The ethics and aesthetics of intertextual writing: cultural appropriation and minor literature

Cultural appropriation, as both concept and practice, is a hugely controversial issue. It is of particular importance to the arts because creativity is often found at the intersection of cultural boundaries. Much of the popular discourse on cultural appropriation focusses on the commercial use of indigenous or marginalised cultures by mainstream or dominant cultures. There is, however, growing awareness that cultural appropriation is a complicated issue encompassing cultural exchange in all its forms. Creativity emerging from cultural interdependence is far from reciprocal exchange. This insight indicates that ethical and political implications are at stake. Consequently, the arts are being examined with greater attention in order to assess these implications. This article will focus on appropriation in literature, examining the way appropriative strategies are being used to resist dominant cultural standards. These strategies and their implications will be analysed through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature.

1 Introduction

> Any genre is never more interesting than when being broken in some way…not what the story is about but its very existence (Moore, 2017)

Both words in the phrase "cultural appropriation" are ideologically loaded, which is further intensified as they become merged into a single concept. The concept is controversial and fundamentally political, as indeed is culture itself. Culture is necessarily shared. It is also

continually undergoing transformation, not least through relationships with other cultures or in addressing alternative values to those on which it is structured (see Kulchyski, 1997; Matthes, 2016; Kramvig and Flemmen, 2019). The implications for neatly defining culture are clear:

> [T]he definition of culture has a contested history. Not only do cultures change over time, influenced by economic and political forces, climatic and geographic changes, and the importation of ideas, but the very notion of culture itself also is dynamically changing over time and space – the product of ongoing human interaction. This means that we accept the term as ambiguous and suggestive rather than as analytically precise (Baldwin et al., 2008, p. 23)

The interaction of practices and values from different cultures is therefore never a neutral process. Drawing out the ethical and political implications of cultural exchange is thus a challenge. This challenge has been addressed a number of ways, including categorising different types of exchange (Rogers 2006), categorising the object of exchange (Young 2000; 2005) or identifying types of ethical consequences of cultural exchange practices themselves (Heyd 2003). This article will take a different approach and evaluate cultural exchange within the arts along a fault-line that divides exchange practices between i) appropriation that serves the interests of existing cultural inequalities; and, ii) appropriative practices used to challenge existing modes of dominance. The focus of the evaluation will be literature, in particular the ethics and aesthetics of intertextual writing, as identified through the lens of minor literature, a concept developed by Deleuze and Guattari (1986). The insights obtained by using the minor literature concept will help to enrich to concept of cultural appropriation and assess its ethical implications. In particular it helps to clarify the relevance of status,

advantage and opportunity as asymmetrical features of cultural exchange, and can be applied to identify strategies to address these asymmetries. Evaluating appropriative strategies within a variety of intertextual literary settings will thus enable these insights to be examined and applied to other cases. Before this evaluation can commence, the notion of cultural appropriation needs to be examined in a little more detail.

2 Categories of Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation can be approached different ways. The variety of different practices classified as instances of cultural appropriation means that stipulating a definition is problematic (see Jackson, 2019). Helene Shugart (1997) observes that appropriation occurs when features perceived to belong to a specific culture are used to further the interest of those not sharing that cultural heritage:

> Any instance in which a group borrows or imitates the strategies of another—even when the tactic is not intended to deconstruct or distort the other's meanings and experiences—thus would constitute appropriation. (Shugart, 1997, pp, 210-211)

Expanding on this definition is helpful in positioning the concept at this initial stage. In this way, if culture is defined (even if imprecisely) in terms of the complex network of practices, knowledge and beliefs that emerge and are shared through social interaction (see Baldwin et al., 2008, pp. 23-24), then cultural appropriation can thus be characterised as an unauthorised use or imitation of characteristics, symbols, artefacts, genres, rituals, or technologies derived from these networks, but removed from their cultural setting and original purpose (see also

