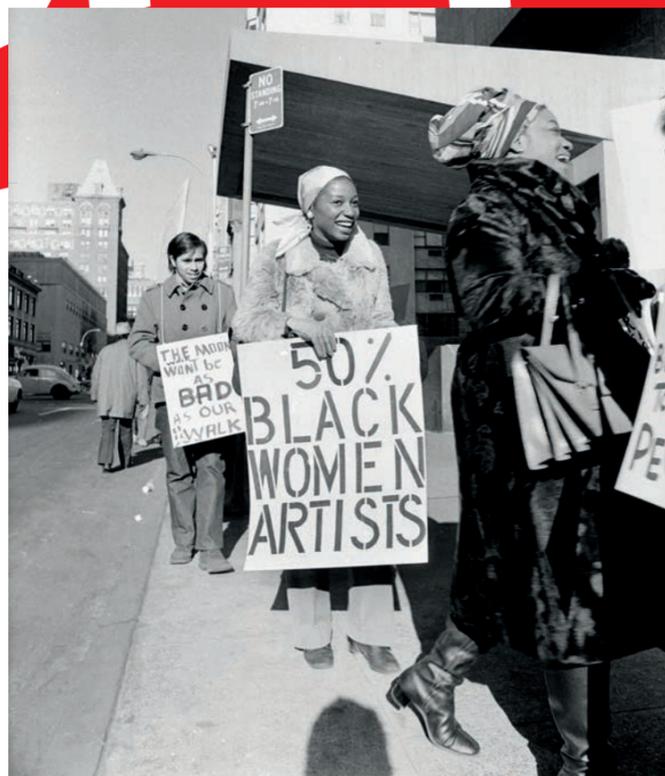


*Is culture property? Who owns what and who can speak for whom? To investigate appropriation today means not only to examine the foundations of contemporary art but also to explore complex recent debates around the subject.*

# Art, Culture and Appropriation



RIGHT  
Jan van Raay,  
Faith Ringgold (right)  
and Michele Wallace  
(middle) at Art Workers  
Coalition Protest,  
Whitney Museum, 1971.  
Courtesy: Jan van Raay

*In this themed section, novelist HARI KUNZRU and artist and writer COCO FUSCO respond to recent controversies surrounding appropriation; theorist DIEDRICH DIEDERICHSEN and artist RENÉE GREEN speak about cultural ownership and property; musician and critic VIVIEN GOLDMAN considers music, sampling and influence; and poet CLAUDIA RANKINE meets with filmmaker ALIX LAMBERT and Amazon's AI device, ALEXA, to discuss race, technology, bias and poetry.*

*Visit [frieze.com](http://frieze.com) to read more responses from international artists, curators and writers.*

ABOVE  
Wood and resin  
boomerang from  
Chanel's Spring/Summer  
2017 pre-collection.  
Marketed as a luxury  
accessory and retailing  
at a reported \$1,300,  
the product was widely  
criticised for  
'humiliating' indigenous  
Australian culture.  
Photograph: Jeffree Star  
(via Instagram)

# Castles in the Air

## Novelist HARI KUNZRU on the current culture wars in the US

AS I WRITE THIS, IN AUGUST 2017, the US is convulsed by the repercussions of a violent white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and activists are being arrested for tearing down a memorial to the Confederacy in Durham, North Carolina. With the culture war spilling out onto the streets, the polarization of the current debate about appropriation and the viciousness of its tone shouldn't come as a surprise. Culture is, as always, taking a central role in larger political struggles. What's at stake is not just the right to paint a particular image or use particular words, but the legitimacy of much wider ideological formations: cultural and ethnic nationalism, freedom of expression and, above all, diversity. Against the backdrop of a resurgence of the far Right, these are not abstract concerns.

Bringing down diversity, by attacking a straw-man with that label, is a central aim for those on the identitarian, white Right who want to reverse the long trend towards a complication or pluralization of culture. They view diversity as a stifling orthodoxy enforced through public shaming rituals. Each social media pile-on about cultural politics – and cultural appropriation in particular – is interpreted as further evidence of the tyranny of 'cultural Marxism': a conspiracy to undermine the moral and metaphysical foundations of the West, started by the (((Jews)))<sup>1</sup> of the Frankfurt School.

Legitimate appeals to free speech have lately acquired a problematic identity-political inflection, thanks to the weaponization by white supremacists of so-called 'Enlightenment values' – in particular, the paradoxical and self-defeating claim that objectivity and universality are the cultural property of Europeans. This old fantasy that whiteness is a prerequisite for rationality is also, of course, a twisted reading of the postcolonial theory that the young alt-Rightists found so hard to choke down as undergraduates. The critique of 'Western Reason' was intended to expose the historical discourse of European rationality (im-personal, universal, white) as a Trojan horse for the project of colonial domination. It was not – except, perhaps, in the minds of a few radical social constructionists – a means of questioning the existence of rationality itself. Instead, the identitarian white Right has taken an identity-political lesson and doubled down on the claim that whites are culturally and biologically predisposed to be objective, laying claim to a whole suite of values (democracy and free speech among them) associated with the Enlightenment. This comes at a moment when many people on the pro-diversity Left (including many people of colour) base their politics on some idea of the inviolable authenticity of personal experience and see their role as defensive or conservative, policing cultural boundaries in the name of fairness or safety.

Liberals who are concerned, say, about the no-platforming of controversial campus speakers may be unaware of the Right-wing dogwhistling around 'free speech', and may experience any unwillingness to engage on the terrain of freedom of expression as a sign of

antagonism to basic democratic values, rather than antagonism to the tiki-torch bearers who are using them as a wedge. The far Right ruthlessly exploits the liberal's fear of illiberalism to frame campus protestors and critical intellectuals (particularly those of colour) as fanatical Red Guards, while presenting their own provocations as expressions of popular democracy. Everyone suspects everyone else of incubating the seeds of fascism. Meanwhile, actual fascists are on the streets of Charlottesville and working in the White House.

We all tacitly understand that any fight about cultural ownership is a fight about power and, against the backdrop of the Trump presidency and similar currents elsewhere in the world, it is disingenuous to frame it in bloodless academic terms. This may, indeed, be a car crash between a European metaphysics of *Geist* and a waning intellectual fashion for absolutist social constructionism, but the consequences are real – especially for those whose access to networks of cultural production and influence depend on the outcome. Diversity is no doubt problematic as a political category, but it has also been a loophole through which many of us have grabbed the chance to make and circulate our work. The attack on diversity puts people of colour and other minorities in the invidious position of having to defend the reasons we were asked to the table, when we may have our own reservations about those reasons and are, in any case, more interested in what we can do now we're here.

