

## An Interview with Lloyd Alimboyao Sy

Sarah Farley

If you look to your right or left walking from the Rudolph elevator bank to studio, you may notice a gray, 5 inch strip of rubber running in a straight line up the wall, across the ceiling, down the wall opposite, and beneath a metal cap below your feet. It looks like the rubber belt buses wear to make tighter turns. Inconspicuous, yet significant, the expansion joint is ever protecting Rudolph and Loria from running into one another. It’s a curious seam and it reminds me of the often unnoticed, small, yet significant connections connecting us to different communities and schools of thought. Meeting Lloyd at breakfast after church a few months ago was one such connection.

Lloyd is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, and is working on a book about the relationship between woodcutting in American letters, and questions of indigenous property, political agency, and environmental ethics. You may have also seen Lloyd in Yale Daily News for winning Jeopardy in January this year. Space, place and belonging are themes running through Lloyd’s work, and our conversation touches on each from both literary and personal perspectives. Our conversation, abridged here, ventures into a wide array of subjects from indigenous property and environmental ethics, to the love of desolate, forgotten places.

You might remember Wendell Berry’s quote from the call for submissions at the beginning of the semester:

“We have lived our lives by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption, that what is good for the world will be good for us.”

Berry has written extensively on the subject of living a life both good for us and good for the world, and often place and belonging are bedrock to his understanding of the matter. Printed here are a few of his thoughts on the subject, excerpts from his poem “This Place that You Belong To.” As we consider the immediate, near, and far off future, which will surely surprise us, here are two perspectives that may light our imaginations to what it will mean to belong in and to places in the future.

**SE** What led you to specialize in indigenous literature?

**LAS** I didn’t come into grad school thinking I would work extensively with native and indigenous literatures. I knew I was interested in questions about place. One of the things that I like most about American literature is that it seems to comment a lot on what it means to be from a particular region of the United States. The United States implies that there are 50 different geographic locales that somehow also form one locale. I’ve always been interested in my particular region — I grew up in the Midwest and I feel very, very Midwestern. I’m from Northern Illinois. I was interested in the question of what it means not only to be American, but to be regionally American.

By random happenstance, my future advisor

asked what I wanted to write my dissertation about, and I kind of panicked because I didn’t have an idea. But, about three weeks before that, I had a strange notion that it might be kind of cool to think about deforestation in the U.S.

**SE** What made you think about that at the time?

**LAS** I was reading a book called *The Prairie* by James Fenimore Cooper. The main character is living out in West Nebraska, or Missouri, or something. He says something like, “Man, whenever the wind blows from the East, I hear the sound of axes cutting down trees.” I was like, that’s a really interesting literary trope. It would be cool if someone did a study of what tree cutting was like in 19th century American literature.

Some of the common suspects for that genre are people like Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson. People who are somewhat well known to the general public, but my advisor encouraged me to consider native literatures. One of the things I realized while writing a chapter on William Apess is that it’s a lot more compelling to study space from a native perspective. Apess was sort of a 19th century social justice warrior on behalf of the Mashpee tribe who live on Cape Cod. They were undergoing a problem with wood poaching on their property. Apess looks upon the moment of environmental destruction as an opportunity to imagine different spatial formations for American people more broadly. So, looking at terrible things happening to the environment or moments of stealing, and discovering new ways to be. They all have different forms of doing this. For Apess, it’s about kinship and emotion, we need to organize space around different kin units. Whereas later in the century, other writers are like, what’s really important is that we discover how to be really good workers. So, they based their idea of creation on labor rather than kinship.

**SE** In writing about Apess,<sup>1</sup> you talk about “his advocacy display[ing] an acknowledgement of the human dependence on wood, not only insofar as it facilitates life, but as it builds community.” Could you talk about how this idea has changed over time in reference to the work you have studied?

