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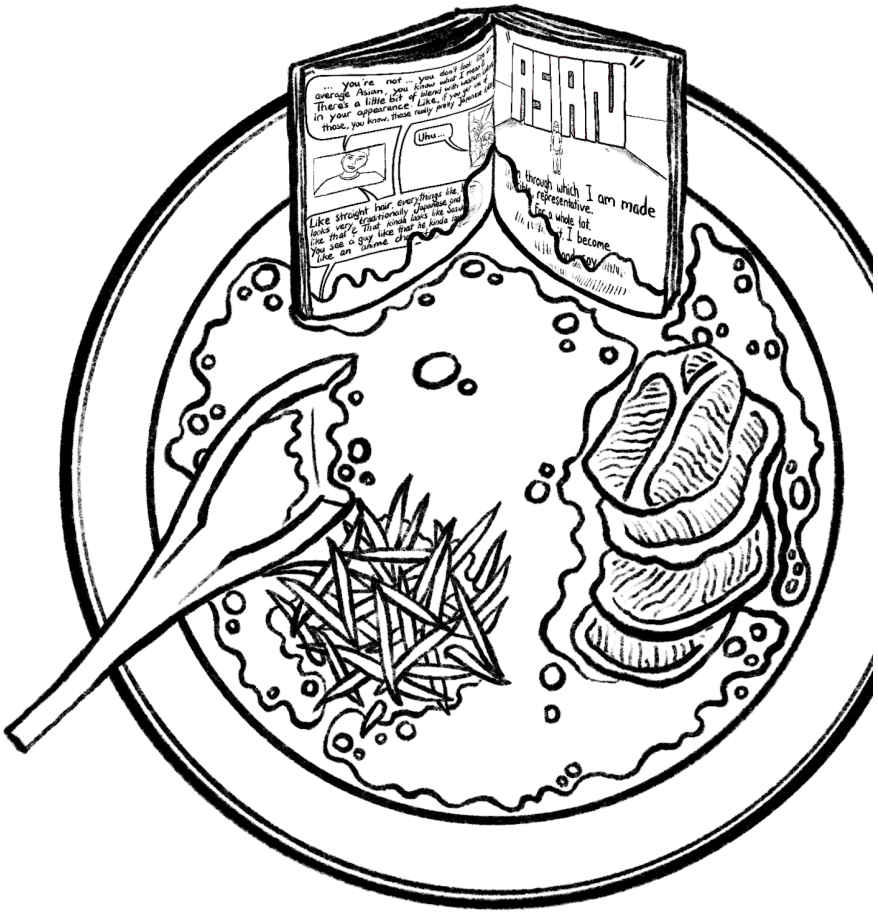

Manga Mine

Exploring Dimensions of Cultural Appropriation through Manga

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Abstract (265 words)

Cultural ownership has become an intensely contested topic in a globalised context where cultural appropriation has become an everyday occurrence, but the underlying intentions and newly generated meanings are often obscured by a discourse focussed on the ethics of cultural appropriation. This visual ethnographic project explores the ways in which Manga and Anime fans employ mimesis as a way to appreciate, but also to acquire a deeper understanding of, and ultimately create new, Manga and Anime cultures. Throughout a fieldwork period of 3 months, I and 4 interlocutors co-produced Mangas based on their designs, including audio-visual recordings, semi-structured interviews, and sketching. The final outputs consist of an ethnographic graphic novel, as well as a written theoretical text. The written text concerns itself with the theorisation of cultural appropriation, exploring the concept of mimesis as a tool for acquiring cultural knowledge, as well as the creator of new meanings. It critically engages the processes through which cultural knowledge is reproduced but also (mis)represented. The collective graphic novel stands as both a manifestation of my interlocutors' understanding of Manga and Anime culture, as well as my personal reflection on cultural ownership and notions of authenticity. Ultimately this research has found that the discourse surrounding cultural appropriation has left little room to consider the plurality within cultural appropriation, naturally connecting the original and the reproduction rather than considering them as separate entities of meaning. I argue that much like cultures, we must consider appropriated cultures in their plurality and that notions of "authenticity" are misplaced in assessing meaning, intentionality, and the ethics of mimetic reproductions.

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Introduction

“It’s just twenty minutes of screaming.”, is how I responded when I was asked about my opinion on Anime, roughly 3 years ago during a university exchange in Taiwan. My Dutch friend laughed in agreement and then continued trying to sell me on the idea. “You should watch [I can’t remember what the name of the anime was], you’ll like it! It’s over the top like all Anime, but it’s fun”. I laughed, replied that I would, and never gave it a second thought.

I had always distanced myself from Anime. I had never understood the, as I felt, over-the-top storytelling, emotions, nor the extreme sexualisation of (most of) its women. Moreover, my image of Manga and Anime fans had been heavily influenced by the stereotype of the obsessive, anti-social, fetishising fan, despite many of my friends being avid Manga readers, and Anime watchers. Especially Anime and Manga fans have been a focus of these stereotypes, with “Otaku” and “Weeaboo " both being infamous names for excessive Anime and Manga consumers. These names partially trace their origin back to Japan, where “Otaku” carries a similar connotation to ‘geek’ or ‘nerd’, and almost glorifies a complete withdrawal from society (Ito, Okabe & Tsuji 2012: xi-xiii).

In my eyes, Anime and Manga personified an inherent Japanese or even Asian 'weirdness' that I as the product of a German father and Taiwanese mother have tried to avoid being associated with for the longest time. I felt quite daunted by the prospect of being singled out as Asian, despite Anime not being my heritage. Having experienced ostracisation for my Asian appearance or the ‘weird’ food I as an Asian supposedly ate, instilled a strong fear of being ‘too Asian’ for my surroundings. Simultaneously I keep feeling the sting of outrage when I see my friends appropriating Asian cultures that were neither mine nor theirs, all the while joking about their absurdity. Asia is hip these days, but am I, as a part of it, still subject to the same ridicule whilst they claim to appreciate my ‘Asianness’?

Controversies revolving around the topic of cultural appropriation have more and more become a common occurrence across media platforms in recent history. Mexico accused fashion label Zara of cultural appropriation after using indigenous patterns in their clothing

designs[1]. UK fashion label Timbuktu was openly critiqued after trademarking the name "Yoruba", the name of an indigenous people in West Africa[2]. The abuse of cultural material for financial gains may be one extreme but highlights the necessity for awareness and research. These instances of ripping cultural material from its context create misconceptions about their cultures of origin, or even worse, may erase them completely.

The inevitable context of globalisation, the easy access to a vast number of cultures has spurred on the development of a discourse torn between notions of authenticity, cultural ownership, cultural hybridity, and global hegemonic powers at work (Kraidy 2000, Kraidy 2002, Matthews 2000). As academic paradigms have come to consider cultural identity a construct based largely on external influences, the question of what anyone's true cultural identity is (supposed to be) remains, as rhetoric still largely deals with cultures based on geography rather than experience: My upbringing as a 'third culture kid' being my foremost example. Questions of "Who/What am I?" are likely to become more and more commonplace as divisions between the entities we refer to as 'a cultures' become blurred.