Rogers, 2006). Characterised this way, a number of relevant themes and practices can be identified, although as an emerging concept, presenting a systematic approach to these themes and practices presents a challenge. Peter Kulchyski warns of attempting to apply an exhaustive or systematic schematic of categories or instances (Kulchyski, 1997); nevertheless, there are some common themes of relevance to the arts, including the following categories: cross-cultural aesthetic appreciation (Heyd, 2003); the fictional (re)production of marginalised voices (Moraru, 2000); appropriation in architecture (Papacostas, 2010); appropriation in popular visual culture (Wetmore, 2000); reciprocal creative exchange (Sinkoff, 2000; Goldstein-Gidoni, 2003; Dong-Hoo, 2006); transculturation in the arts (Lionnet, 1992); and, performance and protest (Hoyes, 2004; Galindo and Medina, 2009; Carriger, 2018). The article will return to some of these topics shortly, but will firstly address attempts to provide structure to the patterns observed within this diversity.

Richard Rogers (2006) develops a framework with which to position the concept of cultural appropriation based on four categories: exchange, dominance, exploitation, and transculturation. The different categories are used to evaluate the ethics of different types of cultural exchange and are constituted by social, political and economic contexts such as considerations of power relations between cultures, hegemonic concerns, resistance and the hybrid nature of cultural development. Cultural exchange is characterised by reciprocal cultural influence in the absence of specific differences in power relations. Cultural dominance occurs when features derived from a dominant culture is imposed on individuals from a subordinate culture. Cultural exploitation occurs when people from a dominant culture take or imitate features or entities from a subordinate culture without permission or without providing compensation. Finally, transculturation is categorised as a hybridisation of

different cultural elements from multiple sources, in particular where the product of the relationship represents a new cultural form.

Rogers describes the logic and relevance of these categories in detail (see Rogers, 2006, pp. 479-497) providing a helpful series of archetypes to assess the conditions that predetermine exchange relationships. Despite these strengths, Rogers' approach has its limitations, particularly in relation to the arts. Rogers' assumption of the operation of a binary structure of power as a force of cultural imposition (or the evasion of 'fair compensation') both simplifies the systemic aspects of power, and risks presenting culture in an essentialist or reified way. As a framework it is powerful in assessing explicitly commercial relationships, but less insightful in evaluating more nuanced creativity emerging within cultural exchange.

A contrasting approach is to place less emphasis on the nature of the cultural encounter and more on the entities enabled or exchanged through the cross-cultural encounter. James O Young, for example, develops a framework by distinguishing between different classes of entities appropriated. Young identifies five categories (material appropriation; non-material appropriation; stylistic appropriation; motif appropriation; and, subject appropriation). In contrast with Rogers' approach, Young's categories focus more explicitly on themes relevant to artistic production. Material appropriation involves transferring ownership of a tangible object from members of one culture (those creating the entity) to members of another culture (appropriating the entity). Non-material appropriation occurs through the reproduction of non-tangible works by members of another culture. Stylistic appropriation occurs when stylistic elements in common with the works of another culture are used by members of another culture. Motif appropriation occurs when the influence of another culture is considerable in creating a new work but without being created in the same style as the works

of that culture. Subject appropriation concerns cases when members of one culture represent members or aspects of another culture (Young, 2000, pp. 302-303). The framework is further enhanced by considering the offensiveness of contrasting examples and mitigated by factors such as context, social value and freedom of expression. The strength of Young's categorisation is to give clarity to the many different ways in which exchange risks being objectionable, particularly in the creation and circulation of artistic technique, art and artefacts and in the broader context of authenticity, representation, cultural heritage, and intellectual property rights. Young's approach is also limited by this focus. By exposing the conditions relevant to the framing of cultural appropriation, Young's categorisation also demonstrates the inadequacy of attempting to unify the multiplicity of cultural encounters and boundaries (and the commodification of cultural content) through the reception of typically dissonant or totemic artefacts. Focussing on exceptional exchange patterns (hawking/hoarding stolen relics, stylistic plagiarism, stereotyping, carnivalesque profanation, etc.) means Young's approach fails to focus on the more pressing implications of cultural exchange and broader issues, such as racism or rights based on heritage (see, for example Heyd, 2003; Jackson, 2019, pp. 1-9). In addition, Young's way of framing cultural interaction reveals exactly the type of appropriative representation – for example, addressing who determines consent or which individuals are authentically "insiders" – that it was invoked to question (see Matthes, 2016). It also assumes a discourse of victimhood that is both oversimplified and "justifiably unacceptable to many indigenous people" (Cuthbert, 1998, p. 257).