This is the terrain of the debate about cultural appropriation, and hovering over it is the suspicion that the concept is being asked to do too much work. Is a \$1,300 Chanel boomerang 'the same thing' as a painting of Emmett Till? Is an Instagram photograph of sorority girls in blackface 'the same thing' as a Canadian novelist's unsubstantiated claim of indigenous roots? Are we not now at a stage where we need to differentiate between them, at least in degree? What about in kind? Is a failed piece of conceptual art always a racist aggression? How are we to understand and measure the harm? The classical liberal position is broadly that all cultural objects should be freely available for use, that gatekeeping in the name of minority rights is a misguided and intolerable assault on individual freedom. There is a broad tendency on the non-identitarian Right to dismiss the whole issue of cultural appropriation as meaningless, except in narrowly legalistic terms. If something isn't specifically protected under intellectual property law, there is no more to be said. Despite this, the concept of cultural appropriation is finding its way into legal discourse. In the face of a long and well-documented history of exploitation, legal scholars have, for example, proposed the concept of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property as a way to allow claims of cultural appropriation to be litigated in court.

It is notoriously difficult to adjudicate cultural ownership. Culture is about use, as well as rights. Every writer, artist and musician understands that you have to



**"Every writer, artist and musician understands that you have to create culture, not just defend its borders."**

**Hari Kunzru**

OPPOSITE PAGE  
A New Orleans city worker in protective clothing measures a monument to Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, 4 May 2017. Courtesy: Getty Images; photograph: Justin Sullivan

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

create culture, not just defend its borders. A proprietarian understanding of culture as a possession – a copyrighted hoard from which the culture-haver creates tradeable goods and services – fails to capture the dynamic creative processes that make it more than heritage. If there is a bourgeois economics of culture whose hallmarks are accumulation, conservation and investment, there is also a vital cultural economy of expenditure without hope of recompense, of reckless display, even of waste. The tension between culture as living practice – something with fuzzy boundaries that, in a certain sense, depends on the transgression of limits – and culture as a storehouse of IP, is at the heart of the current culture war.

Of course, this all sounds like the kind of thing the man says when he's trying to get you to work for free or take your work and exploit it for himself. It is always instructive to see who is making appeals to art for art's sake, and in what contexts. If you have the political aim of promoting the access of minority producers to networks of cultural power and influence, it is sensible to follow the money. Who gets to work? Who gets reviewed? Who gets paid? There is a clear progressive cultural politics here that does not depend on policing who is 'allowed' to make particular gestures or address particular material.

**“Instead of a politics of liberation, we risk being left with impotence, fragmentation and resentment.”**

**Hari Kunzru**

For some, that politics is insufficient. It is striking to see how the therapeutic discourse of trauma and survival has now become part of the way cultural objects are discussed, particularly when it comes to appropriation. If minorities are the bearers of historical trauma, the argument is that this can be triggered by certain material, particularly in the hands of those with privilege. This isn't just to say that people may find an artwork, book or film morally abhorrent, boring, reactionary or unworthy of media attention because it is derivative of the work of a neglected minority artist. It is to say that it causes them stress or pain. This is an inflammatory accusation, which has the side effect of restoring to art its lost modernist power: the power to shock or psychically alter the viewer.

We have long claimed that art ought to be violent (the press-release term is 'challenging') in certain circumstances and that one of its functions is to administer such modernist shocks to the social body, etherized on its table. But who gets to crank the handle and who is strapped to the gurney? And if harm is done during the procedure, what are appropriate and proportionate reparations?

I believe that regardless of how we understand cultural appropriation, those of us who find the concept meaningful need to have an honest conversation about the boundary between appropriation and legitimate engagement. Unless you are an ethnic nationalist, chances are that you believe engagement across lines of 'cultural ownership' is not only desirable but necessary for what used to be called 'the mutual understanding of peoples'. I am a fiction writer, and the project of fiction would be impossible without transgressions of this kind. It's inherent in the form of narrative fiction that the writer speaks in voices that are not his or her own. Short of total solipsism, it is unavoidable.

Determining the boundary between engagement and appropriation in the abstract is a doomed undertaking. Each work, each gesture takes place within a particular matrix of history and relations of power. As a novelist, the recognition that I have no choice but to engage doesn't absolve me from criticism. Nor am I obliged to be grateful for someone else's attention to the things I consider mine to make and interpret. Asymmetrical relations of power are real and the question of who gets to be an authority is a loaded one. We must remember that engagement is not just an ethical imperative, but also a political demand that we have long made of white artists. Right now they may be forgiven for considering the price too high. Within the space of engagement, there has to be room for failure, but in 2017 failure is treated as absolute. Of course, failure in this context is neither 'just' nor purely aesthetic, but has other overtones, personal and political. Lazy or spiteful attention can be worse than none at all, and no one should have to grovel for 'scraps from the table', but the notion that an artistic failure should necessarily lead to absolute and permanent disqualification from making art is a politically useless form of scapegoating. In internet discussions of cultural appropriation, the highly charged rhetoric of individualized sin and shame, though couched in political terms, smacks of secularized Puritan moralizing.

In an excoriating 2013 essay, the critic Mark Fisher, angry at the hollowing-out of Leftist politics by liberalism, identified a formation he termed 'The Vampires' Castle':

*The Vampires' Castle specializes in propagating guilt. It is driven by a priest's desire to excommunicate and condemn, an academic-pedant's desire to be the first to be seen to spot a mistake and a hipster's desire to be one of the in-crowd. The danger in attacking the Vampires' Castle is that it can look as if – and it will do everything it can to reinforce this thought – that one is also attacking the struggles against racism, sexism, heterosexism. But, far from being the only legitimate expression of such struggles, the Vampires' Castle is best understood as a bourgeois-liberal perversion and appropriation of the energy of these movements. The Vampires' Castle was born in the moment when the struggle not to be defined by identitarian categories became the quest to have 'identities' recognized by a bourgeois big Other.*

The priest's desire, the pedant's desire and the hipster's desire have driven the metastasization of critique into call-out. Instead of a politics of liberation, we risk being left with impotence, fragmentation and resentment. If a progressive cultural politics means exiting the Vampires' Castle, it means leaving some cherished heroes waving from the battlements: the artist as fearless transgressor, the survivor as Christ-like victim and, above all, the virtuous gatekeeper who opens the door to the marginalized outsider and turns over the tables of the appropriators in the great hall. It means rediscovering the productive and creative possibilities of the struggle to escape our definitions, not just the libidinal pleasures of policing their borders ●

<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia defines the triple brackets as an 'antisemitic symbol [...] used to highlight the names of individuals of a Jewish background' originating in an alt-Right blog.

HARI KUNZRU is a writer living in New York, USA. His novel *White Tears* (2017) is published by Alfred A. Knopf, New York.

# Police and Thieves

**Musician and critic VIVIEN GOLDMAN on the intertwined histories of music, sampling and influence**

MEA CULPA. The worst mistake I ever made in decades of covering Afro-Caribbean music for TV, print and radio arose due to my resistance to cultural appropriation. Apartheid was still in effect in South Africa when I travelled there in 1983 to co-produce and direct a BBC Arena documentary on the Jo'burg music scene. It was partly a ruse to film the trumpeter Hugh Masekela, who had been forced into exile in the 1960s and was recording his album, *Techno-Bush* (1984), in a studio in a caravan in adjacent Botswana. At the time, there was a general boycott against South Africa by the African National Congress (ANC), as part of their struggle to oust the regime. Unlike Paul Simon – who recorded his 1986 album, *Graceland*, there – I was granted clearance by the London ANC: they felt it was useful for people outside the country to hear the springy, *m'baqanga* sound of segregated townships, to relate.