Manga and Anime reside in a very distinctive grey area concerning culture. As a product that Japan has actively marketed towards the West, it has become a cultural material that has gained huge popularity globally. Today, Manga and Anime play major roles in global popular culture, ranging from being prominently depicted in hip hop, video games, youth fashion, and even on the international streaming service Netflix. It has shaped a generation of fans that express great appreciation towards Japanese culture, often actively engage in shaping Manga and Anime as Japanese culture, but arguably claim ownership of (some of) Japan's culture in the process, through the consumption and recreation of a Japanese art form (Ito 2005: 456, Leonard 2005:282). Furthermore, I would argue that certain power structures and discursive notions at work in this particular case of cultural appropriation have only perpetuated certain essentialist views of Anime, Manga, as well as its original cultural environment: Japan or even (East) Asia as a whole.

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[1] Al Jazeera https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/5/31/mexico-accuses-fashion-brands-of-cultural-appropriation accessed 21/06/2021

[2] CNN https://edition.cnn.com/2021/05/24/business/timbuktu-yoruba-trademark-scli-gbr-intl/index.html accessed 21/06/2021

Given the inevitability of cultural appropriation occurring due to our globalising context, learning to navigate these contested cultural spaces between appropriators and those appropriated from has become a discursive necessity; Our theorisations of culture and identity seem incomplete when considering the global cultural landscape. Globalisation has made any cultural material available worldwide and facilitated cultural interaction to an undefinable degree (Mathews 2000). As cultures interact, evolve, and change, questions of cultural belonging remain. Only by critically engaging with notions of cultural authenticity, ownership, and identity, can we redefine notions of identity and belonging in a constructive, meaningful manner, whilst simultaneously combatting exclusive practices based on (cultural) racism, xenophobia, exoticisation, and fetishisation. Through critical engagement with harmful rhetoric and discursive shortcomings surrounding cultural appropriation, this research serves to promote inclusivity through the acknowledging of plurality within cultural identities, all the while advertising respect for cultural material and heritage.

Research Process

Over the course of 4 months, between January - April 2021, I and 4 of my participants collaboratively designed and wrote Mangas. Most of the research was conducted online, as the global Covid-19 restrictions limited personal interaction immensely. Through several cycles, which were always concluded by in-depth semi structured interviews, we designed all of the characters involved, the storyline, as well as individual story panels. Most commonly we would meet first to discuss ideas and make initial sketches, then meet again for corrections or alterations and a final time to discuss the finished character designs, storyboards, or final pages. As the fieldwork continued, some of these stories took on immense (conceptual) proportions and fostered intense dialogues about their meaning and in which way these pages reflected upon both my participants' position, as well as my own. I ultimately included the short stories each one of my participants produced within a larger narrative centered on my own experience as both the appropriator and the appropriated, positioning their short stories as interventions. As such, the graphic novel or Manga can be considered a direct product of in-depth dialogue and indeed the embodiment of my participants' cultural experiences and understanding of their cultural appropriation. It stands as a testament to the variety of ways in which the theoretical framework discussed in the later sections of this thesis manifests itself in daily experiences.

Participants

My participants were chosen by pure coincidence and should not be considered a representative study of Anime and Manga fandom in the classical sense. They are not meant to represent a particular demographic, but rather emphasise the absence of one. Indeed, as I will argue in the following text, the plurality which exists in Anime and Manga fandom and other cross-cultural communities, renders a representative study of cultural appropriation largely meaningless, and may indeed only serve to perpetuate essentialist views of Anime, Manga, and Japanese culture, as well as the fans which appreciate and appropriate it.

Whilst I interviewed a larger group of Anime and Manga fans throughout my fieldwork, I ultimately collaborated with four of these interviewees to produce the final Manga(s), Rares, Vlad, Kyle, and Dia.

Rares initially joined this project, before inviting his friend Vlad to join. They proceeded to write their Mangas collaboratively, each creating their own protagonists which were ultimately supposed to meet throughout their stories. Both of them have been Anime fans since their childhood, roughly 6 years of age. They both gave the same initial reasons for being interested in Anime series and Manga, centered mainly around the fact that Anime series were available on television and that they were more focused on mature themes, which other Western cartoons did not, according to them. Despite them living out their fandom and cultural appropriation together, their experiences were notably different from each other. This manifested particularly throughout our creative process as they had vastly different approaches to their protagonist, as well as the tone of their story.

Kyle has been an Anime and Manga fan since his youth. His interest in Japanese culture somewhat stems from this fandom, and he has come to learn Japanese and work at a Japanese restaurant as a chef because of it. His perspective on what Manga is, its stylistic elements, as well as content were immensely focused on a Japanese cultural context, and, I felt, deeply rooted in a larger understanding of what Japanese culture is to him as a whole.

Dia was introduced to Manga by her older brother in elementary school. Her perspective on Manga was largely shaped by relatability and real-life reflections. Similar to my own

understanding she drew a particular parallel between her own Asian experience as a Chinese American and the Japanese context of the Mangas she was consuming.

Moreover, I spent a considerable amount of time collaborating with Nick. He has been an Anime and Manga fan since his early youth, having been introduced by his older siblings. He stated that his first book had to have been a Manga since he still almost exclusively reads Manga to this day. We designed several characters together, and discussed story ideas, but were ultimately not able to continue working on the project due to other engagements.

I personally have no connection to Manga or Anime, besides some inevitable encounters through pop culture references. I was, for the largest part, completely instructed by these participants on what to pay attention to, both stylistically as well as conceptually. This included watching Anime which they recommended as inspiration. During this fieldwork, I was repeatedly made aware of the misconceptions and prejudice I held concerning Anime and Manga, as well as the role I played in reproducing them. It has heavily impacted the ways in which I position myself in relation to cultural appropriation and my cultural identity, a topic which I have further outlined in my visual project.

Positioning the Research

This research explores the different ways in which Anime and Manga fans around the world engage in cultural appropriation, with a particular focus on mimetic processes which take place in consuming, interpreting, and (re)producing Manga and Anime, by engaging my participants in a collaborative project revolving around the creation of a Manga.

In doing so this study explores the ways in which my participants relate to Manga and Anime as Japanese cultural material, notions of cultural authenticity, cultural hybridity, and their role as cultural appropriators. Moreover, we discussed how and why they came to be Anime and Manga fans in the first place, in which way they discern between what is and isn't Manga or Anime in their eyes, and how often they interact with Anime and Manga material. This research goes beyond a simple analysis of what Manga might mean to my interlocutors, but rather exposes the plurality and complexity of cultural interaction, and the cultural relevance of each of these experiences, whilst critically engaging my participants' position within the process of cultural appropriation.

As such, the graphic novel I produced together with my participants exists on two levels: as the visual representation of our reflections on cultural appropriation, but also as an embodiment of cultural appropriation. The stories told are direct products of deep intersubjective dialogue which reflect the considerations and questions we must ask ourselves in navigating a multi-cultural environment and interacting with different cultures. Whilst these Mangas may all carry similar meaning under the umbrella of Japanese cultural material, they are also significant in highlighting individual cultural context and position within the larger processes surrounding cultural appropriation. This was only made possible through this collaborative approach, emphasising them as necessary tools to navigate these incredibly complex issues of identity, belonging, diversity and inclusion.

