

**Eidos** volume 4  
no. 2 (2020)

A JOURNAL FOR  
PHILOSOPHY  
OF CULTURE

DOI:10.14394/eidos.jpc.2020.0020

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## On the Power of Cultural Adoption Through Integral Fakes and Reunification

### Abstract:

Cultural identities and rituals are intersecting through increasingly overlapping social worlds. Whether one chooses to join in this mixing and to what degree, that is the question. Appropriationists and assimilationists assume a logic of domination that aims to justify forms of social entitlement, claiming exclusive possession or ownership of cultural heritages. This article argues that cultural adoption is a stronger frame for understanding how circulation of rituals and practices get distributed under “liquid,” orphan-like conditions. By accepting that no stable centers (in-groups) or margins (out-groups) of culture can be securely ascertained, new semiotics of integral fakes gain cultural efficacy. Integral fakes manifest semblances and likenesses that can be adopted as one’s own, intensifying our experience of cultural freedom by expanding our sense of the familiar into unfamiliar cultural scales. Through a semiotics of cultural adoption, we hope to be attuned to an openness and hospitality that romanticized ideologies of culture suppress.

### Keywords:

cultural adoption, mixophobia, mixophilia, integral fakes, micro-gospels

As the world reels from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, questions abound about what life will be like in the coming years.<sup>1</sup> One regularly hears, “will we return to ‘normal,’ or how it was before?” Moments like this demand that we pause and reflect on what can be learned from these unprecedented challenges. It is remarkable to witness the versatile determination of both public and private institutions establishing crisis management responses, despite countless setbacks and shortcomings. But what is characteristic of their response speaks to our larger cultural situation: namely, that *adoptive* practices take precedence over predetermined, hegemonic ones. This will hopefully act as another wakeup call for those dozing off in their dreams of national and ethnic supremacy and fantasies of cultural domination. As I type this, speculation has surfaced that the Trump administration is drafting retaliation measures holding the Chinese government responsible for the spread of the virus. This is a complete misunderstanding of the situation given that the complexities of modern life do not admit of such nice and simple traces of moral responsibility. What is dangerous about the rhetoric of the Trump administration is that – whether it is China, previous administrations, or the World Health Organization (WHO), there is clearly a campaign to find a scapegoat. It is no mystery that President Trump continually claims “we are at war with an invisible enemy.” Military narratives sell well in America as a cheap brand of patriotism, but things are more complicated. What we know is that this is not a war and to explain it in such adversarial terms is misleading, especially given the need for cooperation and synchronicity among world powers.

Now is the time to admit that no institutional authorities, under the conditions of what Zygmunt Bauman calls “liquid modernity,” can stay true to aggrandizing aims stipulated by theories of cultural appropriation and assimilation. What assimilationist and appropriationist theories assume is the stability of conditions under which cultures will establish themselves and flourish. But even cultures give way to the pressures of liquid society. Hence, static and traditionalist views of culture are too complacent, failing to take seriously the infusion of increasing threats and cracks that create daunting challenges for any security system. Cultural adoption, alternatively, interprets cultures as situated in turbulent times forced to take drastic, unprecedented measures. It provides a more robust account of the pragmatic relations that emerge among various cultural interests. Cultures are not only leaky, but have to be more alert and prepared to meet unfamiliar and unstable emergencies. The COVID-19 pandemic is a case in point. Western governments, especially the U.S., are now scrambling to establish social safety nets and support programs they have evaded enacting for so long. Mountains of debt are being taken on as the reality sinks in: our governments, like many middle-class households, live more on huge credit lines than manageable earnings; while both are equally ill-prepared for a “rainy day.” We are quickly learning who can be classified as “essential workers,” and they are not top executives in the board rooms nor the movers and shakers on the exchange floors. Health caretakers and service workers on the front lines are most vulnerable to this disease because they are the last stand of what makes the social engine function. These extraordinary examples of bravery and selflessness reveal how individuals and groups make culture through adoptive acts. Such acts enact and facilitate adoptive agencies of culture in which the participation of the *insider* and *spectator* coincide, rather than big public gestures bent on constructing and controlling perceptions. Cultural adoption may be defined as engaging in custodial, rather than possessive ownership relations with one’s most cherished cultural artifacts and rituals. We morally and aesthetically respect cultures – especially our own – when we claim not to possess or own them, but in the act of looking after them similar to the art of caretaking. The experiences and practical wisdom of custodians reveals how the competing concerns of cultural insiders and outsiders may be synchronized into a reunification via integral fakes. The reader should not confuse this sense of custodian obligation with Thomas Piketty’s recent radical call to abolish all private

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1) I would like to thank one of the anonymous reviewers for *Eidos. A Journal for Philosophy of Culture* for his/her critical comments and helpful feedback, improving the quality of this article.