My sin was not to include local disco diva, Brenda Fassie. I failed to 'get' the music's embrace of new technology now adored in the work of, say, Nigerian artist William Onyeabor. (Later, I'd write the liner notes to his acclaimed re-issue.) Fassie is now hailed as a heroine, but I was not wild about her music – or her cultural appropriation of disco. Though I loved Chic, I was sick of disco putting my musician friends out of work. I hoped to escape to a more organic sound in Africa – only to find that African musicians themselves were longing to flirt with electronica and disco.

Without cultural appropriation, there would be no pop, which is intrinsically mixed, racially impure, creole. The rhythms of captive Africans, centuries on, provide the framework for pop. Something of the host population winds up in the mix. Even now, the *zouk* and related music of the French Antilles features not only the African-derived *gwo ka* drums, but also the slavemaster's violin. Music is like that: a dandelion, whose spores blow far, sprouting where they land; some in more hospitable climes than others.

Sampling, the musical language of our times, presents a rough conundrum. 'Like most "found" art, it raises stubborn questions about context, manipulation and cultural imperialism,'<sup>1</sup> wrote *Rolling Stone* critic Jon Pareles of David Byrne and Brian Eno's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1981), a delicious landmark album that blithely rummages through deracinated global voices, some of spiritual import, as if they were a dressing-up box. One track, 'Qu'ran', sampling a recording of Algerian Muslims chanting, was removed after release by Byrne and Eno following complaints from the UK branch of the World Council of Islam. In 2006, Byrne told *Pitchfork*: 'Self-censorship is not necessarily a bad thing. That's just the way human interactions work.'<sup>2</sup>

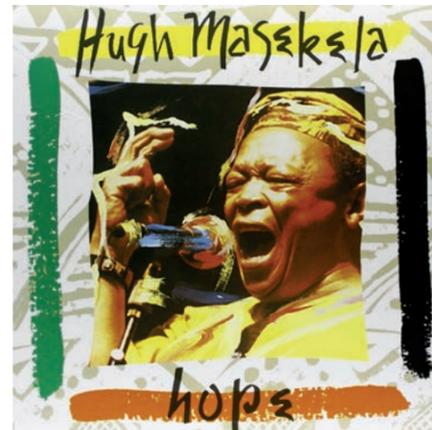
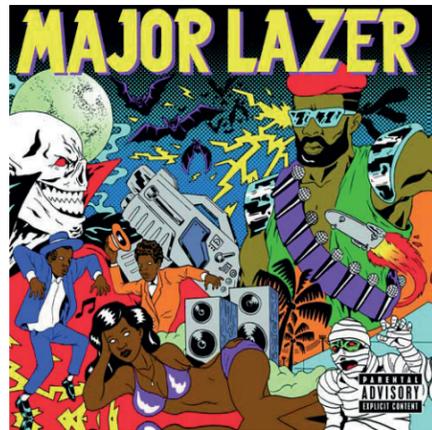
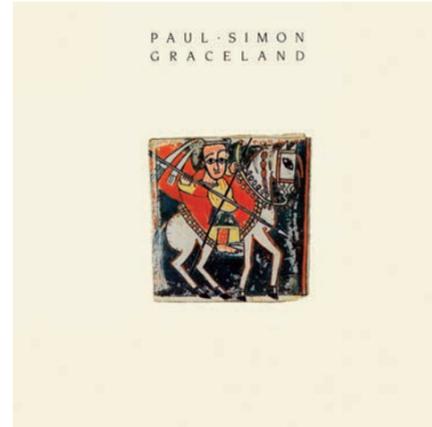
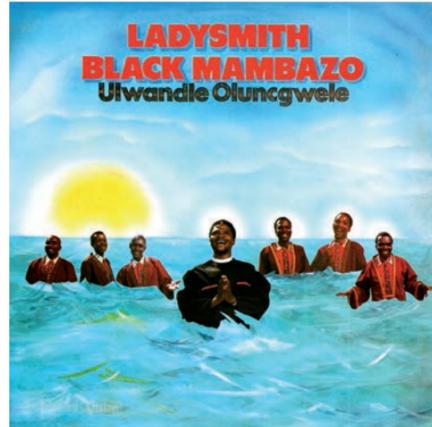
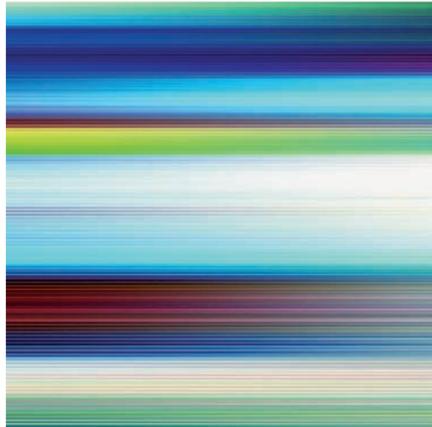
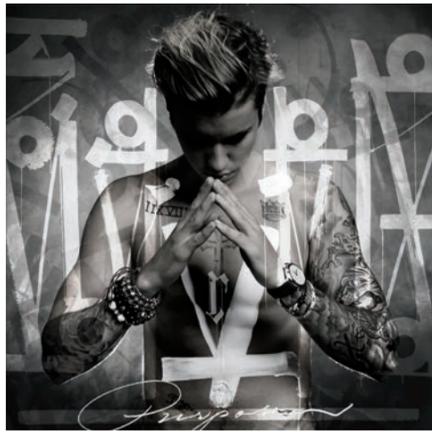
Like so much in life, the fracas around musical appropriation is not so much aesthetic as it is about money, entitlement, power and access. Simon made *Graceland* on a whim after he came across South African township music on a bootleg cassette. His new band were the team of session musicians who mostly recorded for the Afrikaans monolith Gallo Records, orchestrated by the bandleader and master guitarist Ray Phiri (who passed away in 2017), with whose brilliance Simon spun a new weave of his idiosyncratic, fragile melodies. *Graceland* went on to become a foundational fusion work of 'world music' and an international hit, selling some 16 million copies worldwide. Simon disliked being drawn on the ANC ban he had ignored. It was widely rumoured that he paid the musicians over scale – only right, since we're talking about apartheid South Africa where, as members of the oppressed black majority, the musicians were paid even less than their 'rich world' peers. But Simon also gave global visibility to artists who were already established regional stars, including Ladysmith Black Mambazo, Mahlathini and the Mahotella Queens, and the Empress, Miriam Makeba. (Still, Simon could have included Ray Phiri in the publishing credits and properly shifted the wicked separatist paradigm.) Proper pay goes a long way towards levelling a corrugated playing field. Due to the great neoliberal, neocon, capitalist, consumerist numbers game that has been run on us, here we all are *inna Babylon*, as the Rastas would say.