Sketching a Theoretical Framework

Culture[3]

To address the ways in which 'culture' may be appropriated, transformed one must first consider: What is 'culture'? 'Culture' is, both historically and conceptually speaking, a term with layered, thick meaning. Since its first 'anthropological' use by Tylor in 1871 (Condon & LaBrack 2015: 191, Tylor 1871) it has been a widely contested term. Indeed 'cultures' etymology can be traced back to "cultivate", to grow (Hebdige 1979: 5-6, Jahoda 2012: 289 - 290).[4] One might argue that what we perceive as 'culture' is indeed a cultivated total sum of imagined (or unimaginable) proportions, encompassing knowledge, beliefs, ideologies, and is arguably the total make-up of any one society (Benedict 1932: 24, Barnard & Spencer 2012: 206, Jahoda 2011: 290, Morinenko & Sorokin 2018: 338). Parsons, Geertz, and Schneider argued that culture is a web of meaning any individual inevitably finds themselves trapped in (Barnard & Spencer 2012: 213-214). Moreover, this web of meaning is self-made: "He himself has spun [it]" (Geertz 1973:5, Barnard & Spencer 2012: 213- 214). This notion of growing, spinning, generating culture oneself is a recurring theme throughout the discourse surrounding culture, as is claiming a culture for oneself. Culture(s) as such are thus not firm entities, but rather fluid, growing, and as such a continuous process (Barnard & Spencer

[3] This section was copied from the Research Proposal "Nani?!: Cultural Appropriation in the Context of Global Anime Fandom" handed in on the 14th December 2020 as a part of the MSc Cultural Anthropology & Development Sociology

[4] The Oxford English Dictionary https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45746?result=1&rskey=klRvrT& accessed 25/11/2020

2012, Hebdige 1979: 5-6, Jahoda 2011, Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1963, Wagner 2016 [1975]:35-70). Simultaneously we consider culture(s) as almost innate, constituting a context to our lives often beyond consciousness, as it precedes our existence and will continue to exist well beyond any individuals' lifetime (Burke 1973: 110-111). We can thus observe a ladenness of the term: we shape it actively, we can, or regardlessly do, call it our 'own', but simultaneously it is taught, we learn it/them from others and as such thus adopt and adapt our (cultural) selves to our environment (Barnard & Spencer 2016: 206 - 215, Burke 1973: 110-111).

Furthermore, we can observe an almost inherent connection between culture and environment: particularly physical locations and environments generate and are shaped by cultures. Terms like "German", "American", "European" or "Asian" all refer to cultures as much as they refer to a space in which these cultures seemingly belong. Indeed, they seem to be generally considered the anchor of a culture, the origin point, and as such a measure of cultural authenticity or "realness". I will refer to the concept of authenticity at a later point, but what remains is the idea of more or less exclusive cultural space, in which hybrid cultures, as I will explicate later, often lack space due to labels such as "inauthentic" or indeed find potential in what Bhabha refers to as a third space, between cultures (Bhabha 1994: 54-56, Werbner & Fumanti 2013: 151). What remains in the larger context of this research is thus the question of where 'appropriated' cultures thus belong, and how we may navigate these problematic cultural spaces.

Authorship, Ownership, and Authenticity

Cultural ownership is ultimately the starting point from which we begin to theorise cultural appropriation. As the word implies, 'appropriation' refers to the forceful claim of ownership of an object from someone else, and thus must consider how one comes to own a culture in the first instance. It seems only logical to assume that cultural ownership is defined by the creators, authors or contributors to said culture. Indeed etymologically speaking, authentic traces its meaning back to the greek concept 'authentikos', referring to originality but also authority over, which connotes ownership (Cobb 2014: 1).

However, as discussed earlier, we find that culture, or certain cultural material such as Manga and Anime, have come to reside in a space where authorship of this culture is blurry. Does

through participation or creation one come to claim ownership? Do I as a writer and drawer of Manga now too ‘own’ Manga culture? It hardly seems logical to define cultural ownership purely through contribution in a globalised context where everything is accessible, especially when this accessibility is not distributed evenly. Whilst authenticity of a culture is often linked to its geographical location, as my participants for example continuously refer to the Japanese context as a key point to Manga's authenticity, Gibson outlines the ways in which authenticity is spatially dependent in terms of the author, not the original culture (Gibson 2014: 40). That is to say that we may or must consider authenticity in relation to where the cultural material was created rather than the belonging culture itself. The Manga produced by Rares and Vlad is therefore an authentically Romanian Manga, not a Japanese one. Authenticity cannot be considered as an inherent quality, but rather subjectively produced through the context of production and consumption. It is for this reason that we must dissect the meaning of authenticity as a term by which we distinguish cultural production as the genuine article, as worthy of laying claim to ownership. Authenticity implies knowledge of the culture one is (re)producing and representing.

Authenticity is based on a temporarily static view of any given culture. authenticity becomes a pinpoint moment in time, by which we define any given cultural material at any given time. St. Martin outlines the way in which the definition of authentic culture through a “golden age” (St. Martin 2014: 14) within a plural and complex cultural environment only produces contradiction and an overloading of the term authentic as to render it meaningless (ibid.: 14). Were authenticity a practically enforceable standard, we would find that culture became stagnant, which under no circumstances lies in the nature of culture ((Barnard & Spencer 2012, Hebdige 1979: 5-6, Jahoda 2011, Kroeber & Kluckhohn 1963, Wagner 2016 [1975]:35-70). Not only does this mean we discredit any culturally redefining processes moving forward as inauthentic, we implicitly discredit both past and future in favor of an imagined temporal ideal. This carries incredibly powerful connotations when considering the way in which we label cultural practices authentic or inauthentic that are not our own. In orientalising, exoticising fashion we thus come to reduce a culture to a clearly defined and unchanging “Other” as extensively discussed by Said (Said 1978). Simultaneously, by ascribing our own culture as authentic we come to discredit any other lived experiences within our cultural environment. authenticity implies an imagined purity and singularity which cannot be ascribed to culture (Friedman in Schneider 2003: 217). Moreover, through the claim of being able to recognise authenticity, we claim privilege and knowledge over the

cultural materials we describe as such. Describing something as authentic legitimises one's own misconceptions concerning any culture, and can potentially foster damaging widespread misconceptions, (cultural) racism, and bigotry. I would argue that authenticity as a concept is meaningless, and only contributes to problematic considerations of culture: an authentically perceived Manga within the Dutch context for example may still misrepresent the cultural reality of Japanese Manga to a non-Dutch audience.

Simultaneously, as subjective and constructed as it might be, authenticity remains integral in making distinctions and appreciating and forming shared cultural identities (Gibson 2014: 41, Zerubavel 1999: 91).Theorising cultural appropriation and its harmful and destructive potential seems almost impossible without positioning these potentials within a context of what is or isn't authentically (part of) a culture. This authenticity paradox provided a powerful backdrop to the creation of the Mangas, as all my interlocutors attempted to grapple with their own understanding of how authentic their Manga could or should be.

What makes Manga Manga?

Authenticity and inauthenticity became a recurring topic of conversation during this research period, as the distinction between authentic and inauthentic seems to define the cultural appropriation discourse. Vlad and Rares repeatedly addressed the fact that they were conscious of the fact that their Manga was not a "real" Manga. It remained a topic of contention as I kept asking them what made it "inauthentic", trying to point at references for Mangas and Animes which may resemble theirs. This usually resulted in comparisons between Mangas and Animes which were and weren't Japanese in origin, or which depicted a context that was not Japanese. "Castlevania"[5], "Avatar"[6] and "Blood of Zeus"[7] were all mentioned as not properly Anime, due to them not being set in Japan, not being produced by Japanese producers and/or casts, or because their art style did not resemble proper Anime. The distinction between "authentic" and "inauthentic" Anime and Manga. however, ultimately always remained highly relational, and in part dependent on how my questions were posed. None of my participants would or even properly tried to define what makes a Manga Manga, referring to the necessity of context. Rather, they continuously grasped for components which made up its sum, which, despite being present in Mangas and Animes to

[5] An animated show about Dracula out for revenge after his human wife is burnt at the stake for being a witch, set in Transilvania
[6] An animated show about a boy being able to control the four elements, set in a fictional universe
[7] An animated show about a son of Zeus, set in ancient Greece

extremely varying degrees, supposedly made up an authentic whole. Fascinatingly, I would argue that none of these components made it into any of the final Mangas.