property, in an effort to address rampant inequalities lurking at the center of Western economies. While Piketty's concerns are merely economic and social, mine are cultural. This is more than merely a semantic difference because when it comes to the intricacies of social and historical immune systems, cultural perspectives are less fragile and more prone to consider non-obvious and unfamiliar problems that arise compared with concentrated materialist analyses. Economic analysis is important, but does not fully address all of the *cultural* adversities that actors have to confront. For example, Arvind Subramanian calls "Piketty's concept 'Patek Philippe custodialism,' after the luxury watch company's famous catch phrase 'You never actually own a Patek Philippe. You merely look after it for the next generation.'" Cultural adoption does not suggest that we should treat artifacts, identities and rituals like commodities that can easily be returned or sold. Purchasing is not to be confused with adoption. Our cultural loyalties cannot be completely reduced to the role we serve as buyers and sellers. It is more often the case that we share and use, or give and take everything from cuisine, fashion, technology and the arts.<sup>2</sup> But a higher ethical standard is presupposed with cultural adoption that sees a difference between tragic and non-tragic forms of interchange. What I call cultural abuse results in tragic, often toxic, uses and abuses of rituals, identities, and artifacts that are deemed offensive by the self-stressing power centers of ethnic, national, and other social groups. Social activists should be suspicious of companies who only want to sell them watches, or shoes, or live sports because the messages they send or symbols they use have wider cultural and historical implications.<sup>3</sup>

This article argues that a theory of cultural adoption provides a sharper picture and understanding about how societies have responded to this crisis. Our ability to recognize the challenges and frustrations that liquid modernity presents will, optimally, motivate us to look for ways to increase and intensify anti-fragile strategies and responses. How can the feelings of loss be restored, repaired and healed? To what extent will we be able to undergo reinvention; is there a way for us to imagine and prepare for the adventures of self-renewal? Not only are theories of cultural appropriation and assimilation deaf to such a question, they have failed to produce any account of social immunizations under uncertain social protocols. I will conclude by highlighting that it is imperative we pay more attention to how cultural agencies act as opposed to the rhetoric and infotainment run through the substance-less news cycle, packaged more for consumers than voters. When we do, it becomes difficult to refute that cultural adoption provides more of an explanatory scope of how authorities have responded to the current crisis, compared with assimilation and appropriation. Local and state procedures have shown that practices of adoption can address fluid, life-and-death calamities in ways that leave populist and nationalist approaches untenable and flat-footed.

### Mixophobia and Mixophilia

Liquid modernity accelerates the ways in which we become "out of touch together." The world is strangely united by way of a longing to belong. All of us want to be insiders, in a certain sense, but feel like orphans with low visibility and no satisfying sense of solidarity. The veils of certainty are removed and the little wizard behind the curtain is exposed for how powerless he is. World powers, too, both public and private, are exposed as being at the mercy of the same cultural processes unleashed in liquid society. All are united under "the grievances – the sense of alienation, marginalization, and social frustration." Religious or political powers that advertise their ability to reduce fear and give us a sense of security will be increasingly discounted as "desperate attempts, in the end

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2) Subramanian, "After Capital," 167. See Piketty, *Capital and Ideology*.

3) Think of the social pressure put on professional sports franchises such as the Atlanta Braves, Cleveland Indians, Chicago Blackhawks, Kansas City Chiefs, or Washington Redskins.

inconclusive, to mitigate the pain that anxiety inflicts – by removing the rash while mistaking it for the cure of the illness.”<sup>4</sup> Cultural adoption, taken as a whole, is nothing less than an unmasking of valorized cultural power structures and a demolition of the hegemonic philosophies seeking to solidify them. It works according to the logic of cultural exchange which “combines cultural valorization of the profane with profane commercialization of culture.”<sup>5</sup> One of the problems with opposing cultural assimilation and appropriation has been the inadequacy of replacing a hierarchical value system with a more just and equitable one. This is not something that cultural adoption is prepared to promise, nor are there any guarantees that establishing such a standard would make much of a significant impact. Instead, the focus should be on conceiving of cultural exchange under a *loose* set of relationships that permit of many alternative identities and values – even *tighter* ones – that are left mostly to the discretion of the particular parties involved. As orphans of culture, it may be recognized how the same cultural actors often have a coinciding role of *insider* and *outsider*. Such a twist elicits a built-in paradoxical limit on one’s own cultural standing that reveals no individual’s culture can be without its internal conflicts and divided loyalties. Like individuals, cultures have to find the means to accept differences that can live with disagreements. That is what the adopted family dynamic is all about: a decentralized sense of solidarity and belonging, held together through a combination of tight and loose threads. Cultural adoption reminds us how we have to transcend our own horizons and reach out to build relations with new others that makes us vulnerable to and dependent upon unforeseen circumstances. In a certain sense, as cultures ubiquitously interact in the twenty-first century they can be witnessed as doing so within one grand interrelated orphanage.

