

# *The Moral of the Xerox*

## Missalette

*Context for a Conversation on the Ethics of Piracy, Cultural Appropriation,  
and Flows of Consent and Permission from*

East – West

North – South

Center – Periphery

Invisible – Visible

**Florian Cramer**  
**Clara Lobregat Balaguer**

Designed by Clara.

This missalette was intended as a companion document to a conversation. It contains emails, texts, and images exchanged between Florian Cramer and Clara Lobregat Balaguer regarding the theme *Stealing from the West*. This publication exists as a just-in-case, for those who might be interested in the documentation, annexes, and subtext of a finite public intervention.

Amen.

*Her page is this one.*

Printed by Florian.

## KARAWANE

jolifanto bambla ô falli bambla

*grossiga m'pfa habla horem*

**égiga goramen**

higo bloiko russula huju

**hollaka hollala**

**anlogo bung**

**blago bung**

blago bung

**bosso fataka**

**ü üü ü**

**schampa wulla wussa ólobo**

**hej tatta gôrem**

eschige zunbada

**wulubu ssubudu uluw ssubudu**

**tumba ba- umf**

*kusagauma*

**ba - umf**

Cultural appropriation at the root of Dadaism - Hugo Ball reciting his "elephant caravan" at Cabaret Voltaire 1916.

*This page is this one.*

Clara

I generally write out my talks in their entirety, if they are in front of larger audiences or academic people.

Since topics I broach are very sensitive, I find pre-scripted talks are safer.

### Tropical Notes on Cultural Appropriation

People generally talk about cultural appropriation as happening between one culture and another, or one race to another. As a biracial female (Eurasian) engaged with informal publishing as a medium for artistic practice and research, I've encountered a large set of concerns not covered by this polarisation. Cultural appropriation is no less problematic when it happens intraculturally, within a mostly "homogenous" racial environment. Here, shadism, cultural cringe, indigenous politics (there are many precolonial tribes in the Philippines whose culture is often invoked by the non-tribal populace in the search for a decolonized na-

*My notes are a bit extensive since they essentially know nothing about me or the context of the work am doing.*

Florian

### Appropriation versus appropriation

Before "cultural appropriation" became a subject of political debates, the concept evoked different associations in Western culture. For the cultural mainstream, it typically referred to the reuse of images and other media in pop art like that of Andy Warhol, 1980s American appropriation by Sherry Levine, Richard Prince and others to contemporary Post-Internet art. One could also add sampling and remixing culture in popular music - although most of it came from African diaspora culture, from Lee Perry via Public Enemy to Moor Mother, and had the construction of diasporic memory and non-linear time (rather than disruption of one's own memory and time) as a major concern.

In less-known Western culture, appropriation was practiced under such names as "detournement", "plagiarism" and "piracy", with a history that involves - among others - dada-

*My idea was to simply tell the story of the invitation - how I was approached for a subject for which I thought you were more competent to speak about*

*This is fantastic and really shows that catholicism is the oldest globalized medium!*

tional pride), and class privilege are important topics to consider. They are, however, dealt with roughshod in Philippine cultural production.

This has somewhat to do with how discourse on cultural appropriation is controlled by mostly Western voices, whatever color they may be. HyperWestern liberal theories of appropriation—an essentialist quandary of “color” as flattened unity, applicable across global borders and cultural histories—often fail to recognise that, to citizens of the geographical Other, assimilated communities of color in the West are part of the (capitalist/imperialist) hegemony that excludes, subjugates, appropriates, and extracts from the peripheries. Though their experiences are valuable and in many ways applicable, they do not fully explain experiences from the variedly developing elsewhere. Black America is not Black Africa. Brown Europe is not Brown Southeast Asia. And sometimes when you bring this up, some of your POC allies from the West brush you off. Because Western communities of color, however marginalised and vulnerable they may be, still have access to a larger platform

*Wrote this pretty fast, i'll copyedit  
mrrw. now it's late, sleep will do me well.  
If anything is TMI, feel free to edit.*

ists, lettrists and Situationists, mail art, punk, the Pirate Bay and Internet memes.

The dividing line between establishment and underground is, admittedly, somewhat artificial. For example, the Warhol factory was a center of queer counterculture. Conversely, the inventor of Mail Art as an anti-art market practice, Ray Johnson, was close friends with Warhol. Nevertheless, the countercultural Western appropriation techniques can clearly be called practices of “Stealing from the West”. Beyond that, they were tactical and strategic attempts of shaking, undermining and destroying Western bourgeois culture, by attacking its ideological core of the notions of property, authorship, individuality and subjectivity.