Rares and Vlad described a growth process, exaggerated, deep emotion and mature graphic content as some of the reasons why they had been drawn to Anime and Manga in the first instance. When considering their final products, neither of them included these, as loosely as they might define stylistic components, in their stories. Rather than revolving around the growth of their characters, we follow two protagonists, who, as far as the audience can tell, have already reached a certain level of power far from reminiscent of the unpolished, raw potential of some of the Animes and Mangas they listed as inspiration. The stories are, overall, emotionally reserved or whimsical, and much less graphic and mature than initially anticipated. Whilst Kyle outlined the way in which Anime and Manga tended to revolve around grey areas between good and evil, his story criticised and antagonised the customers of the restaurant his protagonist is working at. This is only emphasised by the cover in which the protagonist is shown to fool the customers.

The production of these Mangas clearly revealed a plurality within the meaning of authenticity, and reveals a tension between different, simultaneous interpretations of the word. I would argue that my participants actively avoided these markers they identified in order to distance themselves from claiming to be an authentic Manga, which ironically is done as a way of producing an 'authentically' appropriated Manga. By actively and overtly producing an inauthentic Japanese Manga, they come to produce an authentic, unique, 'hybrid' Manga, which becomes authentic within their individual contexts. This tension is one of the most complex positions within the discourse surrounding cultural appropriation as it raises the question of whether authenticity within cultural appropriation offers enough of a distinction between those who appropriate to (individually) benefit, or those who appropriate out of appreciation. To what extent do we actively need to emphasise 'inauthenticity' when appreciating and appropriating other cultural goods? How do we distinguish between those with intentions to accurately reproduce and those who exploit through convincing reproductions? What kind of problems do both inauthentic and supposedly authentic reproductions pose in terms of representation?

Globalisation & Hybridity

As previously mentioned, both Mangas and Anime's popularity has been largely attributed to globalisation and the consequently facilitated interaction of cultures over the past decades. These processes have only been sped up in the case of Manga and Anime through active involvement of the Japanese government in exporting cultural material throughout the world, which some argue has indeed been a direct response to globalisation (Ito, Okabe & Tsuji xii-xiii, Leonard 2005: 282-283).

The study of globalisation is a varied one, and globalisation has been theorised in a myriad of ways. Kraidy summarizes a dichotomy, in which one camp considers globalisation a process in which we slowly homogenise towards a single, Westernised consumer culture, whilst the other side believes globalisation to be a continuous process of cultural amalgamation and hybridisation continuously creating new forms (Kraidy 2000: 16). These standpoints deeply involve economic, and political aspects which due to constraints I will not cover too deeply within the context of this research. They are nonetheless elements that must be considered as these political and economic powers can in part be exercised through cultural imperialism (Kraidy 2000: 17-21). What must be mentioned here is that the connotation of “hybrid” has largely changed within the discourse (Greenholtz & Kim 2009: 392). Whilst positivist paradigms tended to consider hybridity a state of uncertainty and identity struggle, more contemporary constructivist paradigms have come to consider it a position of privilege as it offers unique, multifaceted insight (ibid. 392).

Whilst I largely agree with this shift in attitude, I must stress my own struggle with said hybrid identity. Whilst hybridity is indeed something considered desirable now, positivist ways of considering culture and identity often still require cultural hybrids to express or consider their cultural identity in binary ways. On the one hand, questions such as “Where are you really from?” or “Do you feel more X, Y, Z?” perpetuate notions of singular identities that only produce (negative) alterity, despite the impression of promoting and appreciating diversity. On the other hand, this critical stance against neo-imperialism and celebration of hybridity and transculturalism often leads us to forget that hybridity and domination are not at all mutually exclusive (Kraidy 2000: 28-29, Kraidy 2002: 317-318). Indeed, it may be more productive to consider hybridity a direct consequence of power imbalances through mimetic processes as I will argue in later sections.

Simultaneously, hybridity in itself is not a concept without controversy. Given its defined meaning, considering cultural hybridity a mixture of cultures reduces the continuous process of (re)negotiation, compromise and perpetual tension hybridity entails. Indeed whilst hybridity has been used to personify struggle against, it has also legitimised and encouraged neo-imperialist discourse (Kraidy 2002: 316). It effectively essentialises culture as a commodity, which through acquisition one can gain more of and 'become' a hybrid, which returns us to the connotations of cultural appropriation as a neo-imperialist action and cultural exploitation as discussed by Matthes (Kraidy 2002: 316, Matthes 2019: 1005-1006).

I want to engage with Mathews' concept of the 'global cultural supermarket' here, centered around the idea of all cultures being universally ready to be appropriated at any given moment (Goldstein-Gidoni 2010: 385-386, Matthews 2000: 4, 63). Whilst it offers a clear metaphor for the growing diversity, rather than homogenising world culture others have argued, it remains descriptively reductive, in that much like Büyükokutans work, Matthews implies finality to 'an' appropriation (Kraidy 2002: 317). Rather than considering hybridisations as separate instances in which the global interacts with the local, e.g. the global dissemination and appropriation of Manga and Anime, we must consider it as a highly specific communicative process, a relationship in which more or less heterogeneous forces, cultures, (re)negotiate themselves and the other (ibid. 317). The theorisation of hybridity within the contemporary context of globalisation has inevitable implications: first and foremost that 'hybrids' are not simply "a mix", but rather materialisations of tensions, of historical, cultural, and political power imbalances, of unclaimed, and yet contested space (ibid. 319-320). Only by doing so do we invite continuous active negotiation, specific critical engagement of these relationships, and reflexivity concerning the meaning of these relationships for all parties involved.

Kakashi vs the Flash

I call Rares and Vlad on the 31st of March. It is one of the first sunny days of 2021, and as I start recording the meeting on Zoom and wait for them to join me I open the window to let fresh air in. When they do finally join, I can see they are sitting on Vlad's balcony. Vlad is smoking a cigarette, wearing a black T-shirt, black sunglasses resting on top of his head. Rares is sat next to him in a white T-shirt and shorts. We were supposed to call to discuss some new drawings they had made, but Rares almost immediately tells me that Vlad has forgotten them at home. They decided to call anyway. A dog is barking in the background while I tell them that this experience has been incredibly interesting, mainly because every one of my interlocutors has been so focused on creating something completely different and completely different in terms of what they think a "proper" Manga should look and sound like. "I think it's also the fact that if we would try to make it a full manga, it wouldn't really be authentic, cause it's not really japanese and it's not really our influence either" replies Vlad. He has been very active in trying to raise conversation topics and openly reflecting on our project together since the first time we spoke. I can't quite tell whether this is only because I have told them about the goal of my research and my own thoughts extensively or whether he is always this aware of his own position. I agree with what he has said and continue to tell them about my experience and struggles as I move my laptop onto the window sill so my face can catch some sun. "Man I'm just trying to get this masters over with and then I will never be an anthropologist ever again in that classical sense". We laugh, and agree that we will continue to simply have fun with writing their Manga which they have done a lot of over the past weeks.