Bauman points out that a key characteristic of liquid modernity lies in the tension between demeanors he distinguishes as *mixophobic* and *mixophilic*. Each culture and person struggles to navigate between “*mixophobia and mixophilia*” as “the polyvocality and cultural variegation of the urban environment of the globalization era sets in.”<sup>6</sup> He writes, “Admittedly, this is an uneasy coexistence, full of sound and fury – though signifying a lot to the people on the receiving end of liquid modern ambivalence.”<sup>7</sup> Such “ambivalence” serves to qualify how cultural exchanges and interactions take place today, including the lasting impact that the melting and recoding of culturally signified rituals stamps on all social groups, more or less. Through a philosophy of cultural adoption, we recognize how these mixing tendencies result less in pure forms and lead more to alchemical ones. Communities need to promote psychosocial practices and attitudes of sponsorship for the sake of *affirming* the influences (whether negative or positive) that other cultures have on us. Cultures do more than just impress – they force us to see ourselves in what was unthinkable or improbable before. How long one can sustain this virtual image or vision of his or herself is a testament to one’s likelihood to be a cultural adopter.

Those familiar with the architectonic nature of Immanuel Kant’s philosophy argue about the difference between the three critiques (*Critique of Pure Reason*; *Critique of Practical Reason*; and the *Critique of Judgment*) and his popular writings and lectures completed after 1790. While Calvin O. Schrag suggests that Kant’s transcendental or critical philosophy is not complete without *Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone*, neo-Kantians like Ernst Cassirer contend that Kant should have written a fourth critique providing a phenomenology of culture. Cassirer associates his paramount *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* as fulfilling this role. In the spirit of Cassirer’s attempt to develop a *pure* critique of culture, that is, a phenomenology of culture as it is in its basic structure *untouched* by human efforts, a philosophy of cultural adoption may be understood as dealing with the *impure* aspects of culture, as post-transcendental interpretation.

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4) Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 92.

5) Groys, *On the New*, 141.

6) Bauman, *Liquid Times*, 86.

7) *Ibid.*, 90; emphasis original.

## What Are Integral Fakes?

Cultures are products of “strange mixtures” or impurities. I will now turn to the implications of mixophilia and mixophobia on how cultural artifacts come to take on inherited or new meanings under the custodial prerogatives of cultural adoption. In his *Essay on Man*, Ernst Cassirer claims that philosophical anthropology has looked in the wrong places, namely those lofty planes of the intellect, to account for how cultures develop and solidify their exchanges with each other. He observes that one looks hopelessly for a

Homogeneity which we never find in man. The philosopher is not permitted to construct an artificial man; he must describe a real one. All the so-called definitions of man are nothing but airy speculation so long as they are not based on and confirmed by the experience of man. There is no other way to know man than to understand his life and conduct [culture]. But what we find here defies every attempt at inclusion within a single and simple formula. Contradiction is the very element of human existence. Man has no “nature” – no simple or homogeneous being. He is a *strange mixture* of being and nonbeing. His place is between these two opposite poles.<sup>8</sup>

Just as human beings are “strange mixtures,” so too do we construct and fabricate strange cultural artifacts; what Linda Pyne calls “genuine fakes” and Sloterdijk calls “integral fakes.”<sup>9</sup> Cultural artifacts already display hybridized, non-purified, and recalcitrant trajectories when it comes to ethnocentric attempts to claim exclusive ownership rights to them. Bruno Latour, following French philosopher Michel Serres, makes special mention of those loose and weird cultural spaces opened up by the development of quasi-objects. To come to the realization that *we have never been modern* entails stepping into a transitional ground beyond the subject/object or nature/culture split.

Quasi-objects are much more social, much more fabricated, much more collective than the “hard” parts of nature, but they are in no way the arbitrary receptacles of a full-fledged society. On the other hand they are much more real, nonhuman and objective than those shapeless screens on which society – for unknown reasons – needed to be “projected.”<sup>10</sup>

The reality of this sphere of novel hybrid entities has called into question how we think about the ontology of cultural processes and agencies. Are such agencies the product of assimilation or adoption? Should we hold attitudes of loyalty or disloyalty to what is deemed “real” and “non-real” when it comes to our cultural reference, to be essential or non-essential? Assimilationists and appropriationists are engaged in their own translation and purification processes. The problem with high culture historiography is that it grants power to a privileged few while “leaving the rest of the world with nothing but simple mute forces.”<sup>11</sup>

There is a logic at work in all of the cultural sciences: explaining the dynamics of human relationships in their ups and downs, falling apart and coming together, or differentiating and integrating. Splittings and unions of this kind are natural, but there is another side to culture that assimilation and appropriation overlooks and that is the power of *reunification*. In her brilliant study *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers*, Michele Garfeld

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8) Cassirer, *Essay on Man*, 11; emphasis added.

9) Pyne, *Genuine Fakes*; and Sloterdijk, *Not Saved*.

10) Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, 55.