Groups like the Lettrists (and later Neoists and radical Internet activists) saw this as a revolutionary effort with no strings attached - except maybe those of humor. Others like Malcolm McLaren’s version of punk were both revolutionary and self-declared product of the creative industries (i.e. the “Great Rock’n Roll Swindle”). Others, such as commu-

**Would it be feasible for you to send them by the afternoon?  
(But please don't worry, in doubt I will always be able to improvise.)**

**but, if you agree, do this in a dialogic or otherwise decentered way so that it doesn't become patronizing?!**



of visibility, their struggles are taken to represent a "people of color" or even a Left that is "post-racially" and progressively globalised. Reality is far more complex. One need only look at the colophon of books that talk about, say, the decolonial, to discover this Western power bias, neatly covered up by male-female parity (in the best of cases) or racial diversity that mostly represents writers based in the North/West. Also, Documenta 14 seemed to consider Greece as the beginning of the Global South (?!), a mere state of mind. Whoever placed those goal-posts seems removed from reality.

### Strategic Essentialism

Not allowing people to determine the use of their own culture for personal gain seems unrealistic. Especially in severely marginalised communities (indigenous groups in the Philippines come to mind) or resource-poor areas whose culture may be the only monetizable asset they control. This was Spivak's concept, but she seemed to renege from it later in her career. Maybe because

*This Catholic school girl reject is  
having real fun with blasphemy.  
gonna be crazy looking hope that's fine*

nity art, Open Source and copyleft activists, made reformist rather than revolutionary efforts.

Appropriation can also be reactionary, even fascist. This includes disruptive and revolutionary appropriation practices. A current example is the meme culture of the Alt-Right. Alt-Right, Neoism, punk and Let-trism are founded on a similar general view of "politics as downstream from culture", to quote Andrew Breitbart, the founder of Breitbart News. All these movements are characterized by their militant ambition to "Search & Destroy" the existing culture, to quote Iggy Pop via the title of Val Vale's historical punk zine.

### *Power as the blind spot in (radical) appropriation*

There is a common assumption that appropriation is counter-hegemonic, the poor people's weapon against larger regimes of power. This makes appropriation a populist practice, with all strings attached. An early cultural analysis of this populism exists in Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of

For Skipping, any time  
between 17 and midnight  
your time in the Philippines  
will be fine.

If the printing is too much to  
ask, I could also take care of  
it in Rotterdam.

it was too complicated to explain to Westerners? Maybe because it was hijacked and twisted by the unsavory soft-powerful? Is it possible to be ethically strategically essential if one is aware of the landmines enough to skirt them? Can we, in the developing elsewhere, choose to deviate, make our own rules, build upon instead of blindly acquiesce to what we are told is proper, civilized? Or is our opinion only valuable if it validates theories born in the West to explain our reality as the Other or the underrepresented or the once-colonized.

### The Copyother:

#### Specific Notes on Discriminate Piracy/Undocumented Publishing

##### Printing Landscape in Metro Manila

Many local printing suppliers are actively engaged in open or semi-open textbook piracy. They are in a neighbourhood where much print

*Cool! Basically, a Catholic zone.  
 Fine \* New phone so autocorrect  
 still doesn't know me very well*

medieval carnival. In Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Bakhtin, intertextuality and subversive appropriation of codes amount to a "revolution in poetic language". - Remarkably, Kristeva later distanced herself from literal applications of her poetics when being interviewed about the German novelist Helen Hegemann's "intertextual" plagiarism of postings by the blogger Airen.

In comparison to the contemporary work of Richard Prince, the balance of power between Hegemann and Airen was rather level. Today, Prince no longer "appropriates" Marlboro billboard ads like he did in the 1980s, but common people's Instagram postings, selling each of them for \$100,000. This might be considered exploitative, but is still an example of appropriation as an individual act. A personal anecdote might illustrate what can happen when institutions begin to practice "subversive" appropriation. In 2005, Lentos Museum Linz, a major Austrian contemporary art museum, hosted an exhibition "Just Do It - The Subversion of Signs from Marcel Duchamp to Prada Meinhof". Instead of a convention-

*But gone is true as well  
 (when we speak about  
 Cologne). sitting in a train to  
 Jachen, a catholic town 60km  
 West of Cologne...*

*It is great, and I will extend/  
 rewrite mine to match it. Gim  
 now on the road in Gritterp  
 (shooting a video) and will be  
 done tomorrow.*

counterfeiting takes place. Counterfeit culture here is very much a thing because of a combination of factors. Bureaucratic red tape and corruption, informal notions on identification. A great number of Filipinos in rural or urban contexts don't have official identification documents because these imply a cost and the need for a safe storage area. Fake diplomas, IDs, etc. can be bought for cheap from a very visible black market, accessible at street level. Xeroxing entire books is pretty standard practice for students to afford or access textbooks (as well as for trading hard to find theory titles amongst the academically inclined).

