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# Enjoy Every "Meaningless" Pleasure

—A music review of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*

## Zongshan Wu

One evening after a rain, the city lanes were as crowded as ever in the evening rush hour. The red glow from the taillights of the front car filtered through the residual rain and blurred the window. The moist air, mixed with dirt and the smell of the rain, came into the car through a small crack in the window. A medley of car horns blaring, the staccato notes of traffic police whistles piercing the air, and the mellifluous strains of ‘*De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*’ flowing from the radio enveloped the entire car. That was the first time I encountered *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*.

Like every classic song, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* spins a tale of its own.

*De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* was created by The Police, a famous British rock band formed in the 1970s with singer and bassist Sting, drummer Stewart Copeland, and guitarist Andy Summers. It is a renowned band that has won the *Grammy Awards* five times. Compared with famous songs such as *Every Breath You Take* and *Don't Stand So Close To Me*, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* is like a tiny star drowned in the bright light of other stars, seeming inconspicuous within. But actually, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* continues the unique style and sums up the character of The Police, which absolutely is a perfect interpretation of this legendary rock band.

There are three main characteristics of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*: concise arrangement, improvisational composition, and poetic lyrics.

In contrast to modern pop music, which relies heavily on electronic instruments, such as keyboards, drum machines, and synthesizers, to achieve an

aural flourish, the arrangements of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* are straightforward, only using bass, drums, and guitars to complement the vocals, which makes Sting's voice cleaner and helps it stand out from the music.

In terms of composition, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* also maintains improvisation. Stewart Copeland once mentioned in an interview that their classic songs, which are still sung by the public today, may only take five or six minutes to write in the studio. This kind of style makes their music more dynamic and creative.

What's more, the most prominent characteristic of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* is its poetic lyrics. The Police broke the “manic” and “cathartic” stereotype of traditional rock music. Compared to the savage image of hard rock and heavy metal that originated in the 1960s, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* is not only simple and relaxed in its arrangement but also more poetic in its lyrics. In the creation process of The Police, Sting experimented with composing their lyrics as poetry. Neat antithesis and comprehensive structure are present. The message is expressed delicately and with connotation. This unique way of creating makes their lyrics not only catchy but also endurable for people to ponder and savor.

At the beginning of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*, the simple, repeated drum beats and chords create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere, as if to take the listener into an interesting story. At the same time, this powerful, consistent sense of rhythm also sets the whole song's tone, forming an echo to the chorus.

Moving on to the lyrics, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da*



*Da* remains simple and regular on the drums, keeping the whole song relaxed and in tune with the theme of the song—enjoy “meaningless” pleasure. At the same time, in order to keep the song from falling into monotonous and boring patterns, The Police used the gradual change of melody and the progressive singing emotion to make the song full and rich.

The most important part of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* is the chorus, where The Police bluntly and emphatically expressed the theme of the song. In the lyrics, it keeps repeating “*De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da*”. You don't have to think about the meaning of it, because it's just a beautiful melody. You don't have to worry about missing it, because you can hear it again after a short period of the lyrics. In the melody, this part reinforces the light sound emitted by the cymbals as a background to set off the vocals, turning the simple lyrics into something more interesting and making the listeners feel that this “meaningless” moment also seems a pleasure.

In the ending, *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* seems to echo the beginning of the song with a similar rhythm. Meanwhile, by way of repetition and diminuendo, the listener will be brought back to reality from the music without consciousness. When the music is already gone, it is like the moment you close the storybook after having finished reading an interesting story. There is a feeling of wanting more.

Obviously, this kind of innovative style is rare in rock music and even can be called strange. In the 1960s and 1970s, driven by economic development, British music entered a golden age. During the “Rock Revolution”, Britain became one of the global centres of rock music. In this period, British music culture started to show a trend of diversification. However, under the strong influence of mainstream rock music, the innovation of The Police was not well received in the British music scene and was even attacked as “pseudo-rock” by some British journalists. Because there was not much room to develop in Britain, The Police went to the US with a commitment to their music.

In the 1970s, a stagflation crisis occurred in the US. Gone are the golden days of the American economy, with massive unemployment and severe inflation. Unemployment, in particular, was at its highest level since the Great Depression. In this social dilemma, young people in the US had a stronger sense of rebellion and hoped to jump out of the shackles of reality through music. As a result, the music of The Police was particularly admired in





the US. So, they went on tours in the US. Capitalizing on the strong cultural influence of America around the world, The Police rose to fame. By the time The Police returned to Britain, they were already a household name.