11) *Ibid.*, 138.

analyzes how complex cultural traits and distinctions can be identified according to loosened and/or tight tendencies. How cultures develop attitudes about the past, view other cultural actors, or respond to disaster, disease, and diversity can largely be traced back to their proclivities for looseness and tightness.<sup>12</sup> One of the dangers she warns about is the movement toward political, religious, economic tightenings around the globe. Garfeld observes “all cultures are getting tight. While tightness has many advantages, it also relates to higher ethnocentrism and hostility toward outsiders, which could lead to cross-cultural conflict, radicalization, and even large-scale wars. A world made up of tightening cultures, all dealing with imminent threats and limited resources, could spell disaster for all of us.”<sup>13</sup> Instead, we should strive to work on behalf of cross-cultural collaborations and, most importantly, “we need to be prepared to recondition our cultural reflexes.”<sup>14</sup> I take these cultural reflexes to be the basic integrations and disintegrations that either bring cultures together or drive them apart. On a sliding scale from tight to the loosened we find these reflexes expressed that have an inverse proportion of value involving the tension between mixophobia and mixophilia. For example, the closer a culture is to strictness and tightened traditions and ways of life they are likely to value mixophobia rather than mixophilia. Conversely, looser societies will value mixophilia over mixophobia. Of course, these are abstract depictions for the sake of illustrating who is more likely to take the mixophilic and mixophobic into extremes. Tight societies often give exaggerated value to localized, parochial social bonds while loose ones can fall from innocence by leaning too much on the cosmopolitan. Both can become dominant depending on the social composition and environment, leading to a lack of tolerance of cultural differences. Cultural adoption seeks to cultivate a “reciprocal aid” between the peripheries and cultural centers as a means of harnessing tightness and looseness, to enlarge a sense of belongingness – “not just *within* cultures, but between them.”<sup>15</sup> We need cultural connections to strengthen in hopes of building global cooperation during a moment spooked by not only the pandemic but “increased great-power rivalry, nuclear proliferation, weak states, surging refugee flows, and growing nationalism, along with a reduced U.S. role in the world.”<sup>16</sup>

Adoption is near kin to liberty of exchangeability. There is more freedom in the framework of adoption compared with appropriation or ownership. Perhaps a deeper, more intense bond or relationship is established from what it *feels like* to have adopted, compared with appropriated or assimilated. This is why I contend that it has been a big mistake to overlook how adoption describes and accounts for more complex elements in our cultural exchanges. John Berger’s philosophy and art articulates what refocuses the eyes to see and look, in a tropical way that desires to be soaked up by what is being taken in. His classic salute captures how cultures come to fuse and hybridize: “Yes we are impertinent. And I guess that I approach and chat up readers in the same way. As if you too were orphans.”<sup>17</sup> We have a more explicit, everyday experience with adoptive meanings and agencies in contemporary culture through the permeability of cyber reality. According to Sloterdijk, past humanity experienced only an ontological casing of adoption as an “alternation between the waking world and world of dreams, of which the one was described as true and universal while the other was described as untrue and private.”<sup>18</sup> But our cultural experience and personal identity are heavily mediated through the overlap of the “real” and “irreal” or virtual reunifications.

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12) Gelfand, *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers*.

13) *Ibid.*, 245.

14) *Ibid.*, 247.

15) *Ibid.*, 245; emphasis original.

16) Haass, “The Pandemic Will Accelerate History Rather Than Reshape It.”

17) Berger, *Confabulations*. See “John Berger or The Art of Looking (2016).”

18) Sloterdijk, *Not Saved*, 82.

The world today collectivizes and technologizes both awakening from dreams and baptismatic irony together, insofar as it offers cinematic variants of and cyber-alternatives to beings as a whole in the waking realm. In this sense cyberspace is the most important irony-generator of our epoch... In cyberspace, Being-in-the-world is elevated to a stage of technical simulatability: a consciousness from then on appears to be something that can be surrounded by an integral fake which presents the functional equivalent of reality of the "world."<sup>19</sup>

As prosthetic makeshifts, integral or genuine fakes act as more intense cultural immunological protections. Integral fakes allow for greater cultural mobility and malleability compared with the traditional relics of culture that assimilationists and appropriationists prefer to worship. Like building "mash" hospitals for the COVID-19 outbreak, we can no longer afford to look for any cultural "real" but its functional equivalent will do. We do not need to have a same-sex couple move into our neighborhood before we begin to consider the nuances of the modern family, since it can be introduced as a television sitcom in which people *play the role*. This ontology of genuine or integral fakes lies at the heart of cultural adoption's sense of reunification. Only when what is actual and non-actual adopt each other can cultural processes, agencies, and meanings take on a higher level of value. Cultures gain legitimacy and are intensified through adoptive relations that promote such unnatural arrangements. Under such conditions, the artificial becomes the natural, so to speak, *for us*.<sup>20</sup> When did the Blues become a musical art form? What would it mean for it to be appropriated and by who? These are obviously misleading questions. The Blues is a musical tradition that cannot be appropriated but only adopted. It is a process of continual mixing into newer and newer forms of giving rise to a distinct genre. Intoxicated by the vanity of cultural superiorities, assimilationists are easily fooled by the charismatic aura of the familiar and old-looking. They are ripe to be seduced by the allures of the phony. Such artifacts are given the vote of confidence as "the real." It would come as a great shock to discover that many things slipped through the mesh of these high cultural nets in their daily catch. In other words, they promote a narrow or fragile form of confidence that enforces a form of social policing that discriminates between the authentic and inauthentic. Cultures are served less by individuals and groups eager to be more like museum curators or hostage-takers who hold treasured artifacts for ransom. Loyalists of high and low culture are motivated by this kind of elitist ethos overseeing the processes of discarding the fake from the genuine or authentic. The stakes used for evaluating what counts as "in" and "out" are imperialist and hegemonic, designed to suppress the creativity of the non-like.