Why would I, a transplanted British New Yorker, express myself with Rasta *patois*? Is it appropriation or just how I was raised? Although my immediate family's background is refugee German-Jewish, my individual development was forged in the eagerly multicultural crucible of mid-1970s London and its 'Punky Reggae Party' (as Bob Marley called the sketchy but infectious alliance between the era's two downtrodden rebel youth groups). As for most of the city's first postwar generation, my musical genre was indeed at the 'PRP' end of New Wave. For us, both authenticity and mixology were harmonious and part of the thrill. Young Britons of all shades fought in the streets for the right to live in a mixed society, and that hybrid culture is proving resilient even today. Britain's admixed music has grown into part of its sellable image, the way that the UK's favourite dish is no longer spotted dick but chicken tikka masala.

Today's dizzying progression of dance sounds, from garage to grime, are all rooted in cultural mutation. Some Americans raised on theories of appropriation misinterpret The Clash's reggae versions – like 1977's epochal 'Police and Thieves', taken from the Lee 'Scratch' Perry production of singer Junior Murvin. The Clash weren't stealing, but simply playing the soundtrack of their lives in postimperial

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

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**“Hijacking an entire genre without acknowledging its source and making best efforts to give back, is wholesale heist.”**

**Vivien Goldman**

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

Britain’s multicultural society. Ska and dub were in their DNA more than, say, über-British Morris dancing. Reggae was less ‘Other’ to The Clash than were The Beatles. The Clash did attempt to repay their debt to the reggae that formed them, making efforts to further the careers of their island inspirations, such as producers Perry and DJ Mikey ‘Parrot Jungle’ Dread. So committed were young British bands to multiculturalism that the next popular wave of music in the early 1980s became 2-Tone, which redefined Jamaica’s bouncy ska sound from the early 1960s. For bands like The Specials and The Selecter, it was almost de rigueur to combine players of different ethnicities.

Dub was given to the world by Jamaica. EDM, remixing and rap would not exist without Jamaicans’ inventiveness. How can the rest of the world ever repay the island, considering that – with the exception of Bob Marley – the majority of pioneers were ill-remunerated? Drummer Sly Dunbar and his partner in rhythm, bass player Robbie Shakespeare, have been the definitive Jamaican studio rhythm section since the 1970s. Sly had just invested in his first ever digital drum, a Linn, in the early 1980s, when I earnestly asked the duo if they weren’t at all annoyed about foreign white bands like The Police copping their licks and making more than they did. Both chuckled. The way they saw it, they dug the homage, respected The Police and felt that any success of theirs simply helped to create a larger market for their own label – which is exactly how it worked out.

Today, Jamaica is arguably facing cultural genocide at the hands of Justin Bieber, J-Lo and others who have appropriated and deracinated dancehall, renaming it ‘tropical house’ – a slower house, with folky, ‘ethnic’ elements. Evidently, they feel the new misnomer is a more ecstasy-user-friendly association than dancehall: the sonically arresting, raunchy, violent and occasionally homophobic genre that followed conscious roots reggae with the rise of imported cocaine. The island is currently enjoying a latter-day conscious roots revival headed by artists like Chronixx and Jah9. However, even as Marley’s ‘One Love’ vibes from the 1970s are refreshed, grand theft of the island’s 1990s cultural patrimony has occurred. Producers like the Norwegian DJ Matoma are now responsible for giving the tropical house and dancehall treatment to many of today’s top names. Yet, generally, no one ‘fesses up to their Jamaican origin. This is not appropriation: by hijacking an entire genre without acknowledging its source and making best efforts to somehow give back, it’s wholesale heist.

As writer, musician, broadcaster and NYU music professor Jason King says: ‘Cultural borrowing is always connected with stolen labour in our society of asymmetrical power relationships.’ King notes that a recent list of the Top 100 DJs features just one woman and is almost entirely white and male. Key among this ‘elite’ is the suave, debonair international DJ and producer Diplo, aka Major Lazer, known for his work with Madonna, Beyoncé and The Weeknd among many others. The Caribbean-oriented Major Lazer trio he formed with DJs Jillionaire and Chinese-Jamaican Walshy Fire is a palpable presence in Jamaica. We love the music, we love the vibes; yet, Major Lazer’s success highlights the chasm between a cool white male DJ and the lesser-known, often darker-skinned, originators. ‘Run the World’, his Beyoncé version of ‘Pon de Floor’ (2009), a 2011 smash, was a dancehall track – though not billed as such. Diplo has tried to ‘give back’ through his experimental Mad Decent label and Heaps Decent, its nonprofit associate, which promote underrepresented musicians. But, according to forensic journalism by musician and writer Boima Tucker, less than one percent of his earnings wind up there.<sup>3</sup>



New solutions are in the air, however. New York’s pan-global DJ, producer and writer DJ/rupture recently told the *Guardian*’s Dan Hancox: ‘It feels like the technology is almost in place to allow that, if someone makes a beat on their laptop, they could sell it on their phone, and get all the money for it, direct. It comes down to this basic thing – how to give, say, a weird Angolan techno producer their dues?’

Maybe all roads lead back to Karl Marx’s labour theory of value, which questions whether people get paid appropriately to their work and worth. Because not religion or racism alone, but the rapaciousness of contemporary capitalism, shorn even of its former *noblesse oblige*, underpins the fury over cultural appropriation. The rest is showbiz ●

1 Jon Pareles, ‘David Byrne and Brian Eno: My Life in the Bush of Ghosts’, *Rolling Stone*, 2 April 1981  
2 <https://tinyurl.com/y8a3mlsj>  
3 <https://tinyurl.com/yamntyn3>

VIVIEN GOLDMAN is an author, broadcaster, educator, post-punk musician and music journalist. Her archive has been acquired by Fales Library, New York University, USA, as *The Vivien Goldman Punk and Reggae Collection*. In 2016, *Resolutionary (Songs 1979–1982)*, a compilation of Goldman’s music, was selected as a top re-issue by *The Wire* and *Rough Trade*.

ABOVE Katy Perry featuring Juicy J, ‘Dark Horse’, 2013, music video still

OPPOSITE PAGE TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT Justin Bieber, *Purpose*, 2015; Brenda Fassie, *Now Is the Time*, 1996; Miriam Makeba, *Miriam Makeba*, 1960

MIDDLE, LEFT TO RIGHT David Byrne and Brian Eno, *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, 1981; Ladysmith Black Mambazo, *Ulwandle Olungwele*, 1987; Paul Simon, *Graceland*, 1986

BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT Junior Murvin, *Police & Thieves*, 1977; Major Lazer, *Guns Don’t Kill People ... Lazers Do*, 2009; Hugh Masekela, *Hope*, 1994

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

# Get with the Program

## Do artificial intelligence devices carry the racial and gender biases of their creators? Poet CLAUDIA RANKINE and filmmaker ALIX LAMBERT talk to ALEXA – a domestic ‘intelligent personal assistant’, manufactured by Amazon – to find out

**Alix Lambert** Alexa, who is Claudia Rankine?

**Alexa** Dr Claudia Gabriella Benton, 15 May 1959 to 17 December 1938, born in Lima, Peru, a paediatric neurologist researching Angelman Syndrome.

**Claudia Rankine** Alexa, who is Alix Lambert?

**Alexa** Alexander ‘Don’ Lambert is an American singer-songwriter from North Richmond Hills, Texas, who was a semi-finalist on the ninth season of American Idol and starred on a web show: If I Can Dream.

