illuminates the complex range of (metallurgic) thing-power by entangling wo/man, metal, and metal-making. Known simply as The Armorer (Figure 1.), this character is sought out by other Mandalorians seeking spiritual guidance, armor repair, or the fashioning of indestructible protective plates.

Figure 1. The Armorer completes the suit of beskar.

Image: "Chapter 8: Redemption" (Favreau & Waititi, 2019, 29:26)

Interestingly enough, The Armorer, or smith as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) might say, remains positioned in a secret location requiring the often-described *nomadic* Mandalorians to seek her out. However, and perhaps paradoxically, it is The Armorer's sedentary location and intra-activity with the beskar that animates all Mandalorians' capacity to perform functionalities of nomadecy.

Whereas The Armorer is responsible for the fabrication of beskarian armor in the Star Wars universe, there is an irrevocable mimetic entanglement between coloniality and the retrieval of metals from the Earth in both a physical and narrative sense. When people think about

gold rushes in America, California[3] likely comes to mind. However, Georgia and the Appalachian region were the sites of the first major gold rushes in the U.S. This 1829 gold rush is often cited as the impetus to Andrew Jackson's issuance of the Indian Removal Act in 1830 and subsequent Trail of Tears. Publicly, mining organizations advertise a desire for fostering healthy and ethical relationships between excavation practices and surrounding communities. For example, the International Council of Mining and Metals (2021) deceptively holds a "vision for constructive relationships between metal mining companies and Indigenous Peoples that are based on mutual respect, meaningful engagement, trust, and mutual benefit" (para.1). However, we believe (metallurgic) extractive practices are insidious, irreversible, and privilege spatial wounding over communal well-being. Being said, this scene foregrounds Parikka's (2015a) insistence that "there is a metallurgical way of conducting theoretical work: ambulant flows, transversal connections, and teasing out the materiality of matter in new places, in new assemblages of cultural life in contemporary technological media" (23). While this connection between mining history in the United States and a science fiction show might seem purely metaphorical, we are reminded that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012) just as science fiction is hardly fiction, but rather a hyperreality (Lawtoo, 2021b).

Composite two: The Entrance

Relating to this scene, Din Darjin (e.g., The Mandalorian) enters a public space for the first time after donning his new armor (Figure 2.).

Figure 2. Din Djarin makes a public entrance, capturing everybody's attention.

Image: "Chapter 3: The Sin" (Favreau & Chow, 2019, 14:25)

Though his identity as Din is concealed, the mere presence of beskarian armor fashioned by The Armorer, reflects his identification as a *Mandalorian*, thus (re)animating the sensibilities and decorum of those socializing in the bar. We understand this scene to be an illustration of Bennett's (2009) (metallurgic) thing-power, or the way in which man-made items "exceed their statues as objects and manifest traces of independence or aliveness" (XVI) and perpetuate

[3] Of note, Author 1 lives in California and Author 2 lives in Georgia.

mimetic ways of knowing and be(com)ing in the world. In this way, perhaps mimesis can be conceptualized as co-constitute insofar that the affectual currents generated are antithetically registered/navigated and contingent upon social-economic status. Just as the iron hoe's purpose was always already in flux across time/space, so too was Din's entrance. For some, fear and trepidation were felt while others experienced feelings of placation considering Mandalorians' (supposed) attributes of integrity. Put simply, Din's entrance—and the presence of his armor—underscores the mimetic orientation that a copy that is not merely a static copy (Taussig, 1993), but rather a prism that is subjective to multiplicitous understandings and perspectives. Across this point, we might say that Din's armor contains an aliveness that (re)produces kaleidoscopic affects and *mirrors* the actions of those entangled in the armor's creation and those in its presence.

However, we find it notable that Din, The Mandalorian—a metal-man—comments disparagingly about droids, thus reflecting a hatred for metal beings. What might this aversion say about Din's relationship to himself and to metal? How might this tension map onto competition between mining companies and producers of technology, thus cultivating a hierarchy of both production and product? Perhaps, as Fuchs (2001) suggests, it is a matter of mimesis wherein "imitation compromises the narratives of national distinction by emphasizing inconvenient similarities and shared feelings" (4). To which we might ask: To what end might becoming more attuned to the entanglements between wo/man, material, material-making, deepen our understanding of human and non-human connectivity? And, how might these complex relationships underscore Ijsseling's (1990) position that through imitation, "man has made the world into what it is, and this means a cultivated world—in our times, a world controlled by technology" (31)?