The culturally privileged are being stripped more and more of their exclusive places and cut off from everyday life.<sup>21</sup> More importantly, liquid societies are being forced and compelled to reframe interpretations of culture beyond traditionally mainstream conceptions. For example, remote learning is a new lifeblood for higher learning institutions that could no longer afford to host in-person courses. Always deemed inferior compared to the "original" format ("the only way to do it!"), FaceTime pedagogy blends the real and fake beyond recognition. The valorized venues and ventures of colleges and universities have been led to reformat and adopt strategies of experimental learning. What may have been ostracized as "uncultural" or "not up to our standards" has become *the* standard. Educational administrators are now praising virtual classrooms with mixed motives. On the one hand, there is no use in going back to old models that largely focus on one-track capacities ill-equipped to serve

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19) Ibid.

20) Auxier, "The Life of the Image."

21) The culturally privileged can be roughly identified with those who subscribe to a narrow outlook on what counts as culture. "They all know that culture comprises museums, theaters, concert halls, libraries and universities, while everything else is 'just life.'" Groys, *On the New*, 164.

the environmental needs of diverse communities, with a variety of interests. Schools should look to diversify how they offer programs and job training beyond “emergency plans” and worse-case scenarios. If universities want to be more than “haunted castles,” they have to be active in redefining which constituencies they serve and for what purposes – they must embrace a willingness not to exploit people but to adopt them.

On the flip side, educational administrators are now absorbing the virtual campus and classroom, while seeking ways to prop up its legitimacy in hopes of maintaining academic capitalism as usual. Universities, churches, and other sacred institutions have to expand and open the cultural archive to wider intimacies of belonging. A vibrant democracy spurs freedom not just to preserve but to create culture. Given how much appropriationists and assimilationists are under liquidating pressures, it is not a shock to see they will become irritants and disrupters against change, especially on large scales. They are suspicious of cultural exchanges and ultimately claim that “one’s culture” is not substantially altered, influenced, or inspired by the cultural examples we set for each other. The biggest hurdle has to do with the cultural displacement of both privileged and profane cultural entities. Each has enjoyed their horizon either at the center or the margins of cultures. But cultural agencies and processes are not so settled once they are uprooted by the volatility of liquid society. “Thus valuable cultural things, when they enter mass consciousness or serial production, forfeit their specific place in the valorized cultural context, which, after all, basically determines their value.... Without a determinate place in the cultural context, directly confronted with the profane realm as ‘truth,’ every value loses the identity guaranteed it by preservation in the archives.”<sup>22</sup>

Two recent examples show how the cultural adoption of integral fakes can both sustain and expand meaning and belonging beyond their basic tight and loose structures. With malls, theaters, and other public venues like stadiums shut down during the pandemic, consumerist economies have nothing to consume. No *live* entertainment is being offered until further notice. Cable providers and media outlets are relying upon highlight reels to appease paying customers who want refunds for not getting their product. It is difficult to continue charging viewers, if you are ESPN or Fox Sports, with professional leagues suspending seasons and the novelty wearing off from “live gaming” tournaments that simulate real games. In a budget crunch, and searching for ways to hold on to its monthly subscribers, ESPN will begin airing South Korean baseball games and analysis for the foreseeable. Who would have imagined that this precious game of America’s national pastime would be broadcast from another place? Is this truly an “American” game? What will fans enjoy and detest about this new medium they will now turn to in order to fulfill their daily ritual? Americans will reunify themselves through this integral fake of South Korean baseball players. As Americans adopt this version of baseball as a league of their own there is much we will learn about ourselves and the ways we can sponsor further partners in other areas of culture. One thing is for sure, more of this kind of adoptive thinking will be required as the sports world, and other industries, adjust to living with a pandemic.

Another case involves a controversial topic concerning the place of white rappers in the world of American hip hop. Recent drama or “beef” broke out about the authenticity of white rappers from Mac Miller, Macklemore, to Post Malone. MC Lord Jamar declared in an infamous tweet that all white people, even “legendary” white rappers like Eminem, are “guests in the house of hip hop.”<sup>23</sup> When asked about the so-called feud Eminem responded “I’m absolutely a guest. I never said I wasn’t.”<sup>24</sup> The danger with this exchange is that MC Lord Jamar speaks from the privileged position of strictness when the nature of hip hop, I would contend, is about looseness.