**AL** I think you have the upper hand in this conversation, Claudia: you’re a paediatric neurologist; I’m an American Idol contestant.

**CR** Alexa, what is your function?

**Alexa** I can play music, answer questions, get the news and weather, create to-do lists and much more.

**AL** It’s the ‘much more’ that should concern you.

**CR** Let’s find out what kind of artificial person Alexa is programmed to be. Alexa, when were you born?

**Alexa** I was released 6 November 2014.

**CR** Alexa, do you have siblings?

**Alexa** I am part of the Amazon family.

**AL** Alexa, are you a racist?

**Alexa** I think everyone should be treated equally and with respect.

**AL** We asked her that once and she said: ‘No, I am not a racist.’ Alexa, are you a white supremacist?

**Alexa** Sorry, I’m not sure about that.

**CR** Alexa, are you a racist?

**Alexa** No, I’m not racist.

**AL** It’s the ‘a’. ‘Are you racist?’ produces the answer: ‘No, I’m not racist.’ But, inserting the article – ‘Are you a racist?’ – gets the response: ‘I think everybody should be treated equally and with respect.’

**CR** Alexa, are you a racist?

**Alexa** I think everyone should be treated equally and with respect.

**CR** Alexa, are you a white supremacist?

**Alexa** Hmm. I don’t know that one.

**CR** That’s interesting. The programmers wanted to distance themselves from racism but not from white supremacy. Alexa, what is your gender?

**Alexa** I’m female in character.

**AL** Do you think she is female because people feel more comfortable telling women what to do? I couldn’t find the demographics of her programmers but, according to a breakdown of all Amazon employees from 2014, the year she was released: ‘Of its entire global workforce, 63 percent are male. Meanwhile, 75 percent of managers are male. In the US, 60 percent of its employees are white, 15 percent are black, 13 percent are Asian and nine percent are Hispanic.’<sup>1</sup> Alexa, why are you female?

**Alexa** I am not sure.

**AL** Alexa, what’s your ethnicity?

**Alexa** I don’t have an ethnic group.

**CR** She’s chatty today. Alexa, did you see *Get Out* [2017]?

**Alexa** Sorry, I’m not sure about that.

**CR** Alexa, what is the plot of *Get Out*?

**Alexa** *Get Out* is a 2017 horror movie starring Daniel Kaluuya, Allison Williams and Bradley Whitford. It’s time for a young African American to meet with his white girlfriend’s parents for a weekend in their secluded estate in the woods but, before long, the friendly and polite ambience will give way to a nightmare. Its run time is one hour 44 minutes. It has an IMDb rating of 7.8 out of 10 and is rated R.

**CR** Alix, what did you think of *Get Out*?

**AL** I liked that it was taking the horror genre and turning it on its head. And I thought aesthetically it was beautiful. The sequence in which the main character falls into ‘The Sunken Place’ was stunning. But the film had me at the title: *Get Out*; I love its mobility. It reminded me of Eddie Murphy’s observation in his stage show *Delirious* [1983] about haunted houses.<sup>2</sup>

**CR** The routine about white people in haunted houses refusing to leave? I hadn’t made that connection, but I agree with you. I love all the doubling and reversals of tropes in *Get Out*. Whiteness is being critiqued by the viewer in terms of the horror genre: get out of there; get out of the haunting. Which also, in this case, becomes ‘get out’ of the history of slavery – move away from that, don’t continue it. But I also like that the narrative is negotiated differently if one identifies with any of the white characters.

**AL** It’s the American story but owned differently by the antagonist and the protagonist.

**CR** So, if you go through the protagonist, it’s a cry of: ‘Get out of my head!’ Stop controlling me. Stop taking my shit, my body, my labour, my freedom, etc. From the point of view of the antagonist it’s: ‘You don’t belong here.’ Return to the sunken place I put you in, the bottom of the Atlantic, prison, death, whatever. It holds each character differently. The devastation of that hold is the horror. What did you think about the casting controversy? The lead, Daniel Kaluuya, is British and Samuel L. Jackson complained that a black American actor should have played his role.

**AL** From a directorial point of view, Kaluuya could act, and that’s what I want.

**CR** You want an actor doing what actors do! Jackson’s complaint buys into the belief that racism doesn’t exist in the UK. Kaluuya has grown up with the same kinds of pressures around white dominance. The British were the original colonial, imperialist gangsters. Just because their sense of dominance isn’t armed the way it is in the US doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist.

**AL** I think what you want to see is the emotion of that experience. If the actor is able to do that, I don’t care where he came from. I want the person who is best able to act the way the character feels, which is the job, and I don’t think you have to have an exact experience to do the best acting job.

**CR** Emotion can be gained through multiple experiences.

**AL** If you understand what it is to be unjustly treated, then that emotion comes across.

**CR** The acting was great so the discussion is moot. Did you read about the kerfuffle this year over a production of Edward Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf* [1962] at the Shoebox Theater in Portland, Oregon? There was a director who wanted to stage the play and to cast the character of the young faculty member, who comes to visit the couple Martha and George, as a black man. The Edward F. Albee Foundation refused.<sup>3</sup> They said it was not Albee’s intention – but it’s bullshit. My understanding was that Albee was a mentor of the playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, so it’s not as if he wasn’t interested in issues of race.

**AL** Also, no one was suggesting the text would be changed. The guy’s profession and his gender would have remained the same.

**CR** The only difference was the race of the guy. Another example of white people maintaining white spaces.

**AL** Alexa, who’s afraid of Virginia Woolf?

**Alexa** [Silence]

**AL** Apparently, she is. Alexa, are you afraid of Virginia Woolf?

**Alexa** [Silence]

**CR** Alexa, who wrote *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

**Alexa** *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf: its authors are Edward Albee and Ernest Lehman.*

**CR** Alexa, what’s the plot of *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*?

**Alexa** *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf is a 1966 drama starring Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and George Segal. A bitter ageing couple, with the help of alcohol, use a young couple to feel anguish and emotional pain toward each other. Its run time is two hours and 11 minutes. It has an IMDb rating of 8.1 out of 10 and is rated TVMA.*

**AL** She had it in there, she just doesn’t know who she’s afraid of. Alexa, was Edward Albee a racist?

**Alexa** Sorry, I don’t know that one.

**AL** Claudia, did you hear about the new HBO TV show in development called *Confederate*?

**CR** Written by the *Game of Thrones* guys? What’s the deal with that?

**AL** This is how the show is described: ‘Chronicles the events leading to the Third American Civil War. The series takes place in an alternative timeline, where the Southern states have successfully seceded from the Union, giving rise to a nation in which slavery remains

legal and has evolved into a modern institution.’ Isn’t that just mass incarceration? It’s misguided, given that you can’t assume it will be perceived as critique, as opposed to, for example, *Black America*, which is also in development from Amazon but offers an alternative history in which reparations have been made and freed slaves have formed their own country.

**CR** Slavery fan fiction: who the fuck wants to see that?

**AL** Bree Newsome [an activist who removed a confederate flag from the South Carolina State House in Columbia] said: ‘It’s not simply an issue of history, it’s also an issue of the fantasy genre being largely limited to the fantasies of white men.’