**LAS** When we first encountered wood in the forest, our primary idea was, can we eat food if we burn this and cook something on it? It was a very sustenance [oriented] idea of wood. But, I think also very rapidly, one came to see that the fire, for instance, where one cooks food that helps engender human survival, also becomes a place where people naturally cook together. And then, they start talking together. And so, this thing that begins as a tool of survival rapidly becomes a tool of social belonging. This is sort of the basic idea of architecture, that almost goes without saying — what appears material is far more than something material. This is why architecture is important and not just engineering, because there is immediately in any sort of human space a recognition that it affects us beyond simply keeping the rain out. It’s good that concrete helps keep us warm and keeps the rain out, but also, by its shape, and by

its sheer presence, suggests an idea. And we, as humans, experience that idea even if we can’t articulate it immediately. Wood is a really kind of wonderful substance. Right? It’s so clearly natural, and it’s useful in so many ways. It can become charcoal. It can be shaped into canoes, into houses. It’s also something that helps us raise our kids, because it helps us cook our food.

It’s useful for a whole bunch of survival purposes, and, because it’s useful for all these survival purposes, it takes on this kind of spiritual or psychological importance as well. Anytime a native person is talking about wood, they’re drawing on a whole host of associations that are partly survival based, but also based in a kind of culture that has developed around that survival, and I think that the fire was a good example of that. The 19th century is a tragic story of dispossession. Different governmental impositions lead to a continuing divestment of native space. This culminates in 1887 with the Dawes Severalty Act, which essentially takes reservation lands in the United States and apportions them out to individual families. Where a tribe may have been living together on 50 acres of land at some point, they then divide that up into 2 acre plots, which are given to individual families. And, only part of the original 50 acres is now still belonging to native peoples.

So, it’s a forced imposition of individualism over communalism, which breaks with all sorts of native ways of belonging. This is all tied up with wood, because that land has wood on it. And so, the wood goes from being communally owned or managed through complicated forms of community into being managed by very individualistic ideas of property. The writers I work with, a negative stance is that they’re accommodationists or assimilationists towards the federal government. A positive stance is that they are pragmatic. They see that there’s really no way to stop this. The American military is big and has a lot of guns, so it’s difficult to stop this onslaught, this change in land.

I see the writers at the beginning of the 20th century, suggesting ways of labor. Playing within the game of individualistic property holdings, but then, hopefully building something that more resembles those initial forms. It’s really a story of how one responds to a situation that is continuously getting worse, a situation of increasing cultural dispossession over time.

**SE** How has your work influenced your understanding of belonging?

**LAS** I don’t know if I can come up with a better answer than a clear, personal answer to the question of belonging. We all probably know what it’s like to feel belonging in a place, and belonging within a place. And, we also all probably know what it feels like to not belong somewhere, to not belong within a space. I feel like an interloper in certain buildings I go to at Yale, and I feel very at home in certain buildings I go to at Yale. It can be a city. Same principles there. It can be the idea of a nation. It can be way more abstract than that. You know? Like, I feel a sense of belonging in the digital space. One way to put it, is there is no experience of space or place that is not immediately also

considering the degree of belonging that one feels within that space or place.

My research looks at indigenous authors, [of whom a lot] have been painted as assimilationists. And, I think that one of the reasons why some of them have been painted as assimilationists is because they are keen on belonging within the idea of America.

So they’ll talk in their writings about how they live within a nation. They’d like to belong in that nation. That’s a very abstract way of putting it, but they’ll also take more concrete steps to feel belonging within that nation. For instance, my favorite writer that I work with is this woman named Zitkala-Ša. Her real name is Gertrude Simmons, but she goes by Zitkala-Ša, which in Lakota means Red Bird. She is always talking about how does one belong in America. And then, she’ll also do things like dress up in traditional native clothing, and perform some sort of native dance or song in front of an audience of mostly white people.

In that moment, she is belonging in a physical space, in a building, built by white people. This is why people are like, oh, that’s not good, you know? She’s advancing a stereotype of native peoples. And then, she’ll go home and write more about belonging in American space, but then also write about how foolish the people who came and watched her were. She wanted to go and belong there. But also, while she was there, she was hyper aware of how weird what she was doing was, and how problematic what she was doing was. So, I guess this is just an acknowledgment that when we’re inhabiting space, we are always caught in this sense of belonging and not belonging. I don’t think that the writers I look at give any firm definitive ideas about how one might achieve something like belonging in any space. I don’t think it’s true to how humans experience space.