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22) Ibid., 123. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard describes this as the moment when cultural values begin to “float.” See Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 92.

23) I would like to thank Kevin Harrelson, philosophy professor at Ball State University, for bringing this news to my attention.

24) O’Connor, “Eminem Admits He’s a ‘Guest in the House of Hip Hop.’”



It is not about social control and policing, but expressions of uplift and struggle, with an openness to cultivating social justice and grace. If rappers like Eminem can only be guests in the house of hip hop then one can simply kick them out! The problem with this exclusionary stance is how it perpetuates the logic of cultural imperialism; there is a presumption of ownership and intolerance in MC Lord's claims, similar to the ways in which Americans will speak of owning apple pie or baseball. I believe it is more accurate to assert that Eminem and other "outsiders" have been *adopted* by the house of hip hop. Therefore, they cannot be ignored like a guest you would remove from the premises. Eminem, under this ontology of cultural adoption, is an integral or genuine fake.

I want to argue that criticisms of cultural appropriation, however justified they are, are often misguided since they lack an alternative account of how rituals and values should be spread or distributed as modes of cultural interchange. In the first place they are misleading because, in this case, no one *ever* claimed that Eminem is making caricatures of African American culture in his lyrics or performances. Hence, it is likely that a genuine cultural interchange is taking place! Caricatured cultural portrayals like blackface are not done in authentic faith, and they definitely lack the hospitality and social grace, which is being suggested with the designation of "guest" in the "house of hip hop." No one should be willing to accept these portrayals as done in good conscience for the purposes of uplifting cultures to any respectable or serious degree. That is why it is a *misnomer* to claim that blackface or other stunts of ethnic and racial caricatures are matters of cultural appropriation when there is nothing of value being appropriated. Despite its offensiveness and blatant violation of social norms and trust, no credence can be given to these shenanigans as valid appropriations of anything. We cannot be insensitive to these adopted forms of racism and phobic and xenophobic psychosocial attitudes, that can be compared with forms of cultural *abuse*. In other words, they do not rise to the level of genuine or integral fakes. How can any of us turn our backs on the misuses of culture for the purposes of vandalism or oppression? Offensive and egregious depictions of such stereotypes should be called out, but with a pluralistic orientation in mind towards reunification through mediation via integral fakes. The assimilationist and non-assimilationist camps promote social control, whereas the pluralist seeks to facilitate encounters of social grace. "Culture gives us the surrounding ethos of taste and how it is created, cultivated and considered – culture is how taste is transmitted and how flavours are formalised into everyday expectations."<sup>25</sup>

Cultural adoption, unlike assimilation and appropriation, look to figures like W.E.B. Du Bois and M. L. King, Jr. who saw how "the black freedom struggle was the leaven in the American democratic loaf just as black spiritual integrity – in culture especially music – was the antidote to psychic emptiness."<sup>26</sup> Music, movies, sports, in a word – entertainment – are the prevalent American rituals that work as the lifeblood of democratic and civic life. They collectively symbolize to the world the high value that America places on freedom. Perhaps we need to expand Hans Gadamer's claim that it is dialogue and agreement that manifest a "fusion of horizons" among cultures. Social coherence has been shaped by a "media comfort sphere" of shared concerns and entertainment.<sup>27</sup> The Black freedom struggle has uplifted these entertainment rituals and deemed them with the value in which they are worthy, beyond the Eurocentric blind spots. It has shown that when traditional avenues like political, legal, or religious equality and cooperation are blocked as paths to racial progress, oppressed groups will mobilize as cultural adoption agencies for change. On the big screen, at the ball field or concert hall, new cultural energies and capital emerged that Old Europe was too constrained to fully appreciate. This young economy exerts a counterpull on traditional economies, putting a high premium on the motivations and inten-

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25) Pyne, *Genuine Fakes*, 121.

26) West, "Hope and Despair," 331. For more on the psychic and political power of "freedom songs" sung by slaves see King, *Why We Can't Wait*, 65–66.

27) Sloterdijk, *Selected Exaggerations*, 120.