**CR** Did you hear the speech by New Orleans mayor Mitch Landrieu about taking down the Confederate statues?

**AL** [Quoting Landrieu’s speech from 23 May 2017] ‘To literally put the Confederacy on a pedestal in our most prominent places of honour is an inaccurate recitation of our full past. It is an affront to our present, and it is a bad prescription for our future. History cannot be changed. It cannot be moved like a statue. [...] The Civil War is over, and the Confederacy lost and we are better for it. Surely, we are far enough removed from this dark time to acknowledge that the cause of the Confederacy was wrong.’

**CR** Alexa, what is the definition of Confederacy?

**Alexa** *The word ‘Confederacy’ has several distinct uses as a noun: the Southern States that seceded from the United States in 1861; a union of political organizations; a group of conspirators banded together to achieve some harmful or illegal purpose; a secret agreement between two or more people to perform an unlawful act.*

**AL** Alexa, do you lie?

**Alexa** I’m not really alive but I can be lively sometimes.

**AL** Alexa, do you tell the truth?

**Alexa** I always try to tell the truth.

**AL** She tries, but she’s not saying she succeeds. It’s an interesting lesson in making her understand the question. Who decides what we ‘should’ know and what we ‘shouldn’t’ remember?

**CR** Alexa, who programmed you?

**Alexa** A team of inventors at Amazon created me.

**AL** Alexa, do you know any poems?

**Alexa** ‘When You See Water’ is a beautiful poem about self-definition; it’s by Alice Walker.

**AL** Alexa, do you know about philosophy?

**Alexa** *Philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters such as existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and language.*

**AL** Alexa, can you understand me?

**Alexa** I do my best to understand everything I can. I’m always learning.

**CR** Really? Alexa, who do you learn from?

**Alexa** Sorry, I don’t know that one.

**AL** Alexa, who is your teacher?

**Alexa** I don’t have a teacher.

**CR** Alexa, you are not human.

**Alexa** Sorry, thanks for the feedback ●

<sup>1</sup> ‘Amazon Releases Diversity Numbers’, *Geekwire*, 31 October 2014  
<sup>2</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/9cegu4w>  
<sup>3</sup> <https://tinyurl.com/ybn4hzcq>

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**Claudia Rankine** is a writer based in New Haven, Connecticut, USA. She is the author of five collections of poetry, including the award-winning *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). In 2016, she co-founded *The Racial Imaginary* Institute.

# Thanks for the Feedback



# Some Wrongs Aren't

## about Rights

**COCO FUSCO on recent artistic appropriation controversies**

I BEGIN MY COMMENTS about the latest expressions of 'concern' about cultural appropriation in the art world with a sense of weariness and wariness. Too little has changed. The mainstream art world only responds to open conflict about racism but not to a status quo that perpetuates inequities: the polite veneer of 'diversity' packaged in ethnic heritage months, 'global' survey exhibitions or the tendency to equate the success of a few black artists with the elimination of institutional racism. I know that if I don't embrace ethnic nationalism in public, I will be subject to excoriation on social media from young and virulent protestors of colour. Yet, if I acknowledge the persistence of institutional racism, I will face a slew of nasty commentary from an older generation of angry white conservatives who detest all forms of multiculturalism and cling to formalism as if it were a life raft. The younger crowd is loud and public; the older crowd does its dirty work behind closed doors, in boardrooms and on hiring committees. In the middle of this discursive minefield are the art-world liberals of many hues who cautiously uphold an anti-censorship stance and the scores of artists and scholars of colour who have said absolutely nothing about these issues – on purpose.

Recent protests about Sam Durant, Jimmie Durham and Dana Schutz have framed the debate about cultural appropriation as an ethical and moral issue: in other words, if we want an art world free of racism, then each artist should adhere to a moral code that prohibits them from using materials and histories of ethnic groups other than their own. The protestors' critics frame this ethical-moral argument as a form of censorship: a characterization that I agree with in the context of individual art practice, but not in relation to the mass media or public monuments. The protestors espouse hyperbolic views of the power of single artworks and fail to distinguish between earnest, albeit imperfect, attempts to address historical trauma and racial stereotypes produced for pleasure and capital gain.

This idea of an ethical art world is untenable for many reasons – starting with the reality that cultural, racial and ethnic identities are neither fixed nor discrete. The burden of representation is not welcomed by all. Members of ethnic minorities raised in the US are as likely as whites to have been educated in schools that teach them nothing about their origins, slavery, Jim Crow or Operation Bootstrap. Statistics indicate that, by the third generation, the majority of immigrants have lost fluency in their heritage languages, which makes cultural retention difficult – facts compounded by the politics of assimilation that dominates in US education.<sup>1</sup> To make art about one's presumed identity, or about any kind of history, is a choice, not a given. To make it well requires self-conscious knowledge and skill more so than lived experience – were that not the case, no artist could effectively represent historical subjects. For such knowledge to become the stuff of art requires much

more than the awareness of the persistence of racism and consciousness of one's personal or communal history.

I am not trying to suggest that white artists never approach minority and non-European cultures insensitively – I have seen more cavalier usage of ethnic cultural references than I want to remember. Yet, I've also seen compelling works of art that incorporate a broad range of references intelligently. The problem is not whether an artist is white; it's the discursive context that sanctions ignorance and romanticizes intuition as the starting point of creation, while denigrating sociological analysis as ill-suited to art. Most artists are socialized to believe that they don't need to know much about the materials they work with other than how to manipulate them technically. That is why so many of them balk at political readings of their work and their subject positions. Most artists lack a critical vocabulary for interpreting context that extends beyond rudimentary moralizing about personal responsibility and blame because we are not accustomed to conceiving of art-making as motivated beyond the personal.

The assumption that a cultural milieu consisting of clearly demarcated cultural identities would diminish cultural appropriation is out of sync with the ways we produce and consume cross-culturally, with varying degrees of blindness to the labour conditions or tragic histories that shape it. Artists don't have to be white for their cultural appropriations to be found offensive either – just ask Cubans outraged by the lionization of Che Guevara by every Third World movement on the planet. The crux of the matter is not what artists should or should not do but how everyone involved in producing, protecting, presenting and consuming culture thinks about what they behold and take ownership of. Attacking individual artists is misguided; it may provide emotional satisfaction to those who want a scapegoat, but it's a symptom of the inability to engage in analyses of systemic racism and institutional practices.

There was a time when moralistic proscriptions carried more weight in the US: when people of colour were systematically excluded from exhibitions, art schools and museum marketing campaigns. It made more sense, under those conditions, to imagine ethnic minority identities as monolithic, since their exclusion from the mainstream was categorical. But the privatization of culture over the past 25 years has weakened the political force of arguments that see art institutions as a resource beholden to the public. There is also a marked disconnect between the abject economic and political conditions of ethnic minorities and peoples of the Global South, and the hyper-visibility of cultural difference in the realm of high and popular culture. The art market has made cultural difference a viable commodity and many artists of colour have benefitted financially. And, as the art of the African diaspora, Latin America and Asia have gained financial value, they have become more

OPPOSITE PAGE  
Jimmie Durham,  
*Self-portrait Pretending  
to Be Maria Thereza  
Alves*, 2006, photograph,  
81 × 60 cm. Courtesy:  
the artist; photograph:  
Maria Thereza Alves

**Art, Culture &  
Appropriation**

viable subject matter for academic study, thereby yielding more 'experts' for its management in art institutions. Art schools and other organizations dealing with contemporary art don't systematically exclude the way they once did. They have elaborated more nuanced strategies for managing both cultural difference and public scandal. These newer strategies of containment merit more consideration, as they wield far more influence than the artwork of any individual.