After I openly wonder about why I have perceived Western animation and Anime/Manga in such different ways, Rares replies that it might be simply because "it is a bit more weird for the Western people, also the way they approach certain subjects. The way it's drawn as well , it's not as masculine because everyone is quite scrawny, even the ones that are good fighters, compared to if you put them next to DC or Marvel Characters."

Vlad: "But that depends, I wouldn't call Goku[8] or Vegeta[9] scrawny motherfuckers."
Me: "Have you watched Baki[10]? The entire series is about massive dudes".

[8] The Protagonist of the Manga &Anime Series "Dragon Ball" and most associated titles
[9] The Antagonist/Returning character of the Anime Series "Dragonball Z" and following titles, rival to Goku
[10] An Anime series centred around street fighting, with a drawing style exaggerating male physique in particular

We laugh and ridicule Rares a bit for the sweeping statement he has just made. Rares agrees that this might not always be the case, but names Naruto[11] as an example of the overall tendency for Manga protagonists to be less buff and physically strong, whilst DC and Marvel characters tend to be more mature. Birds are chirping loudly in the background.
Vlad:"Yeah that's different, the characters tend to be a little bit younger [in Manga] and eh…."
Rares: " Kakashi[12] aswell, he's fucking strong!..."
Vlad: "Yeah but that's the way of drawing, I think if you were to draw the Flash[13] and Kakashi in the same style, they'd pretty much have the same body type. You know what I mean? It's the same body type in different styles".

I listen attentively. I have been watching much more animation lately, and whilst I understand Rares' point, I also noticed that stylistically, the line between what one might say looks Western and what looks like Manga/Anime is very blurry. When I raise the point that sometimes I can't categorically make a distinction between "Western" animation and Manga/Anime, Vlad agrees.

Vlad: "Well think about like Batman the Animated series where Batman literally had like a rectangular fucking jaw, and think about the last DC Animated movie, where Bruce Wayne when he doesn't have a fucking mask its basically like oval face like anime has."
Me: "Yeah and the eyes as well, and the hair!"
Vlad "Yeah everything!"

I think this difference in opinion is incredibly evident in the way they have each designed both their characters and their storylines. During our first conversation, Vlad had named DC comics, and the grim reality of their stories as a big inspiration for him. He had watched and read Batman stories long before he started reading Manga and watching Anime. His storyline overall was meant to be much grimmer, with his protagonist having lost an eye, his wife having been murdered and his character being a recovering alcoholic. His main points of critique towards our drawing usually revolved around things looking too silly or childish, missing the largely serious tone his story seems to convey. His inspiration was always rooted

[11] The protagonist/titular teenage character of the series "Naruto".
[12] A supporting character, mentor to Naruto. He is very slender in appearance.
[13] The protagonist/titular character to a DC comic series. He is a superhero who can run at "superhuman" speed.

in his experience as a Mixed Martial Arts Fighter, choosing to make his character a Batman-like figure who has trained hard to acquire the skills that he has. Rares' story is much more lighthearted and has always drawn inspiration from the fictional and the "over the top" style he once identified as typical of Anime/Manga. His character is an almost overly careless surfer with water controlling-powers, riding a giant capybara, reflecting Rares' overall demeanor.

This stylistic mix of components epitomises hybridity, for better and for worse. Rares and Vlad expressed extensive awareness that whatever they were creating was inauthentic and as such possibly removed from 'Manga' in its meaning, and not truly representative of what Manga 'is'. At the same time, they drew upon a 'monomyth' theory by Joseph Campbell, who poses the idea that all storytelling follows a singular structure (Campbell 1949). This equation of Manga and non-Manga storytelling is not an expression of appropriation, but rather an expression of respect and appreciation in Vlad's and Rares' opinion. Campbell's theory can and has been heavily criticised for selection bias and oversimplification, alluding back to one of the positions towards globalisation outlined by Kraidy: the homogenisation of all cultures (Kraidy 2000: 16). 'Homogenisation', which some may equate to 'hybridisation' is dictated by cultural hegemony, leading to the imposition of normative (Western) cultural norms on a 'weaker' culture, such as Western beauty standards on Japanese media (Rogers 2006: 476). By drawing parallels between Manga and Western animation Vlad and Rares attempt to respond to cultural hegemony by emphasising Japanese Manga as cultural equal through their similarities: a Japanese alternative to Western animation.

Dia on the other hand actively links her Manga to an Asian context. I found this to be quite noteworthy as she drew strong parallels between her own lived experiences as a Chinese American and the themes and environments represented in Manga. As such, her experience closely mirrors my own: she feels a sense of conservative and representative responsibility for Manga's Asian origins. Of particular interest here is the hybridisation or amalgamation of Japanese Manga and Chinese diaspora experiences into 'Asianness'. To me it reflected a similar sentiment to mine, in that Asianness comes to exist as a hybrid to oppose global cultural hegemony; a hybrid to oppose further homogenisation (Kraidy 2002: 316). I reflect on this more extensively in the collaborative Manga.

Kyle too attempted to ‘preserve’ Manga, repeatedly choosing to include cliches and tropes such as his mentor character and his hidden power, the side-kick barman character, and drawing upon well-known Anime movies such as “Spirited Away”.

These different positions ultimately illustrated the two different sides which Kraidy describes quite well, whilst also emphasising a paradox when considering the necessity of both cultural hybridity and heterogenization within the discourse surrounding cultural appropriation. Only through division and heterogenization can cultural heritage and authenticity be preserved, and exploitative appropriation distinguished, whilst hybridisation opens up potential to renegotiate what authentic means and include hybrid experiences such as diasporas or third culture kids in a cultural discourse. Both sides are equally relevant within the context of globalisation, and are pivotal in navigating cultural appropriation and its many expressions.

Appropriation

As previously stated, the word ‘appropriation’ implies a forceful change in possession (Büyükokutan 2011: 622, Rogers 2006: 475, Matthes 2019: 1003,). Whilst these are no longer strictly colonial, or imperialistic in nature, one can assume that these power imbalances still favour Western culture as dominant, which Rogers exemplifies through the prominence of Western beauty standards in Japanese media (Rogers 2006: 476). Overall, discourse surrounding cultural appropriation has been very moralistic, mainly engaging notions of thievery, victimhood, and inequality (Büyükokutan 2011, 622). Whilst I believe these themes to be limited, I also believe that one cannot rightfully exclude them from analysis, given that doing so potentially encourages cultural exploitation and a cultural appropriation free-for-all which, as I continue to discuss, is not as free for some as it is for others.

Matthes too refers to cultural appropriation as a form of oppression and an expression of power imbalances (Matthes 2019: 1003-1004). He does however distinguish between objectionable and legitimate reasons for appropriating culture (ibid. 1005). Matthes makes a strong argument that appropriation in itself is not wrong, however, through it, problematic power imbalances and controversial opinions and misconceptions can be created, perpetuated, or accentuated. This places minorities at a continued disadvantage. This process and system are what Matthes refers to as “epistemic injustice”(ibid. 1005), and identifies it as

a way of differentiating between right and wrong reasons to culturally appropriate. He argues that due to this system of inequality, cultural appropriation from minority cultures should be considered "problematic", whilst minorities appropriating from a majority or more powerful cultures was less so, calling it assimilation rather than appropriation (ibid. 1005-1006) I would however argue that even in what Matthes argues should be considered as assimilation, power imbalances are at work which ultimately can entrench alterity, construct a division between what both the appropriating majority and minority ultimately consider The Other. I will refer to this again in the subsection on mimesis (Bhabha 1994: 126-127, Taussig 1993: 19).