**SE** Looking 100 years in the future, how would you hope forests would be spoken about and experienced?

**LAS** There’s two intertwined hopes. That people who go into the forest recognize that American forest space, while seeming to give the illusion of pure wilderness is in fact extremely mediated by human hands. So, hope that they can see that these sorts of spaces rest upon the dispossession of native lands, but knowing that history does not completely divest them of their enjoyment of this space. And the other hope is that people can have a similar beneficial experience with their built environments. I hope we see trees and forests that exist in urban spaces as being every bit as wonderful as trees and spaces outside of urban spaces. I’m a profound humanist in some ways. I like that humans go and shape nature. I hope they do so with lots of consideration, with a lot of nuance, and that they do so in ways that pay honor to the land. These things can coexist, and wonderfully coexist, and we can be every bit as moved by something super-artificial as we can be by something super-natural. The reason I call this an unrealistic hope is because I’m basically just asking people to be more on fire with the spirit of being alive, and I know that a lot of people feel that way around

trees. I feel that way around trees too sometimes. I also feel very on fire while looking at a concrete building sometimes. You know? One of the most beautiful places in the world to me is this decrepit train station in New Jersey. I hope people experience space with a lot of attention.

**SE** Would you like to talk more about the train station in New Jersey?

**LAS** It’s weird. It’s in Jersey City. There’s a light rail that goes around the city, and there’s this staircase that leads up to this corridor. It’s glass on both sides. And then there’s like a neon sign that’s never lit up. And I don’t know what it says, because it’s never lit up. And it looks like it’s out of the eighties. It looks like it hasn’t been refurbished or cleaned since the eighties. But every time I look up at it, I’m like, that’s so great. You know?

I think I sort of appreciate that no one ever took down the neon sign. And it still retains its shape even if it’s really dirty. Over the last couple of years, I’ve been thinking about how what’s really important about literature is not that it directs our attention towards something. I’m sure it’s important to consider the actual object that is the subject of literature, but I think that one of its values is that it actually just corrals our attention at all.

I would wager that most human beings feel happier when they are able to focus on singular entities, when they’re able to corral their attention towards certain things for however much time. I think that nature is sort of like a book in that it really commands your attention and forces you to cut out the distractions. And then the next step, the really crucial step is that we apply such things to human beings. I think that people find themselves increasingly dissatisfied with the level of distraction. The opposite of distraction is attention. So I hope that space spurs people to pay attention to things. I think it can. Maybe this is the importance of architecture.

**SE** It’s interesting that you can design something with intention and clarity to hold someone’s attention. But then something blown over on the street can be just as capturing of our attention. If we’re willing to look at it and see it.

**LAS** Right. It could be anything.

**This Place that You Belong To**

It is hard to have hope. It is harder as you grow old, for hope must not depend on feeling good and there is the dream of loneliness at absolute midnight. You also have withdrawn belief in the present reality of the future, which surely will surprise us, and hope is harder when it cannot come by prediction any more than by wishing. But stop dithering. The young ask the old to hope. What will you tell them? Tell them at least what you say to yourself.

[...]

Because we have not made our lives to fit our places, the forests are ruined, the fields eroded, the streams polluted, the mountains overturned. Hope then to belong to your place by your own knowledge of what it is that no other place is, and by your caring for it as you care for no other place, this place that you belong to though it is not yours, for it was from the beginning and will be to the end.

[...]

No place at last is better than the world. The world is no better than its places. Its places at last are no better than their people while their people continue in them. When the people make dark the light within them, the world darkens.

<sup>1</sup> Stopping by Woods in Mashpee Territory: Belonging in William Apess’s Indian Nullification

Visit [yalepaprka.com](http://yalepaprka.com) to read the unabridged version of this interview.





### A Dispatch from the Rudolph Hall Old Folks Home Colin Morse

There is a lot of tragedy in the world right now. What has happened at Yale is not the worst of it, but I write this to share with you what I have seen in the past couple weeks. To be upfront, I support the full decolonization of Palestine and the complete liberation of the Palestinian people. Stopping the genocide and halting the flow of weapons are the most urgent necessities, but this is not the end goal. An end to the occupation and a free Palestine is the goal. On Monday, April 22nd, around 7 o'clock in the morning, the Yale police department began arresting peaceful protestors the exact same way it arrested those who protested Yale's connections to apartheid in South Africa and the Vietnam War.