### *Intimate Piracy:*

### **HOHOL** *(Hang Out Hang Out Lang)* *as Library Activation* *and Pedagogical Tool*

The book pirating parties I do in Manila with a small group of changing guests, where we xerox books from my

*This way, we save the texts and honor the effort, but still deliver the kind of loose talk the context seems to demand.*

al catalog, it was accompanied by a book whose content the curators had appropriated, sampled and plagiarized from various sources - books, essays, papers. None of the original writers or sources were credited. The colophon, however, still mentioned the museum and the three curators as its author, and the publication was only commercially available as a 22 Euro print book.

I happened to be one of the writers who got appropriated. The manuscript of a lecture on Open Source, Copyleft and Open Content I had given at a public library, originally published on the library's homepage, had been fully incorporated into more than 20 pages of the Lentos Museum book. Back then, I was unemployed, living on German Hartz IV welfare and barely had the money to buy that book. (Another writer "included" in the book was Inke Arns, curator and artistic director of HMKV Dortmund, who wrote the following statement on the matter: <http://www.mail-archive.com/nettime-1@bbs.thing.net/msg02876.html>).

This was my first personal experience of power as an under-reflected

**This article gives some interesting insight. (Helpful information for us.)**

**Being the protestant atheist I am, I wouldn't have recognized the format though.**

library and from the book selection brought in by each guest. This project is the premise of the book for which Florian is lending us one of his texts.

### *Cottage Industry Birth Marks*

My publishing practice uses cottage industry printing methods—semi-legal, aesthetically deviant, error-laden—and vernacular material culture references. Aim is to create critical content/objects that reflect the physical context in which they were created. And how, ironically, in the post-colonial condition, this is received more enthusiastically in the West than at home.

### *Copyright Statement as Intervention In Itself*

I sometimes use the copyright statement as an expressive intervention, as a sort of microessay in itself, a parody of legality, and a place to determine who can and cannot pirate what we publish.

*Sent  
Possibly  
Hopefully  
from  
while  
not  
my  
sitting  
in  
while  
phone.  
traffic.  
driving.*

aspect in past discourses of appropriation. It may be easy to criticize the current debates of “cultural appropriation” for being essentialist (which indeed is their major risk). Yet these debates do sensibly highlight previously blind spots of the power politics of appropriation. The example of Lentos and Richard Prince suggest to broaden the critique of “cultural appropriation” towards an intersectional critique that not only includes culture and race, but last not least class, plus gender, sexual orientation and ability.

### *Towards a radical critique of appropriation, which must be a critique of “appropriation”*

Such a critique will be painful because it would not only target, say, blackfacing in Dutch Santa Claus celebrations, but also the blackfacing done by early 20th century Dadaists in the Cabaret Voltaire when they performed “negro dances” and “negro songs” wearing pseudo-African masks.

If this critique is radical, it must not stop at itself. Thus it ultimately has to concern the word “appropri-

*Do you have particular preferences regarding the paper?*

*Or collated GDS would greatly help me!*

Note: Permission to pirate our books hinges upon credit, making less or equal profit as us, belonging to some sort of periphery, not being an asshole... In short, wielding not more power than we do and seeming relatable. Very subjective and difficult to enforce. But then again, you could describe fair use contingency of copyright in exactly the same way: hyper-subjective and hyperrelative.

### Humane Print Relations

How to be a humane publisher/designer/collaborator, regardless of precarity. You may not be able to pay people, acknowledge all your visual influences, send as many free copies to collaborators as you would like, but it is of supreme importance not to be an asshole.

A tiny toolbox: Authorless books, credit where it's due, not just mentioning but extensively documenting your influences and publishing investigative texts about them especially when these texts do not exist, sharing opportunities for visibility, experiments in profit distribution. TBC.