I believe this to be particularly necessary as the etymological origins imply the one that something, in this case culture, is appropriated from, to be the victim. I would argue that due to the aforementioned cultural power imbalances entrenched globally, the reason why minority cultures appropriate or feel the need to 'assimilate' are because of the oppressive forces Matthes identifies earlier in his text, and therefore the dichotomy between victim and appropriator become blurred (Matthes 2019: 1004-1006). In the case of Manga, the relationships between global appropriators and the ones appropriated from becomes even more complex, as Japan continues to actively export and encourage appropriation of this cultural good of theirs, even going so far as to accredit Anime as the "savior of Japanese culture" (Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in Leonard 2005: 282-283).

Büyükokutans work attempts to analyse cultural appropriation as an exchange of cultural material rather than a unilateral seizure of cultural material (Büyükokutan 2011: 622-623). Whilst I agree with this initial premise of exchange occurring within the process of cultural appropriation, I believe some of his theorisation only serves to minimise the underlying power structures which shape this exchange (ibid. 622-623, 637). The fact that he implies that appropriation may reach a successful conclusion under the right circumstances, resulting in cultural innovation and mutual exchange is problematic, mainly because it suggests that appropriation may reach a final endpoint, which I will contest later (ibid. 622). I do mean to conceptualize cultural appropriation as a form of exchange, or rather fusion through mimesis which produces cultural innovation in the particular case of collaborative projects with Manga and Anime fans. However, this does entail somewhat distancing oneself from the direct association drawn between cultural appropriation, oppression, and exploitation (Schneider 2003: 215). Moreover, this means specifying research beyond 'cultural'

appropriation, as this implies the seizing, imitation, or structural change of an entire culture, rather than specific practices and material such as Manga and Anime (ibid. 215-216). Schneider makes a strong point in having to move past the binary between an original, an authentic and an (implicitly inferior) imitation as it traps the discourse of cultural appropriation in a "straightjacket of cultural essentialism"(ibid. 218), as I argued in my previous section on 'Ownership & Authenticity'. The collaborative appropriation and production of Manga enabled this study to reach beyond these notions, whilst critically engaging the power dynamics at work which allowed us to do so.

Besides the Point?

We are sitting at Kyle's kitchen table on a relatively warm spring evening. We met up to continue drawing some more pages but have gotten sidetracked by personal conversations. He's struggling at university, and whilst we both hang out of his kitchen window, smoking a cigarette he shares his frustration about the Gender and Sexuality course he is following at university. How they seem to be analysing media for problematic content without considering whether this meaning, these problems should even be read into respective contexts.
When we return to the kitchen table, we continue drawing, and whilst he leafs through a Manga book he has been using as a visual aid to explain his visions for his Manga, he stops and points at one of the characters.

Kyle: "Hah this is actually the character which they [does air quotes] "whitewashed"."
Me: "Oh yeah. But was she supposed… Was there anything in it that sort of like…?"
Kyle: "She kind of just had darker skin. Just like browner skin in a way. And I'm just like, yeah. I mean it doesn't really change the character that she is in the end, you know?"
Me: "Yeah fair enough. I mean in a fictional medium, it's sort of, how relevant is skin colour?"
Kyle: "I mean race is really just an ambiguous thing in Manga stories anyways. You know they create their own fucking worlds, there's no, you know. Of course you know most of them get their inspiration from their daily lives and in Japan… Japan is one of the most homogenous countries in the world. They're not exposed to many other things. And at least if they, you know, if they even put darker skin characters in it they are really just part of the world, they're not necessarily anything special."

I was somewhat surprised by Kyle's position. As a black man he had been quite vocal about wanting to be represented as one in his Manga, due to a lack of representation and often gross stereotyping of black men in the medium. He continued to name examples of Mangas which have, in his eyes, metaphorically engaged themes of ethnic and minority oppression amongst other issues quite well. I took a sip of my beer and tried to summarise his point.

Me: "So correct me if I'm wrong, but what you're basically sort of saying is that because Japan does deal with a lot of problematic issues that Japan [or] Japanese Manga finds problematic, you can't technically fault it for not addressing certain issues that they as a nation, haven't encountered such as, for example, the representation of black people in that sense."

Kyle agreed and in a sort of 'Heureka' moment referred back to his frustration with his university course earlier. In his eyes, the focus on ethnic representation within Manga came from outside of its cultural context, and was therefore problematic due to its policing nature. He laughed, struggling to find the right words. I agreed with him, but expressed my reservations. In my mind, this position only served to perpetuate and entrench problematic values. He half sighed, half laughed, which somewhat felt like a realisation on his part that he had made a pretty problematic statement himself. Simultaneously I felt a certain exhaustion from him, as if he had grown tired from discussing topics surrounding racism and representation without wanting to for too long. I grinned, knowing that I had made him reconsider, but also felt somewhat guilty.

Me:"I mean I get what you mean. Basically it's the same thing as, you know, looking for meaning in random stuff. You can't look at X,Y,Z Manga and then go "Oh but they didn't cover this", I get what you mean."
Kyle: "Yeah, for example that. And I mean I think it's more of a commentary on the audience rather than the actual artists themselves, because, of course there's many other issues, I mean female representation is one of the biggest issues in Anime at the moment. I mean, of course there's strong female characters in almost every single Anime, but then there's also the, you know, ditsy, sort of cute, submissive, big titted bimbo. Which is also, you know, problematic in it's own way. But you know, when it comes to sort of ethnic representation, I don't know, it doesn't … It's kind of a, I wouldn't say non-issue, but it's kind of besides the point."

This dialogue emphasises a consideration that I returned to a lot whilst producing this Manga, particularly in relation to my participants. In discussing cultural appropriation both its positive and negative potential is largely contingent on who the cultural appropriator chooses or comes to represent through his appropriation, which relates back to my previous section on the authenticity of appropriated Manga. Whilst we may actively attempt to position ourselves as representatives of either ourselves and our own culture, or the one we have chosen to appreciate, we must remain aware that we will be made representative of the culture we have appropriated regardless. Indeed, through appropriation and reproduction, we create an inherent connection in representing the two. No matter how much my participants emphasised that their Manga was not Japanese or authentic, it ultimately comes to represent Japanese Manga indirectly through distinction. The audience will always impose their own understanding of what is authentically Japanese onto my participants' Manga, and through it, new insights may be gained, but also misconceptions about one's own and another's culture entrenched.

Whilst designing the initial characters with Nick, we approached the topic of a female character, and whilst discussing what she would look like, Nick jokingly replied that she needed big breasts because it was typical for Manga and Anime. Whilst I can appreciate that Nick had no harmful intent whilst saying this, and made this joke partially to ridicule common misconceptions about Manga, it illustrates one of the main issues of cultural appropriation, and the representation of both the self and the 'other'; through it. Nick's appropriation of Japanese Manga has lead to over-emphasising the importance of the sexualisation of women in Japanese Manga and consequently, Japanese Manga comes to be perceived as inherently sexist and sexualising, whilst simultaneously justifying the sexualisation of women in any Manga under the guise of authenticity. These beliefs may only become further perpetuated through a sense of cultural superiority internalised through a global hegemonic system. The sexualisation in Nick's design becomes Japanese, rather than a product of his lived experience within two cultures. Moreover, globalisation creates a bilateral, albeit imbalanced, exchange where hybrid forms such as Nick's design may ultimately find their way back into Japanese culture, where it can either be internalised in Japanese culture or perpetuate existing issues. Through unequal power distributions, these negative consequences will misrepresent predominantly minority and hegemonically disadvantaged cultures. I believe it is this problem which Kyle was alluding to when stating

that criticising racism and ethnic representation in Japanese Manga was a commentary on the audience rather than the culture and its creators.