The Police were hugely influential from the 1970s and 1980s to the early 2000s. With their music, they gave young people the power to break the rules and insist on being themselves, helping them find their own way of expression in a difficult time, enjoy every day, and cherish every moment.

Decades have passed since the initial unveiling of this melodic masterpiece, but I can still feel the charm of this song.

Whenever the melody of *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* entered my ears, I felt like I was going back to those “meaningless” moments in my memory. Sitting in the bus seat, I listened to music and watched the scenery out the window. Sitting on the balcony floor, I carefully looked for dead leaves in the branches of the plants and cut them off. In self-study classes, I read those novels unrelated to my homework... These memories are familiar but unique.

It's hard for me to find some essential meanings for those moments because they could not make my exams easier or have a significant impact on my future, but perhaps the simple and real joy they brought to me actually was their most important meaning. Bertrand Russell once said: “The time you enjoy wasting is not wasted time.” I think that is the way that *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* makes me feel.

As the lyrics in *De Do Do Do, De Da Da Da* try to express, when you are overworked with a chaotic mind and desperate to find clear logic to restore yourself to a productive “working machine,” it is better to take a break from stress and enjoy some “meaningless” pleasures. Take a trip to a faraway place, have a cup of coffee and chat with a friend you haven't seen for a while, go for a walk in a park, or simply stand on your balcony with your eyes closed, enjoying the breeze. These simple but real pleasures can always bring an ordinary yet blissful day.

“De do do do de da da da / Is all I want to say to you / De do do do de da da da / They're meaningless and all that's true.”

In the rush of life's journey, cherish your time, feel the moment, and enjoy every “meaningless” pleasure.

# Finding the déjà vu moments in our growing pains

—A music review of *Seventeen*



Zhengyang Liu

**A**s a piece tucked into Sharon Van Etten's 5th album, *Remind Me Tomorrow*, the song *Seventeen* serves as a thread between the preceding and the following songs of the entire album, experiencing déjà vu by recalling the process of growing up. Van Etten is a Brooklyn-based singer, songwriter, and actress who has made waves at the forefront of indie rock from the beginning of her career. Her music is best known for a perfect combination of rambling folk lyrics and brooding melodies, which is intimately called "a collective healing" by the fans. This album was made after a break since Van Etten felt overwhelmed by the intensive 4th-album tour schedules. During her break, Van Etten continued her study in psychology, acted in minor roles in films, and became a parent, which was shown as reflections in her new album.

Déjà vu is the situation and things that we face with conditions similar to those before, which not only brings back last-time memories but also last-time feelings and emotions. However, our mentality has already changed. On the one hand, we attempt to forget it if it brings us pain. On the other hand, we try to hold on to it and carry on. This song is like a memoir of experiencing déjà vu written and produced by the artist herself.

In the first verse of the song, Van Etten speaks to her younger self and sings: "I think that you're all the same/constantly being led astray", which implies that even though she experiences a life that consistently reminds her of the past, those bad decisions remain in her grown-up life. We all experience troubles that cannot be figured out or solved, even if we encounter them twice. When we face the problems again, déjà vu comes, and then our bodies flood with gut-twisted insecurity.

In the first chorus, Van Etten sings, "Downtown harks back/Halfway up the street/I used to be free/I used to be seventeen." Here, "used to be free" suggests that she isn't as free as when she was seventeen, and she misses her younger self even if it was a chaotic teenage life. What makes growing so painful? I believe that part of the pain comes from the failure to find similar happiness in our younger times. The upside of déjà vu is a feeling we've all been looking for in our closest family, friends, or even partners, which we believe could

lead us to happiness. Van Etten misses the déjà vu of her younger free self. In the music video of this song, Van Etten redoes the things in her seventeen: taking subways from Brooklyn to Queens, climbing iron gauze from one neighborhood to another, and treating New York City as her playground. The similar feeling that is referred to as déjà vu is like the first time we experienced friendship, even as simple as receiving a bar of chocolate from a friend, but as we get older, we find it hard to recapture the similar feelings again when we grow up. It is all gone.

What's more, Van Etten weaves her second verse into an experienced old-hand narrative before landing on a clear closure to the past. "Down beneath the ashes and the stone/Sure of what I've lived and have known/I see you so uncomfortably alone/I wish I could show you how much you've grown." In interviews, Van Etten confessed that the older she got, especially after having a son, the more she understood her parents when the 17-year-old did not believe in them. There is no doubt that everyone has been through more-or-less rebellions and mistrust against elders. Now, déjà vu plays the role of a message, an apology, and forgiveness for both her parents and herself. Meanwhile, acknowledging her weaknesses makes her what she is at present, and she embraces them. It is a song of quiet praise for youth, a love letter to where she grew, and an appreciation of life.