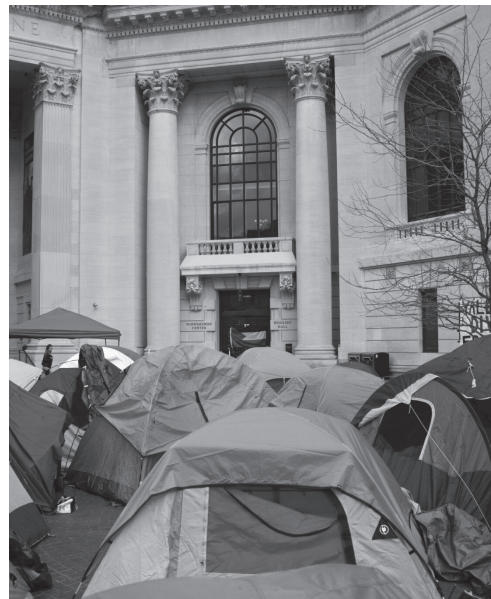
I've been involved in many protests and movements, from opposing the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, to Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. All those times, I have been with comrades who knew the lengths that institutions of wealth and empire would go to protect their interests. I've been arrested multiple times and many of my friends have as well. We all know it's part of the fight.

I had forgotten that here at Yale, there are many people who are getting involved for the first time, acting out for the first time, and speaking up for the first time. On Monday, many people were arrested for the first time and many more saw their friends arrested for the first time, all in Yale's attempts to silence them. I can talk about the heartbreak of seeing them so hurt by this institution that they came to for education, but that wouldn't really be right.

Instead I will tell you about the pride and inspiration I feel, when those who had been arrested, upon release, returned straight away to a rally and led us all in chants of "Free Palestine!" While Peter Salovey and the Yale administration have tried to spin a twisted narrative, make no mistake that these demonstrations are being organized by students just like us. Their conviction and resolve to fight in the face of criminal charges and threats of academic expulsion is a beautiful light in these dark times.

Finally, just let me say that this is not over. It won't be over until Yale divests, until the genocide is halted, and until Palestine is free. Such things don't happen quickly, and powers like the Yale Corp are waiting for us to tire and burn out. What I ask of all of you, is that when you see your fellow students begin to tire, begin to fall, we must help them back up and not walk away. Join your fellow students who are giving their all. If you oppose war and genocide, join your fellow students, provide your presence and strength so that they can recover some of theirs. If you haven't given your time and support, here is the place, now is the time.

No one is free until everyone is free.



↑ The wall of bookshelves was installed around the curved steps of Beinecke Plaza, in response to the ongoing genocide being perpetrated by the Israeli state against the Palestinian people. The bookshelves carried two messages painted on the first and last bookshelf: Books not Bombs, and All Walls Will Fall. The 36-foot long wall was meant to echo the multitude of border walls in Palestine that imprison and divide the Palestinian people. Yet the initially blank wall was soon filled with messages of love and resistance, symbolizing the resilience and steadfast belief that someday soon Palestine will be free. The bookshelves themselves reference the destruction of Gaza's Universities, and Yale's investment in Israeli weapons that pay for those bombs. Instead of investing in books and education, Yale continues to invest in the Israeli genocide being perpetrated against the people of Palestine.

Words by Moss Brenner-Bryant

**Ten Years**  
Jany Xu

ten\* variants include tin, tain, tent, tinu

tenant one who holds a lease

tenant maintenance to hold in good condition through continuous upkeep

tenet an opinion or doctrine one holds

tenet A large land mass held together

continent

what will we still ten in 10?

### Climate Action Plan Bulletin

Yale's 2025 Sustainability Plan has 8 months left of its 9 year life span (23 out of their 41 goals achieved as of 2023, carbon offsets, and a couple LEED buildings), with many professional schools following suit through school-specific action plans. The School of Architecture has not published commitments to sustainability, instead relying on individual efforts to make headway; like the banning of foam or the introduction of the dual degree program with YSE.