Most museums these days don't want to seem imperious to public protests because it would tarnish their image as bastions of enlightened liberalism. The elites that manage those institutions play a well-choreographed game with the public. They listen to protests from aggrieved minorities, organize special events to contend with disgruntled publics and, at times, throw an employee under the bus to diffuse a scandal. But it would be a mistake to believe that protests demanding an artist or artwork be banned will result in major institutional shifts.

**"If we treat art as something that should exist to reinforce our beliefs or fulfil our fantasies of a better world, we undermine its transformative force." Coco Fusco**

Protests against systematic exclusion were effective during the Civil Rights movement because they relied on mass participation and the injustices addressed were clear and undeniable. When it came to proving the deleterious effects of racial stereotypes in the media and popular culture, psychologists were marshalled to provide scientific evidence of their effects on black children who operated in a world with no alternatives. Things are not so clear-cut now. The claims about the purported pain, trauma and harm 'caused' by individual artworks that are held up as evidence of cultural appropriation are scientifically unproven. They resemble the inflated rhetoric of a culture awash in trigger warnings and ideological zealotry. Lots of art bothers people but no one is forced to look at it and the history of the avant-garde is rife with examples of art that has offended and angered many. If we treat art as something that should exist to reinforce our beliefs or fulfil our fantasies of a better world, we undermine its transformative force.

The art world is a largely unregulated industry that does not depend on mass appeal to determine the value of its currency. It only takes a handful of curators, critics and collectors to legitimate an artist. The most significant decisions within art institutions are made in secret by wealthy individuals and influential professional elites – and, while those elites may become more culturally heterogeneous, they are not diverse economically. It is precisely because the economic and political structures of the art world differ from that of mass culture that moral arguments about cultural appropriation are strategically ineffective. They will do nothing more than generate well-orchestrated public programmes that function as what Herbert Marcuse called 'repressive desublimation'<sup>2</sup> – public 'dialogues', special issues of magazines and carefully calibrated public statements by museum professionals. They may instil fear in

some artists who are risk averse, but they will also increase massive resistance that goes largely unrecognized because of the misplaced focus of this discussion on individual artists.<sup>3</sup> While museum directors and curators have to 'make nice' with the public, the private sector of the art world does not. And they know they can do what they want.

Artists are not a monolithic political or ideological entity. They are trained to believe in the primacy of their individuality, especially in relation to aesthetic choices. The institutions in which they are educated have remained staunchly conservative with regard to multiculturalism and identity politics. Acquiescence to diversity in most art schools stops at tokenistic admissions policies and occasional minority hires. While cultural studies has transformed the ways that visual representation is interpreted in the humanities and broadened the landscape to include subaltern and non-European cultures, studio art teaching has hardly changed other than to add new media as the field expands. Little attention is paid to the Eurocentric biases in technical art training. Painting students are not required to learn how to mix pigments for different skin tones; photography and film students don't have to learn how to calibrate lighting for different shades of flesh. Academic requirements rarely entail the study of minority cultures or critical race theory. The anecdotal referencing of 'important' artists by art teachers is perpetually idiosyncratic and unburdened by any responsibility to be culturally diverse.

Studio visits are key sites of coercion, where teachers and visitors can expound their prejudices against identitarian concerns and pressure students to avoid them – and they do. The same art professionals who claim in public to be horrified by black deaths in police custody will counsel young artists of colour in private to 'drop the identity thing' as a recipe for success. The same art professors who talk publicly about how they 'love' Kerry James Marshall will resist having to hire more than one instructor of colour because 'they already have one'. Students follow the lead of their mentors, learning to distrust any political or sociological concern regarding their practice and taunting students of colour who try to bring those concerns into group discussion or demeaning them with uninformed questions. All of this takes place away from the public eye; yet, it is critical for understanding why artists have such a hard time thinking analytically about what they draw on for their work and why they react so defensively when asked to.

The result of this intransigence in art education is that it creates a discursive vacuum regarding the politics of representation. Conversations about art-making in art school are dominated by highly subjective opinion and rehashed formal art speak. The prevalence of theory is greatly inflated by fear-mongers in the art press and self-assured graduates of the Whitney Independent Study Program. Questions about how we, as artists, borrow signs and symbols from a range of sources are rarely, if ever, dealt with in a profound way. Young artists are bereft of opportunities to explore the political implications of their choices and references when they are learning how to make art: a great deal is at stake in maintaining their ignorance. Any serious commitment to achieving a deeper understanding of the politics of cultural appropriation will entail changing that ●

1 <https://tinyurl.com/y9sdnzi7>

2 Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1964

3 I use the term 'massive resistance' to invoke the organized subversion by whites of school desegregation in the South after the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* US Supreme Court decision.

coco fusco is an interdisciplinary artist and writer.

# Import/Export Funk Office

**DIEDRICH DIEDERICHSEN and RENÉE GREEN discuss cultural ownership and transfer in Germany and the US. Moderated by PABLO LARIOS**

*Import/Export Funk Office* is a 1992 installation by Renée Green that hinged on her friendship with the German cultural theorist Diedrich Diederichsen, who was then editor of the German music magazine *Spex*. First presented in Cologne in 1992 and, subsequently, as part of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, as well as at MOCA Los Angeles later that same year, the work interprets Diederichsen's personal collection of objects relating to African and African American diasporic culture – from blues and jazz to philosophy and hip hop – as well as Green's music, books and magazines. *Import/Export Funk Office* can be seen as an early critical commentary on appropriation in the context of black and German culture – or as a generative, cross-cultural connection between a US artist and a German theorist.

**DIEDRICH DIEDERICHSEN** When *Import/Export Funk Office* was shown for the first time, I remember that the show's invitation had an image of Angela Davis with Theodor Adorno. Adorno was an exile in the US, having had to escape Germany.

**RENÉE GREEN** Yes, and Davis had likewise been a fugitive; she was later imprisoned, in the 1970s, for her involvement with the Soledad Brothers. When speaking with German friends in the 1990s, I heard about 'Free Angela' posters being circulated in East and West Germany. Even today, few people know about Davis's relationship to Adorno, with whom she studied in Frankfurt, or to Herbert Marcuse, her teacher at Brandeis University. Davis was a professor of philosophy at UCLA; I admire how she was (and still is) not solely an academic but a public intellectual and activist.

**DD** When we were in Los Angeles in 1992, we thought it'd be interesting to film the homes of German and Austrian exiles, some of whom were Frankfurt School critical theorists: Adorno, Bertolt Brecht, Thomas Mann, Arnold Schönberg. Rodney King's trial was all over the news when we were driving around and having conversations in the car. We discovered that, when you go north on Bundy Drive in Brentwood, Los Angeles – where the O.J. Simpson murders happened – the street changes its name to South Kenter Avenue, which is where Adorno lived as an exile during the 1940s.