Apart from the lyrics, Van Etten's music production gives *Seventeen* a nostalgic filter, taking us back to the carefree state of mind. From the start, the obvious, clear, and heartbeat-like rhythm is made by strong drumbeats throughout the whole song, together with continuous electric guitar distortion, exuding the reckless freedom of standing on the sunroof of a moving car and spreading arms wide. In the bridge before the last chorus, the singer sings viscerally in a potent voice, "Who's my shadow? /I know what you're gonna be," suggesting the confidence that transcends the unbearable past.

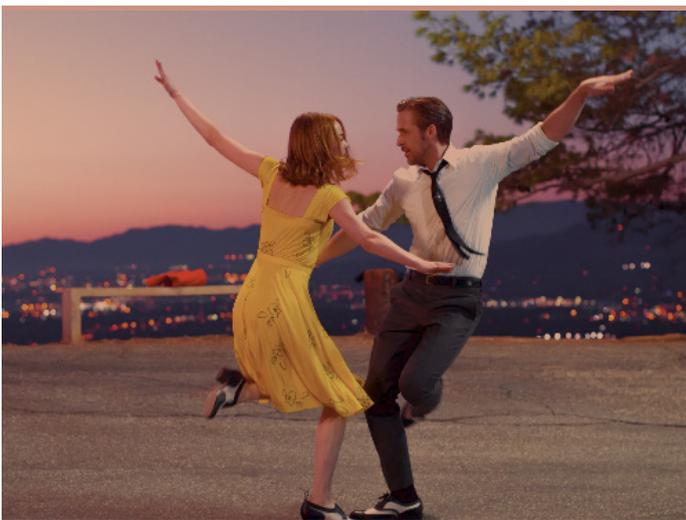
Nevertheless, growth becomes a process of witnessing occasional triumphs and usual dismal moments, leaving us reckless and in despair. The song is like a reassuring hug and comes across as a grown-up telling the younger self: carry your déjà vu moments, then you are going to be all right.

# What if...

—A review of the epilogue in *La La Land*

Yimin Sun

**H**ave you ever considered traveling back to the past to alter every choice you made in order to accomplish a dream or expectation? Damien, the director of *La La Land*, uses fantasy to make Mia and Seb's desire to be together become reality. As Mia occasionally walks into Seb's jazz club and hears the tune from the time they first met, it is like déjà vu to Mia that her memory rewinds for the first time through this familiar melody. This time, Mia defies reality's harshness in an effort to achieve their unattainable fantasy of being together. All the audiences hope the story ends here, but the director still pulls us back to a reality in which Mia and Seb are not together but left with a smile.



Focusing on this arrangement in the epilogue, this movie review explores how dreams and reality intertwine and diverge.

*La La Land* is an American romantic musical film, which is about pursuing the dream and a relationship between a struggling pianist called Seb and an unknown actress called Mia. When depicting the relationship between Seb and Mia at first, the director Damien builds a classic Hollywood romantic structure in the first half of the movie, which is two people first meet with conflict, but then they fall in love with each other by chance. When they first meet, Seb, annoyed by his dismissal from the restaurant for not following

orders to play traditional Christmas pieces, ignores Mia's praise for his jazz improvisation. Until months later, Mia notices Seb playing in a 1980s pop cover band at a party, and then their chemistry ignites in a dance at dusk. Afterward, their almost perfect relationship lets audiences enjoy this fantasy and hope to see their happy ending.

However, just like the title *La La Land*, it is an unrealistic fantasy that cannot be true. Their pink bubbles are soon popped by reality. Mia likes the man who is crazy about pursuing his jazz club dream and accompanying her. But now, she thinks Seb has changed because he submits to reality and reluctantly joins a pop-oriented band as a keyboardist. For Seb, he takes that job because he misunderstands the conversation between Mia and her mother that she needs money. After consideration, Seb suspends his dream temporarily and takes the job. Their opinions of reality cause a crack in their relationship and halt their ability to pursue their dreams, so they choose to break up.

The distinction between the dream and reality reaches its climax in the epilogue of *La La Land*. After this separation, Seb and Mia achieve their dreams. Mia becomes a film star and has a harmonious family. Seb opens a jazz bar. One day, when Mia occasionally goes into this bar with her husband, Mia recognizes the hanging sign she had once designed for Seb, and Seb spots Mia in the

*“That now our dreams may finally come true...”*

*—Lyrics from City of Stars*

crowd. To welcome Mia, Seb plays the same piece from the first time he met Mia. With the music and his eyes, Mia seems to have a feeling of déjà vu. Then, all their experience is rewritten through a montage, which is a film technique to piece together all the different cuts into a new story. However, all their former arguments become merriment.