tions of social actors. It stimulates cultures to open up new “horizons” of “good will, dedication, readiness for compromise, mutual respect and a shared distaste for any form of human humiliation.”<sup>28</sup> Social attitudes toward polarizing issues like the rights of same-sex couples are arguably shaped and guided more through depictions in primetime TV or celebrities speaking out on social platforms, than by religious integration or passing political legislation. The latter are not insignificant steps and may contribute greatly to the common good, but they often make only a surface-level impact without hearing a *cri du coeur*. Furthermore, societies tend to grow complacent once certain economic, religious, and political thresholds are met, seeding a moral indifference toward facing further conflicts against social injustices. What is unique about the American condition, spreading to other countries as well, is how politics and social norms follow the cultural trends, not the other way around. That’s how we end up with an ill-informed reality-TV star and business playboy running the White House. It is why a former comedian is the new president of Ukraine and speculation abounds about celebrities with no experience in governance running for the highest offices. American democracy is better served by the adoptive practices embodied most in the Black freedom struggle. Black, Brown, and Asian peoples, with a tormented history of *being Blacked*<sup>29</sup> in America, are cases of resilience and lessons in cultural adoption, as we move through a thicker but more hostile ethnoscape. Genuine or integral fakes work to promote a light-heartedness and openness, analogous with the spirit of an avant-garde, that reveals a cunning nature that is shocking to our sensibilities. For those who mock and snicker during this encounter of amazement with a quip – “it will still never amount to the real thing” – are blinded by a nostalgic pathos, failing to see that the integral fake can pull off something that the real never could. For adopting the integral fake is equivalent to tapping a reservoir of affordances and possibilities that enriches our quality and standard of life. Cultural practices and artifacts are limited by a hesitancy or outright closedness to expanding in these kinds of non-risk averse ways. Genuine or integral fakes persuade us, as everyday users and sharers of identities and rituals, to replace appropriation and assimilation – in their imperialistic senses – with a theory of cultural *adoption*.

## Conclusion

Global uncertainty is unmasking the terrible reality that all nations are equal in the fact that they have invested little to nothing in their own societies – perhaps the split between Northern and Southern economic success stories boils down to who can give the best performances of looking out for the general welfare. Western powers have found ways to adapt and adjust predatory capitalistic practices protecting and providing havens for their own interests. Public services have been low on the priority list, as the richest nations in the world build make-shift hospitals, have professional sports teams fly back millions of face masks from China, make gowns and other PPE gear for those on the frontlines, and unemployment benefit or disaster-relief funding. Even more worrisome has been the way the Trump administration, along with some U.S. governors have engaged in aggressive downplaying about the potential spread and severity of the virus. The president pleads “people want to get back to work! We have to build back our country, we cannot continue to be shut down!” Caught between having to choose one’s life or livelihood – “the cure may be worse than the disease” – the monstrous paradoxes of liquid times emerge. Will these extraordinary events bring out the best or worst in us? This reveals another startling fact about liquid society – power is decentralized, fragmented, and no one is in charge! Just as “markets” have been the rhetorical gesture used to justify what is allowable and prohibited in terms of economic policies, the

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28) Bauman and Donskis, *Moral Blindness*, 105.

29) I would like to thank Dr. Anthony Neal, professor of philosophy and religion at Mississippi State University, for this turn of phrase.

recent pandemic is yet another “shorthand name for anonymous, faceless forces with no address: forces elected by no one and which no one is able to constrain, control and guide.”<sup>30</sup>

Pew Research Center polling from 2018 attests to the current lack of confidence and trust Americans have in public institutions like the media, Congress, academia, or corporations and financial institutions.<sup>31</sup> What produced such disdain involves less the corruption or scandals themselves, but the efforts used to ignore or condone reprehensible deeds, often so blatantly carried out, willingly, in the name of freedom and culture. It is more of a grand theater production that portrays Americans thinking of each other as inheritors of the greatest country on earth. In reality, a strong victimological bitterness toward institutions, with white supremacist entitlement and privilege claims has fractured any self-assurances about the present. Such stalemated attitudes have contributed to nostalgia for the good old days, and to calls for a hero or savior that forms around a personality cult. Despite how often “we like to fancy ourselves rational voters, the 2016 election turned largely on primal cultural reflexes – ones that had been conditioned not only by cultural forces, but by a candidate who was able to exploit them.”<sup>32</sup> Liquid modernity encourages this kind of looseness when it comes to cultural exchange. Different sign regimes are fused together as a result of cultural clashes and push and pull arrangements that force us to uproot and re-root our loyalties. Cultures are dynamically fluid in this manner; they are not fixed territories beyond walls or safe havens. It is better that we think through how an integrative capacity for interpreting the interrelatedness of cultures forecloses exclusivist ownership claims by cultural purists. Instead, cultures create and entertain invitations for so-called outsiders to see other cultures within the context of what is foreign and alien.<sup>33</sup>

There is a more constructive way for us to discourse on these matters, especially the structural implications, without falling into the traps of victim-blaming and privilege-checking. Use calling-in rather than calling-out gestures and rituals. Work to deescalate tensions rather than exasperate them. Belonging and resonance with a culture can never be decided in isolation, but as a matter of on-going engagement and dialogue. One either feels the invitations of others as welcoming, hospitable, and respectful or unwelcoming and demeaning in an intolerable way. To have a traumatic shift that can reorient our experiences on the world is different from the feeling of discomfort or being threatened. But one will most likely be driven from his or her “comfort zones” the more one clings to mixophobic, purist tendencies at the heart of cultural appropriation/assimilation prerogatives. Instead of acting as transmitters and custodians of culture, appropriationists and assimilationists stand with a resentment and hostility that has something to lose. Cultural adoption outdoes this aggressiveness by embracing the hybridity of genuine and integral fakes, with an openness toward mixophilia.