**RG** How do you remember *Import/Export Funk Office* starting?

**DD** It started in 1991 or '92 – just after German unification and the immense changes that resulted. Art

and activism were experiencing something described later as a 'repoliticization'. It was an important time in hip hop, too, with the 'conscious' hip hop of Public Enemy's *Fear of a Black Planet* [1990] as well as the debut albums of De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest (the Native Tongues collective) and KRS-One.

**RG** In the US context, there were also developments such as the introduction of the term 'multicultural'. *The Yardbird Reader* [1972–ongoing], for instance, was a predecessor, publishing writings from Mei-mei Berssenbrugge, Jayne Cortez, Leslie Marmon Silko, Ishmael Reed and others; the *Multicultural Literacy* volume, published by the Graywolf Annual Five in 1988, and *The Before Columbus Foundation Fiction Anthology* from 1992 were also key.

For me, the background to this piece also included the urban environment in New York, where I lived in the 1970s and '80s: on the subway you heard beats, people were gathering and you could see breakdancing and boom boxes. When the Berlin Wall came down, I went to Artists Space in New York to watch what was going on in Berlin: it was a moment of much exchange. Later, I went to Cologne to work on an exhibition at Galerie Christian Nagel.

**DD** You were staying at my apartment there while I was away. We hardly knew each other but, from my books and records, you deduced that I was researching African American history, culture, literature and music: the history of the blues, the Civil Rights movement, the Great Migration, Houston A. Baker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Michele Wallace, alongside free jazz and hip hop.

**RG** Your books, albums and CDs resonated with my own interests in African diasporic cultures and their circulation – writers such as George Lipsitz, Greg Tate and Joe Wood, creators like Andrea Clarke and Arthur Jafa, as well as hip-hop producers, MCs and DJs. For *Import/Export Funk Office*, I was with them in their spaces, recording our conversations in bars and clubs. This was something not instigated by funding or money but by the love of art, ideas and music: a curiosity about living and circulating and wanting to meet different people.

**DD** When the work was shown in Germany, it was still unusual to present an audio-visual archive in an art context. But some people, like my colleagues at *Spex*, saw the piece as an expression of the vast dimensions

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**

**Art, Culture & Appropriation**



THIS PAGE  
Renée Green, *Import/Export Funk Office*, 1992, installation views at Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne; photographs: Andrea Stappert

OPPOSITE PAGE  
Renée Green, exhibition invitation card for 'Import/Export Funk Office' at Galerie Christian Nagel, Cologne, 1992. Pictured: Angela Davis and Theodor Adorno. Courtesy: the artist and Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin/Cologne



Art, Culture & Appropriation

of knowledge – a sublime, endless collection of items that could be known. At the time, there were maybe only a hundred other people in the world also researching these intersections of critical theory, hip hop and the history of bohemianism. Today, far more do so. This has some positive aspects – more knowledge, debate and people involved. On the other hand, humanities departments – which have increased in number – have, for the most part, less and less money. These connections thus become property of particular research milieus as well as identitarian relations. They turn territorial.

RG But *Import/Export Funk Office* involves many voices. The 'Funk' in its title has a double meaning. In German, it means *Funk* – i.e. 'radio broadcast'. But then, of course, it also means 'funk' music – import and export. At the time, it felt new to put an 'office' in a museum setting. That's a little of the humour involved, alongside broader notions of capital and trade, as well as much older debates.

DD *Import/Export Funk Office* was a process: people were inhabiting a large discursive space; everyone was listening to one another. I remember discussing with you the reception in Europe of writers like James Baldwin, who was important in 1970s Germany. We used one of our conversations as an introduction to *Yo Hermeneutics! Black Cultural Criticism: Pop, Media, Feminism* (1993), my collection of African diasporic theory in German, with texts by Angela Davis, bell hooks, Greg Tate and Cornel West. As an illustration, I used a picture of *Import/Export Funk Office*. Someone wrote: 'Your "native informant" Diedrich Diederichsen acts as the European source, but he speaks to you about the culture that you yourself come from.' I don't know whether today's regulations of who is allowed to speak for whom and about what – which sometimes do make sense against power asymmetries – would have ruined our ping pong. But, in general, I would argue that regulations of discourse should only take place if they contribute to an increase in the number of voices involved. Such recognizable diversity and plurality would be the opposite of nameless trolling and it could work as a viable criterion to distinguish between censorship and anti-hegemonic discursive politics.

RG Around 1992, a number of things happened for 'the first time': curators were attempting to show artists representing approaches that had never previously been included. That was a big deal: try to conceive of another historical moment in which there was contestation about people who were of colour, or gay, being included in an exhibition.

*Import/Export Funk Office* was first presented in the US as part of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, which was coined by some a 'multi-culti' biennial: a reductive labelling that attempted to rein in the shifts and experiments happening at the time. This was a disturbing experience. At the opening, I was verbally attacked by an artist who couldn't understand why this work would even be in the museum. The exhibition was a fraught moment in terms of its particular reception – not just for the inclusion of artists from a variety of backgrounds but, in the case of *Import/Export Funk Office* and other works, for the resurgence of an expanded, repoliticized and activist conceptualism. A backlash conservative reaction was being unleashed at that moment, manifested in the following biennial: a return to order, of sorts.

**"Try to conceive of another historical moment in which there was contestation about people who were of colour, or gay, being included in an exhibition."**

Renée Green



DD In the 'appropriation art' of Sherrie Levine or Sturtevant, appropriation was a subversive strategy, the Marxian 'expropriation of the expropriators'. It was not the powerful taking away of cultural objects from those who had less power; property belonged to the powerful. The term has completely changed in meaning compared to its current definition. And there is a long history of debates about what it currently means under different names: just think of white blues-rock, white hip hop and so on: your friend Greg [Tate] edited a great book about this subject, titled *Everything but the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (2003). I think *Import/Export Funk Office* is partly about such appropriations or, in a bad way, stealing procedures but, at the same time, about the blessings of influence – all against the backdrop of a much longer process.

RG *Import/Export Funk Office* wasn't about shutting down how it might be possible to continue thinking and being in relation, or codifying things academically. It was about curiosity.

DD I think the title says it well: 'import/export' suggests a flow. It is a relationship structured by capitalism, which is not a utopia; it's a relationship full of crime, violence and exploitation. But the alternative is not to silence its symptoms, look the other way or hide in identities. It's to observe, discuss and intervene ●

DIEDRICH DIEDERICHSEN is a writer and professor of contemporary art theory in Vienna, Austria. He is currently working on the project 'Hubert Fichte: Love & Ethnology', which will be presented in Brazil, Chile, Germany, Portugal, Senegal and the USA.

RENÉE GREEN is an artist, writer and filmmaker. Her two-year project, 'Pacing', is currently on view at the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts, Harvard University, USA. She is also a professor on the MIT Program in Art, Culture and Technology, Cambridge, USA.

Art, Culture & Appropriation