The first segment is their first meeting. This time, Seb does not rush her but directly kisses her. The next piece is that Mia and Seb do not fail to keep any appointments they make but happily enjoy their dates together. During the first part of this montage, the colors in the screen are adjusted in high saturation, and this fantasy is performed as a form of music production with the violins and other orchestras added to make the background more splendid. All these elements remind the audience that it is totally a beautiful fantasy. In the second half of the epilogue, the glamour of stage production fades away as the orchestras stop but only with the piano. Mia and Seb curl up together to see their fantasy post-wedding life video shot by a rolling camera. After that, Mia and Seb wander in the street and go to a pub occasionally, holding hands just like Mia and her real husband. This montage is a close loop of this fantasy that can be perfectly connected to the beginning of this epilogue. After this montage, the two characters are back to reality. When the last musical note stops, they watch each other with a glimpse of a smile and a slight nod. It seems like an agreement with each other about their decision and the satisfaction of their lives. From here, audiences cannot help thinking, what if Seb accepts Mia’s compliment at their first encounter? What if Seb attends Mia’s drama show in time? What if Seb accompanies Mia to Paris to act? If they choose these decisions, could they be together?

The answer is no. This fantasy is based on their choices of a perusing dream, so they only can choose one of them. The epilogue of *La La Land* depicts more than just a fantasy dream but also the gap between reality and dream. In this movie, two characters can either choose to live in *La La Land* so that all things can come true, or they can hold the dream and choose to live in reality. Mia and Seb explicitly choose the latter one, in which their dream is exchanged for their love, because *La La Land* is rare, while the cruel reality is common. Same as the setting in the epilogue, even though the majority of the plot is their fantasy, Mia and Seb are still back in reality. *La La Land* reminds us that dreams and reality are often at odds. A dream can be a lighthouse to guide your life path so that you will not be mediocre, but it can also be a fantasy if people are drawn to their imagination and do nothing to pursue it.

Because those imperfect things are so cruel and frequent in reality, we are so desperate to maintain that dream. However, if all “what ifs” can come true in reality, dreams will not have significance. Instead of imagining or regretting those things that cannot be changed, just smile and follow your dream.



# Echoes in Translation: Translators and déjà vu

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*Elsewhere* sat down with two graduated students and an Assistant Instructor in Applied Translation Studies at UIC to hear their thoughts on “déjà vu” and translation. Yifan Cao serves as an Assistant Instructor in the Department of Language and Culture at UIC. His academic journey led him to pursue a master’s degree in Language Studies at City University of Hong Kong. Ruifeng Li pursued a postgraduate programme in Audiovisual Translation and Localisation at the University of Leeds after graduating from UIC. Currently, he works as a Project Manager at an audiovisual translation company in London. Yanjun Wu graduated from UIC in 2023 and continues her studies at the University of Edinburgh, pursuing a master’s degree in Translation Studies. For clarity and brevity, their responses have been edited.

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Figure 1: A photo of Yifan Cao



Figure 2: A photo of Ruifeng Li



Figure 3: A photo of Yanjun Wu

**Elsewhere:** Let's start the interview here. In your opinion, what is the connection between the translation and the "déjà vu"?

**Cao:** Starting from the translation of the word "déjà vu" itself, I would think more about its untranslatability nature. Because the word "déjà vu" is French and describes a feeling that, in some way, you have already experienced what is happening now. There happens to be no completely equivalent expression in English, so it is borrowed directly, which adopts "borrowing" as the translation technique. Similar examples include the four expressions of "normal school" in English, French, Chinese, and Japanese. The English phrase "Normal School" is translated from the French "école normale", which means "model school", and then English began to use normal to mean standard and model. The Chinese proper noun "Shifan" originated from the Japanese "Shihan (しはん)", which means "model".



**Li:** Engaging in translation practice exposes me to a diverse range of texts and domains, enriching my experience in the process. This exposure enables me to draw from past experiences and adapt to similar challenges in future work, evoking a feeling of "déjà vu". For example, when translating, encountering vocabulary rich in cultural nuances is common. Having previously encountered similar terms, I find that the translation process becomes smoother, requiring less effort, as I don't need to spend as much time on research or struggle to find cultural equivalence.