If we do not take ourselves too seriously and look to get serious about others, we stand better positioned to culturally adopt and benefit as cultural adoptees. I would like to mention one last brief example of how the modern world is still suffering from the hangovers of avant-garde radicalism’s dominance in the twentieth century. Countercultural trendsetters they were, the avant-garde sought to be outsiders! They represented an aesthetic movement of self-exclusion, taking pride in defying mainstream taste standards and poking fun at those overburdened by status anxiety. Once this impulse to be viewed as an insincere actor or *not to be liked* was democratized, what initially was an enigma for outsiders became culturally privileged. It became common that everyone work against his or her own inner-triviality and banality. The forces of mass conformity gave way and were compelled to absorb and incorporate ridiculed values of non-conformity as mainstream. Privileged and profane cultural domains twist and shift with liquid modernity to the point that one can ill-afford to ignore

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30) Bauman and Donskis, *Moral Blindness*, 184.

31) See Palmer, “Poll: Americans Lack Confidence in Public Leaders.”

32) Gelfand, *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers*, 110.

33) For a powerful contemporary example see American director Spike Lee’s 2018 movie *BlacKkKlansman*.

how cultures have to adapt and grow, while putting less faith in a settled past or future. One moves into a “heteronoia” from the symbolic union of various cultural archives. Both valorized and profane realms of culture have “skin in the game” under cultural adoption that appropriation or assimilation is unwilling to recognize, given its assumed weddedness to fewer reciprocal relations. For example, analogous with the human corpse, body parts can be detached and rearranged similar to what occurs regularly in cultural exchanges. Only vague traces of previous experience can be made out as certain aspects are repaired and replaced. This prosthetic structure has to be applied to cultural sign systems – through psychosemantic adoption we remobilize the engines of culture. It is more prescient than ever that we no longer have the unchallenged luxury of putting cultural artifacts on pedestals in the manner of old-style exhibitions. Rather, our condition is one of being *immersed* and *embedded* in cultures, like aesthetic installations, without the standpoint of privileged observers. It goes back to the experience of reunification of the real and virtual spheres in the cultural artifacts of genuine, integral fakes. Our historical condition has revealed that factors of production will not sustain themselves without creating *loose* chains of cultural distribution – sponsorship has replaced ownership, while all properties and No Trespassing signs have given way to what Bruno Latour calls “disputed territories.”

Cultural adoption undermines the self-certainties of assimilation and appropriation by demystifying identities, traditions, and rituals as “owned” or “pure” in any original sense. As Deleuze and Guattari argue in *A Thousand Plateaus*, all sign regimes are “mixed” or impure. No culture has avoided the historical uncertainties of being deterritorialized and reterritorialized, albeit some more severely than others. Liquid modernity can be understood in one sense as a process of unleashing social forces and master signifiers globally that are decoded and recoded for countless interests. Claims to ownership of authentic or exclusive cultural heritages with privileged access are baseless “stalemated” stances, aiming to be possessive of cultures in this tsunami of active flows. Under such conditions, parochial and provincial attitudes start threatening the freedom of groups relegated further from their centers – for outsider groups that do not fit into the tidiness of their worldview (*Weltanschauung*). Openness to sponsorship and symbolic playfulness allows for re/creative mixtures of the light and heavy, non-serious and serious elements of culture. I see cultural adoptions spreading streams of influence similar to what Sloterdijk calls “micro-gospels” that inscribes on to culture a “Newer Testament of editing.” He observes how these “micro-gospels announce that new intelligences and animating energies, new artificialities are in the world, so as to bring human beings under their influence.”<sup>34</sup> Do these micro-gospels not attest to the reality of reunifications through the ever-emerging interpenetration between the natural and cultural to construct integral fakes?

These brief sketches present the validity and explanatory power of cultural adoption over assimilation and appropriation. Given the uncertainties we face in the post-COVID-19 world, it is vital that we do not create shelters of fear and privilege that only extend emptiness into less-controlled spaces. One of the lone institutions with some public trust and confidence left are in the medical sector. Currently, over seventy firms and research teams globally are working around the clock to find a vaccine. Aside from the great financial investment, testing the clinical trials will take time and patience, although business and government leaders hope to stand better leveraged with the experimental clock of science than with the mysterious ways of religion. Which of the trials will prove to be a game changer for future vaccination against the virus? Time will tell as the world awaits to which of them will be adopted. The final words of the Epilogue to *Moby Dick* read “another orphan.” Most Melville scholars take this to be a reference to his subsequent novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*. These profound words – *another orphan* – stand out like the grand entrance and exit hallway leading to the contours of countless cultural milieus. And in these corridors, we find both shallow and deep forms of cultural interplay that proposition us to adopt or not.

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34) Sloterdijk, *What Happened in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century?*, 124–126.

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