This year, Green Action worked with an ad hoc faculty and staff committee to correct for this absence. Conversations with the committee identified a focus on culture, curriculum, and material usage; a departure from the typical plan that is grounded in facility usage and operational carbon emissions. This departure comes as an acknowledgement that our impact will reach far beyond Rudolph Hall; as an industry we are the cause of a plurality of global GHG emissions, and the current structures of Sustainability and Resilience are an inadequate basis for addressing that responsibility.

A draft Climate Action Plan is under review, and plans for implementation in Fall 2024. The proposal will prioritize the urgency of strengthening socioecological thinking as integral to architectural education. It will also give members of the YSOA community tangible goals by which to measure the efforts made by the administration, by the faculty, and by the students.

### The Alterlife Tara Vasanth

The "Alterlife," coined by Canadian academic Michelle Murphy, refers to the condition of simultaneously becoming and unbecoming, the acknowledgment that bodies are not separable from land, water, air, and even other human beings.<sup>1</sup> It is this paradox that lives inside every immigrant, and the children of those immigrants, who hold far less of that duality.

I inhaled and it hit me: that unmistakable blend of diesel, incense, and heat wafting in from the busy streets told me I was home. I stepped out of the airport and was inundated with rickshaws, carts, and crowds. My father expertly wove us through the masses and hailed a taxi. After nearly a decade, I returned to India as a twenty-three year-old woman.

100. My grandfather is nearly a century old. He lives in a Bangalore rocked by World War II, shaped by Partition violence, and newly independent, but influenced by the British Empire. He speaks with an English accent.

10. My father lives in Bangalore for a decade before leaping continents and making a life for us in Texas.

0. I am born and raised in Dallas, never living in Bangalore.

The driver honked at a cow resting on the road before turning into a quiet corner. Before us, my mother's ancestral home, named Veda Nilaya,<sup>2</sup> rose up from behind the gates like a yellow sun. I took off my shoes and crossed the stone threshold, eager to meet my grandfather after ten years apart. As soon as I walked into the room, Kannan thatha, who was ninety-two years old, sprang up from his chair and pressed my hands together in his. He looked hard into my eyes and without a word, he shuffled to the kitchen to make me chai. Kannan thatha flitted from one end of the counter to the other like a hummingbird, rounding up the spices and tossing them into the pot sitting on a hot plate. He came to rest right in front of the pot, stirring wildly with one hand while the other steadied the brew. I looked over his shoulder, suddenly aware of how small he was and how much I had grown.

His simple gesture touched me deeply. In spite of his fragility and age, he summoned the strength to serve his guests. I felt as though no more than a day had gone by since I last visited him. The tea he prepared for us was more than tradition and hospitality, it was an expression of endurance that immediately reunited us. It was kinship in a cup, and it overflowed.

Your identity is patchwork, filling in the wears and tears with fragments, moments, and gestures that bring you closer to where you came from. The tapestry of my heritage constitutes and reconstitutes my view of time and togetherness. Perhaps Kannan thatha and I can chat about this over tea soon.

<sup>1</sup> Murphy 118, "Against Population, Towards Alterlife" in Making Kin not Population  
<sup>2</sup> Translates to "abode of knowledge" in Sanskrit

### Taking Brief Stock of Three Orders of Magnitude

By stepping backwards in magnitudes of scale and time, 100 | 10 | 0 asked contributors to:

**100:** Understand our many visions of the future by means of the past,  
**10:** Consider the powers and practices behind institutional change, and

**0:** Frame advocacy now through the reciprocity between conversation and action.

100 | 10 | 0 is about environmental action, but environmental action is about everything now. It is infrastructure, translations, community tradition, stone. It is self, glass, wild rice, plastic. It is poetry, weather, New York, Khrushchevka. The plurality is disorienting, but decision paralysis and moratorium only benches us, and change is long past here.



Contributors questioned how we measure our role in change—seeing future practice as novel relationships with time and community by challenging preconceptions on commodified knowledge and economics as establishment tools that will continue engagement within a broken cycle. A 'green' future is necessary; a just one relies on granular, conversational progress.

Thank you for writing, thank you for reading, Camila, Charlotte, Hannah, Michael, Natalie, Peter

**Graphic Design** Jeewon Kim + Davy Dai  
**Coordinating Editors** N+C+C+M+P+H

Dymaxion Map, locations from Volume 10 pieces  
Dates from Volume 10 pieces