It is for this reason that we must carefully consider the role we play in cultural appropriation. It means we must actively engage with what we appreciate, and understand how, and why we understand it the way we do. We must be mindful of the way in which we may represent these cultures both through our perception of beauty, as well as our criticisms. This is not to say that we should not critique exclusive practices in other cultures. Indeed we may consider exercising explicit and implicit criticism and facilitating change as a positive potential of cultural appropriation. Kyle's decision to represent his protagonists as himself, a black man, is in itself a direct response to these criticisms through appropriation. We possibly can't or shouldn't actively attempt to change Japanese Manga, but we can actively address shortcomings of Japanese Manga in our context, such as the representation of black people in Manga. Series such as 'Afro Samurai'[14] or 'The Boondocks'[15] are exemplary of the power of appropriated and hybridised forms of Manga. They allow for powerful commentaries from this unclaimed third space, this space of cultural interaction which was previously mentioned, (Bhabha 1994: 54-56, Werbner & Fumanti 2013: 151).

Mimesis

Mimesis is one way in which we can theorise these aforementioned cultural relationships and interactions. Conceptually 'mimesis' and 'mimicry' have been topics of contention and debate throughout history. Works of Plato and Aristotle already discuss the human faculty of imitation, but also representation through these processes extensively. These terms have long been used to theorise notions of reality and fiction (Mathijs & Mosselmans 2000: 80-81). Commonly, 'mimesis' and 'mimicry' have both been established as processes which constitute much more than simple reproduction and copying, but rather a making sense, the creation of 'something' similar or alike, but inevitably shaped through one's own understanding and environment (Bhabha 1984, Raulet 2016, Taussig 1993). Ironically, theorisation of mimicry and mimesis coincides with rapid development in 'realistic' life-like art throughout greek antiquity which sought to mimic real life as closely as possible (Mathijs & Mosselmans 2000: 83-84). Much of this discourse surrounding the concept of 'mimesis'

[14] An Anime series produced by Samuel L. Jackson centered on the life of a black samurai
[15] An Anime series produced by Aaron McGruder centered on the unique experiences of black people in America

and ‘mimicry’ revolves around the process of creating, as well as ‘art’ itself being inherently mimetic, in that it represents some kind of reality, and at the same time makes worlds, or ‘fiction’ by distorting reality and experiences to create something ‘fictional’ or beyond real (ibid. 85). It is this mimetic potential of creating something new through art that I believe stands at the core of cultural appropriation, in that one does not only imitate but inevitably reshapes any appropriated cultural material through this mimicry. The complexity of mimesis and mimicry as concepts lie in the many processes which occur through mimesis: exaggeration, perpetuation, reimagination, and irony all take place simultaneously (Baud 1997: 105). This potential is also where the danger of cultural appropriation lies: Mimetic potential to create new realities, worlds, or cultures in this case can just as much distort, destroy or conceal the ‘original’ (Taussig 1993: 42-43, 92, 95-96). Within the context of global (cultural) power imbalances, this consequence is a probability more than a mere possibility.

Simultaneously, one may assume imbalances of power are somewhat inherent to the process of mimesis and mimicry in the first place. Bhabha and Taussig’s works are often cited as instrumental in theorising mimesis and mimicry within a colonial context, albeit not without controversy (Bhabha 1984, Huggan 19998, Roque 2015, Taussig 1993). Most noteworthy is the instrumentality both Bhabha and Taussig ascribe to mimesis and mimicry in creating The Other (Bhabha 1984: 126, Taussig 1993: xiii, 19). By definition, the word mimicry implies imitation or impersonation and as Bhabha argues, this imitation or impersonation can factually never be complete, therefore we create the other through this tension of similarity but never quite being the same (Bhabha 1984: 126). Indeed, being or becoming the same is not desirable in this colonial context: it would imply a sameness between colonist and colonial subject that stands in stark contrast to the hegemonic power distribution and ideology at the core of colonialism (ibid. 126-127). Taussig also equates mimesis to magic, in that it imbues power. In this context, mimesis serves as a way for colonists and colonial subjects alike to claim power over or acquire some of the characteristics of what they are mimicking (Taussig 1993: 47, Baud 1997: 104). One may even argue that colonialism itself was indeed a direct consequence of mimesis as European powers imitated each other to assert economic, political, military, and cultural dominance (Roque 2015: 207-208). Is globalisation therefore mimetic in nature?

Taussig also identifies the faculty of mimesis, which he deems inherent to humans, as significant in constructing alterity, The other, and consequently, through reflection, the self (Taussig 1993: xiii, 8). Taussig touches upon a significant function of mimesis here: the creation of self, which Raulet echoes in his work (Raulet 2016: 581-582). In fact, Raulet extends this argument of Taussig by stating that mimesis as a process stands at the core of human civilisation, and by extent, culture as a whole (ibid. 582). “Society is “an accumulation of creatures which are united as they mimic each other, or, when they are not, are still so similar as to read as old copies of a larger pattern” (Gabriel Tarde in Raulet 2016: 588, German in original). Through mimesis, we learn to recognise similarities and differences, and ultimately form a cultural identity by creating a cultural entity and identity based on like-mindedness.

It is here that I want to draw attention to the attempt at a distinction between mimesis, and mimicry by Roque (Roque 2015: 201). It is noteworthy that a large majority of scholars make largely no distinction between these terms and indeed use them interchangeably (Bhabha 1984,1994, Huggan 1998: 94, Taussig 1993). I however would argue that there are subtle, but distinct differences in how we should approach both within the context of appropriation, working from the starting point that they have been handled as synonymous due to their etymological relation. Roque essentially distinguishes between mimicry and mimesis as camouflage and as symbolic representation respectively (Roque 2015:201). He also defines a distinct third process: imitation as mere mechanical production, which I will for the purpose of this thesis not dwell on extensively. Whilst these distinctions are still binary, and will to some extent and in specific situations overlap undoubtedly, I do believe there is meaning in dividing the two. This distinction is particularly motivated by the need to address intentionality behind cultural appropriation, and the destructive or constructive potential within these processes. Whilst mimicry, as discussed by Goldstein-Gidoni for example, serves imitation, mimesis connotes an appropriation, interpretation, and representation of the other (culture) shaped by one's own experience and reality (Goldstein Gidoni 2010, 379-382).