**Elsewhere:** Have you experienced the feeling of the déjà vu in translation practice and how would you apply it to translation?

**Cao:** For me, translation resembles a matching game where I align expressions from the source language with those in the target language, evoking a sense of "déjà vu" as I connect past and present. This process is subtly shaped by the translator's life experiences and emotions. For instance, in translating the Chinese poem "Reply of a Chaste Wife", a Chinese translator preserved the original poetic form to maintain its charm, while a foreign translator opted for prose to better convey the poem's emotions, influenced by his belief that prose captures the narrator's feelings more effectively.



**Li:** During my freshman year, I discussed a translation of the phrase "this love is everlasting" from the movie Twilight into Chinese, which interestingly



borrowed from Bai Juyi's ancient poem, interpreting love as eternal. Later, while pursuing my master's degree, I revisited this example to demonstrate the impact of Chinese culture on translation. My Cantonese-speaking tutor suggested that further adaptation might be unnecessary, as in Cantonese, "hate" can also mean a form of deep love. This insight, resonating with my own understanding of Cantonese, emphasizes the evolving nature of translation and its reinterpretation through new perspectives. Expanding beyond academia, I apply lessons learned from translation to professional settings, integrating approaches like "supplementing" and "hijacking" from Luise von Flotow to ensure gender inclusivity in communication. This extends to using gender-neutral pronouns, such as "they/them" in workplace interactions, reflecting my commitment to inclusive language practices.



**Wu:** I recall a concept mentioned in class, "Translator Positionality", which suggests that some believe only translators who have had similar experiences can accurately translate the source text. However, some argue that they may not accurately convey the meaning because social environments and personal experiences can change the feelings expressed in the source text. For instance, when an Arabic translator translates a text about childbirth, they may change the positive emotions to completely negative emotions. This is because in Arabic society, pregnancy and childbirth are considered dangerous and painful, or the translator may have had unpleasant childbirth experiences, subconsciously altering the emotions in the source text.



***Elsewhere:* How do you view the role of "déjà vu" in translation practice? Do you lean towards a positive or negative view?**

**Cao:** I'd say I'm on the fence. On the positive side, having this kind of "déjà vu" moment can help improve translation efficiency. For example, by using terminology databases in CAT (Computer-Aided Translation) tools to assist in translation practice. Each time a stored term is retrieved from the term base, it is a re-enactment of the scene. However, it can also affect the quality of translation. When translators encounter familiar content, they may make incorrect matches due to their over-familiarity with certain words or phrases.



**Li:** In my view, its role in translation practice tends to be positive. While I have faced challenges, such as translating unfamiliar material during a translation certification exam, I have grown to appreciate the broader lessons translation



has taught me. It goes beyond linguistic skills, requiring determination, cultural understanding, and the ability to draw on past experiences. This sensation of “déjà vu” feels like having an old friend who supports me through difficult tasks, strengthening my appreciation for past experiences.



**Wu:** Considering the examples of translator positionality mentioned above, I maintain a neutral stance. However, I believe a translator’s personal experiences can indeed lead to conflicts between personal ethics and professional ethics. For example, I learned a real example, an interpreter from the LGBTQ community encountered a situation where the client expressed an anti-LGBTQ statement during the meeting. In this case, the translator chose to be silent, refraining from translating the anti-LGBTQ remarks, but his/her partner grabbed the microphone and faithfully translated the words. Therefore, after encountering these examples, I think the issues of personal ethics and professional ethics faced by translators are indeed worth pondering.



**Elsewhere: So, has the experience of “déjà vu” helped you gain a deeper understanding of cross-cultural and cross-linguistic phenomena?**

**Cao:** Yeah, I think, to some extent, these two concepts share similarities. Just like the “matching game” I mentioned earlier, they both involve seeking similarities. “Déjà vu” means matching across time and space, and cross-cultural activities such as translation means matching across languages and cultures.



**Li:** Of course. Whenever I encounter topics or cultural elements related to China while abroad, I find myself sharing them with friends, which leads to meaningful cross-cultural exchange. This phenomenon occurs because these topics resonate with the knowledge I’ve previously acquired or understood, serving as a catalyst for communication. The sensation of familiarity prompts me to draw connections between different cultural contexts and linguistic expressions, ultimately enriching my understanding of both.



**Wu:** The biggest inspiration is that I will proactively explore various expressions of words, phrases, and various knowledge in life. For example, when watching news reports, listening to songs, and watching dramas, I pay more attention to accumulating some English expressions, to quickly familiarize myself with the context during translation and understand its meaning in the future.