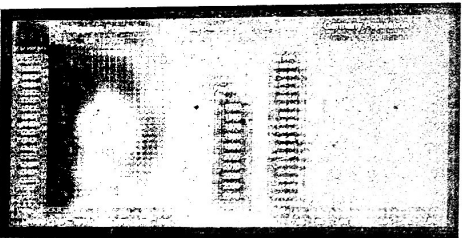
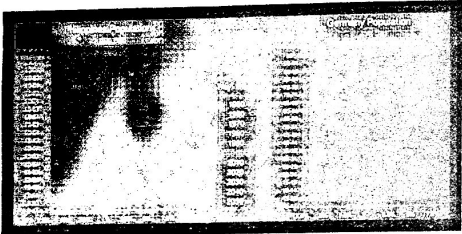
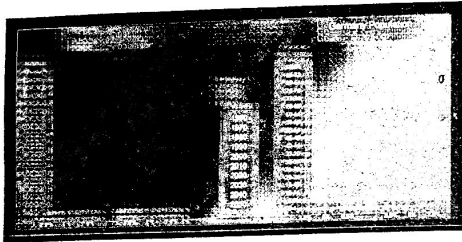
*Light blue because Virgin Mary/  
color of heaven? But if you only  
have white that's also totally fine.*

ation" itself, a word that suggests, by implication, that culture is a property in the sense of a commodity. The dialectics of the critique of appropriation is, in other words, that it reinforces a capitalist, economic, ultimately Western paradigm of ownership and territorial claims, especially if the resources - the information, the signs - that are being appropriated aren't a scarce material resource. If there's anything to be learnt from subversive appropriation practices, then this critique of ownership. Their history as I had previously sketched it might be Western to a large extent, yet I see their most advanced contemporary practices elsewhere, in areas less suffocated by repressive intellectual property regimes: take, for example, the sharing of popular media as a "weekly packet" via USB sticks in almost all of Cuba, take Russian e-book servers, West-African electronics markets, Shanzhai product design in China and Clara's practices in the Philippines.

In the end, there are no answers but just questions: How to account for power in these practices without falling into essentialism? How do we get out of this mess?

**I do have a large archive of zines and publications, all related to Zteoisim, festivals of plagiarism, multiple names, Luther Blissett etc.**

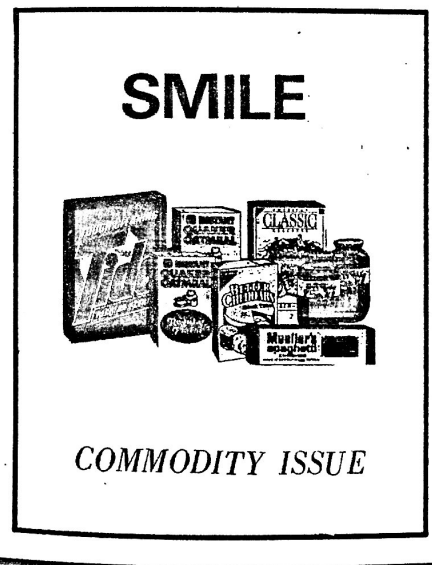
**Going through the manuscript, a crazy idea occurred to me**



Life expectancy comparison between populations of the Philippines (left) and Germany (right). In 1950, 2000, and projection for 2050. Dynamic pyramids of data from the UN found at <http://www.worldlifeexpectancy.com/world-health-review/philippines-vs-germany>



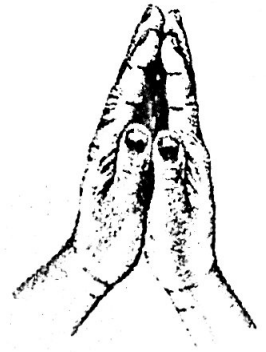
Appropriation/culture jamming done by art institutions by "appropriating" the work of artists and freelance writers: "Just Do It" exhibition by Lentos Museum Linz, 2005.



One issue of SMILE, the zine of multiple origins which anyone could publish.

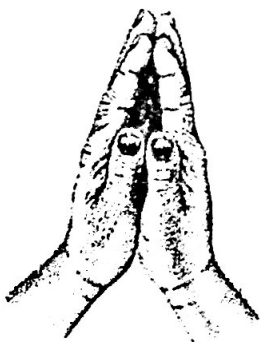


Salamat



Palihog

Printed in the diocese of  
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on the joyous occasion of the  
Pluriversale VII:  
Stealing from the West  
for the critical parishioners of  
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Bitte



Danke