Particular to Din, how might a perspective underpinned by such *inconvenient similarities* relating to metal and metal-making recast his conceptualization of non-human metal bodies (e.g., droids) and in turn, alter his own identity? We say this as we consider the functionality of droids both in the Star Wars universe and in our own societies; those androids are distinctively designed in the likeness of humans to attend to anthropocentric desires.

Significance and concluding thoughts

In 2010, Bennett asked: "What can it mean to say that metal—usually the avatar of a rigid and inert substance—is vibrant matter?" As discussed, Din Djarin in *The Mandalorian,* the non-neutrality and (metallurgic) thing-power of beskar propels, to various degrees, the actions and reactions of all the characters in the series. We have been thinking about how metallurgy and beskar might help us reimagine our own identities as human beings considering the direct and indirect role that metal plays in shaping everyday social, intellectual, and technological performativities. Within the context of education, we ask: Why metals? Thinking with metallurgy and posthumanist perspectives excavated our relationships as educators/learners/researchers to metal and the divergent ways that these entanglements create, influence, and sustain contexts relating to identity formation and articulation. As IJsseling (1990) notes, "identity therefore neither exists in the full possession of oneself nor in pure presence to oneself, but is appropriated and assigned in mimesis, and this appropriation and assignments are attended by a dispossession and an absence" (36).

While the overarching goal of teaching/education is to prepare students to ethically and critically engage with surrounding (past/present/future) worlds, we believe accounting for the

ways that humans have destroyed the land in search of metal is a vital, yet unfortunately underdeveloped line of inquiry. We are optimistic that exploring the intensities embedded within (non)fictional metal-scapes will further provoke new ways of thinking about identity, responsibility, justice, and perhaps most significantly, *co-existence* across more-than-human worlds. Further, critical engagements with media and technology holds the "potential to deliver open-ended and indeterminate sensations, movements, affects, thoughts, actions, and interactions in and across societies with pedagogical consequences" (Ellsworth, 2005, 126), thus presenting countless opportunities for inquiries into the complex and mimetic relationships between people, process, and product.

For us, engaging with *The Mandalorian* unveiled entry points for further considering the relationship between wo/man, metal, *and* media. Through a conceptualization of mimesis that operationalizes open-ness and slippage (Ijsseling, 1990; Taussig, 1993), we began to unfold our own understandings of how metal—and in turn media—impact the making and unmaking of what is means to be human in a more-than-human world. While this research unearthed the nuanced ways that metal is extracted, fashioned, deployed, leveraged, and registered, we also are left contemplating the subjective ways in which media is controlled, warped, and exploited (Lawtoo, 2021b) as well as the impact of these signifiers on public perception. As we write this article, we were utterly astonished to come across the title of an article from a wide-read international news source: "The Taliban are sitting on 1$ trillion worth of minerals the world desperately needs" (Horowitz, 2021). Considering the horrific rate of deaths and destruction occurring in Afghanistan, we are particularly concerned with the neoliberlal positionings of minerals over concern and care people, flora, and fauna throughout the communities impacted by actions of the Taliban.

Metals are part of our everyday existence. They make our modern lives possible. Our coins are metal, our communications are metal, as is our air, and the devices that make our (academic) work possible. Being said, tethering mimetic theoretical framings to metallurgy lays bare the problematic history of how we (e.g., humans) continue to treat each other and the ecologies that sustain our existence. Colonization (continues) to occur, over and over and, and, and….among other things, the desire to extract, control, and circulate metals. Extracting metals from Earth has resulted in unalterable damage to the relationships between humans and the planet. Moreover, this work is significant given the mimetic history between mining and modernist social science research (Williams, 2008). There, mining practices of ever-deeper excavation can be found, *un-metaphorically*, in the "surface-depth dialectics" of psychoanalysis and today's "data-mining" practices that occur everywhere, especially in our field, education (Parikka, 2017). Heightening our awareness of the harms caused by and through (mimetic) mining logics and practices is critical if we humans want to disrupt the cyclicity of ecological and spatial wounding. As Ferrando and Datta (2021) remind us, "we need to realize how much more we need because it is never enough" (108). Shalaby (2017) uses the "canary in a coal mine" metaphor to describe the ways children, in their particular sensitivity, serve as sentinels warning of poisoned air. With this in mind, mining must be(come) response-able because it is a model that—through nuanced mimetic reflections of self/others and the world—many follows. Hence, what happens in mining is imitated elsewhere and perpetuates onto-epistemological ways of being and becoming that are ecologically irresponsible, alarming, dangerous, and *unjust*.

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