This is not to reductively theorise either process. As Goldstein-Gidoni outlines in her work, mimicry serves a purpose in the understanding and experiencing of Japanese culture, however, this mimicry is generally based on the recreation of what her interlocutors consider authentic Japanese (Goldstein-Gidoni 2010: 379-382). She describes acts which are generally based on an essentialised perception of what Japanese culture is or is supposed to be,

involving wearing martial arts costumes and traditional Japanese clothes, facilitating financial gain based on the exploitation of Japanese culture amongst other things (ibid. 380). Mimicry here serves the copying of an image of a culture frozen in time. It is based on the conceived existence of an 'original', the goal being to reproduce it as closely as possible. This process of imitation allows a deeper connection with the visuality of culture as they continue to study it, it also becomes self-perpetuating knowledge of said culture, stagnant and essentially the antithesis to what cultures is: dynamic, moving, continuously growing. This is where imitation, where mimicry in the cultural context fails, as the appropriator cannot fully reproduce an original that does not factually exist.

Mimesis, on the other hand, may be seen as the process of hybridisation, of not just the creation of the self and the Other, but also the space in between, where negotiation between the two occurs (Baud 1997: 106-107). Mimesis, must be considered as a continuous process in which the appropriator, the mimic, through his communication and interaction with another blurs the line between his own cultural identity and that of what he has appropriated, and as a result becomes a hybrid (Kraidy 2002: 317). As such, we return to the ambivalence which Bhabha outlines as a space of immense cultural (and political) potential, the space where hybridisation occurs (Baud 1997, Bhabha 1984: 131-133, Bhabha 1994). "Thus, imitation does not mean loss of identity per se; it can also mean appropriation and resistance" (Baud 1997: 107), or indeed the gaining of one, as mimesis becomes the re-representation, of an object or cultural material in a completely new, unique context (Mathijs & Mosselmans 2000: 97-98).

Mimesis and Mimicry as a Collaborative Method

The concept of mimesis stands central to my understanding of cultural appropriation, cultural authenticity and culture as a whole. At the same time, it provided a pivotal theorisation of a methodology I believe to be a necessity in exploring the convoluted and pluralistic positions within cultural appropriation. Indeed, I would argue that the process of 'mimesis' is indeed inherent to ethnographic practices and that ethnographic knowledge-making is contingent upon humanity's inherent mimetic faculty (Mathijs & Mosselmans 2000:80-81, Taussig 1993: xiii, 19). Taussig's analysis that mimesis plays a major role in creating alterity further supports this theory, as one may argue anthropology and ethnography as disciplines are both dependent on the tension between the self and the Other (Taussig xiii, 8). This theorisation of

mimesis paired with Goldstein-Gidoni's hypothesis that mimicry may be a powerful tool in learning from other cultures through imitating, practicing, and experiencing suggests powerful methodological potential particularly within the context of this research (Goldstein-Gidoni 2010: 366, 379- 382). Whilst the theorisation of mimesis aids in theorising and navigating processes of cultural appropriation beyond moral and cultural dichotomies, it may also be considered as a guiding principle to collaborative methodologies. Indeed, works on other ways of knowing, collaborative research, and even visual anthropology imply mimesis and mimicry in the way in which knowledge may be transferred between researcher and interlocutors (Botticello 2016: 314, Grasseni 2004: 43-44, MacDougall 2005: 3,7). Botticello, Grasseni, and MacDougall outline in which way guidance is needed to overcome 'blindness' or incomplete understanding by not knowing what to perceive, caused by different lived experiences. Hastrup refers to these differences in experience as "other ways of knowing" (Hastrup 2004). I would argue that collaborative, mimetic methodologies are productive, particularly in research into cultural identities and overcoming the gap between these different ways of knowing for several reasons.

As explored in my fieldwork and visual project, the experiences of cultural appropriation and appreciation are incredibly fluid and plural. The plurality of these experiences means that considering these participants as representative of a larger group to be reductive, ultimately producing a new way of knowing which is not representative of any of my participants. As argued previously, this misrepresentation can only lead to an essentialization and misrepresentation of my participants' experiences, which continue less meaningful debate on cultural appropriation. Collaborative creative practices allow for the continued complexity of my interlocutors' ontologies by allowing for an intersubjective exchange of ways of knowing. Schneider in fact identified this factor of agency as an underestimated factor in productively defining and exploring processes of cultural appropriation (Schneider 2003: 225-226). I became mimetically involved in reproducing their lived experience, and by doing so gained both a deeper insight into their position holistically, whilst simultaneously being confronted with my own. Collaboration in effect becomes mimesis in action, as I attempt to become the other. By doing so I expose the alterity between me and my participants, allowing for a much more reflexive understanding of their and my own positionality. Indeed, one may argue that going native is rooted in mimetic behaviour (Roque 2015: 208).

Lastly, this mimetic collaboration offered powerful opportunities in actively engaging not only with the audience but also with my participants. As O'Neill and Hubbard describe, this combination of collaborative and ethnographic methods and the production of art allowed for the simultaneous production and representation of experience (O'Neill and Hubbard 2010: 47-48). This creates an imagined space in which empathic and intersubjective knowledge can be exchanged. Through collaborative creation we open potential channels through which other ways of knowing, complex truth, and immaterial experiences can be embodied and experienced through artistic recreation (ibid. 50-53).

Drawing Conclusions

"One imitates with a view to criticize, to learn, to experiment, to incorporate, to order, to have fun, to play, to laugh and cry."`(Trajano Filho in Roque 2015: 204).

Although Filho's observation may exclude some of the more dire consequences of imitation, I believe that at the core, he is right. As exemplified by my participants' varied positions and experiences, appreciation, and appropriation are never destructively intended, which makes the analysis of cultural appropriation as a discourse that much more of a necessity. As we try to distinguish between authentic and the inauthentic, between appreciation and appropriation we must consider contextuality, plural meanings, and the politicisation of these terms.

As discussed, authenticity as a construct ties culture in one place, both temporarily and spatially, and discredits the experience of diasporas, mixed heritage people, and those whose experience does not fit a 'traditional' cultural environment. Moreover, it serves as a legitimising term for continued exoticisation and othering by ascribing inherent factors to culture which, as established, continue to grow and evolve. Simultaneously I have established how authenticity remains a relevant concept by identifying cultural entities and making distinctions between both communities but also between individual experiences (Gibson 2014: 40-41).

Globalisation as a process necessitates the analysis of how and why we experience, particularly in a context where homogenisation and heterogenization occur simultaneously. Hybridisation and cultural interaction are by far not clear cut processes, and existing power structures may, despite intentions to the contrary, produce hybrids and processes of cultural

appropriation which may prove to be destructive whilst trying to conserve cultural heritage and diversity, or in fact misrepresent cultural differences within hybridity.
Appropriation and appreciation are not mutually exclusive, not synonymous with bad or good experiencing of culture. Indeed the intentionality, with which we have distinguished between the harmful expression and constructive potential does not stand as an analytical framework. This research has shown the convoluted ways in which attempts at appreciation may have destructive consequences and how destructive appropriation of culture can in fact create constructive potential and foster inclusivity and diversity. Cultural appropriation remains a relevant discourse to frame and understand global cultural imbalances of power, exploitation, and questions of representation within the larger cultural discourses. Only by critically engaging cultural appropriation, hybridity, (in)authenticity can we create space between culturally different actors to include new cultural realities such as those of my participants (Schneider 2003: 222).

Ultimately, this research, whilst offering a theoretical framework within which to dissect and navigate cultural complexities, demands for further study. Additional factors, which were omitted or ignored from this study due to restraints in scope, such as critical race theory, the meaning and queering of ‘Asianness’, Manga and Anime specific contexts such as the active exportation of this cultural good by the Japanese state, concepts of popular or unpopular culture within the context of cultural appropriation or the dissection of diaspora experiences, all beg for continued additional research into the field.

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