A third approach to categorise forms of appropriation and exchange is presented by Thomas Heyd (2003). Heyd's focus has the potential to offer additional insight relevant to this article as it is derived from research on art and aesthetics (Heyd, 2003, p. 37). Heyd emphasises the

need to distinguish between three categories of risk that occur with acts of appropriation. The first risk is moral and occurs when appropriation is unauthorised and threatens the income or rights of disadvantaged or indigenous groups or artists. The second risk is cognitive and occurs when a different value context is imposed on a creative process which threatens the authenticity of the cultural artefacts (and culture) appropriated. The third risk is ontological and occurs through a misrepresented portrayal of the culture producing the appropriated entities, which ultimately threatens their cultural identity. (see Heyd, 2003, pp. 37-38). There is, however, a fourth risk, one with which Heyd seems unaware, but for which his approach is complicit. This is the risk of defining the creativity of artists in terms of their heritage i.e. interpreting a work of art by an artist from a marginalised culture predominantly in terms of their marginalised status *irrespective of its relevance to their art*. This deterministic coupling of creativity to heritage is problematic for a variety of reasons. The most obvious objection is that it limits the creative work to an imposed standard, often in terms of a stereotypical representation of its marginalised origin, or dictating the criteria for authenticity. Genevieve Nnaji's film *Lionheart* exemplifies this final point well, in being disqualified from the 2020 Academy Awards 'International Feature Film' category for having insufficient Igbo dialogue (and too much English) regardless that the film reflects an authentic contextual use of different languages for business purposes in Nigeria, which is itself a prominent theme of the film (Whitten, 2019). Viewed in terms of the authenticity such creativity 'owes' to its marginalised cultural patterns additionally removes the potential for the intended subversion of such standards. Removing opportunities to resist or subvert prevailing standards is another aspect of cultural domination, appropriating or closing down "strategies of discourse and public performances of culture beyond the stultifying binaries of right/wrong or appreciation/appropriation" (Carriger, 2018, pp. 165), strategies examined later in this article.

An alternative approach is to address the growing body of case studies that present the scope of cultural appropriation in its broadest form and position them in terms of how they reproduce or resist forms of cultural dominance. This will also help to identify strategies, such as performance, redeployment, learning, engagement or re-identification able to serve the purpose of resistance, subversion or to produce lines of flight to address marginalisation, exclusion, invisibility and powerlessness. What potentially unites such examples is that they might serve to provide evidence of the operation of cultural *expropriation*, i.e. not merely to resist cultural domination or address establishments of power, but to develop mechanisms of cultural innovation available to empower even the most marginalised of social groups. It is for this reason that there is the need for a revised perspective distinguishing between processes of cultural appropriation and strategies of cultural expropriation, and to explain their relevance and implications. To do so, the article will now turn to this theme and attempt to redefine the relationship underpinning the revised perspective in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature.

3 What is Minor Literature?

To answer the question that Deleuze and Guattari ask – "what is minor literature?" – is to address the broader questions implied by the powers of becoming that it reveals. More specifically, it will address the question of how to construct a form of writing from a language that isn't one's own. In order to address the challenges implied by cultural appropriation, the minor literature concept will also need to be linked to the aesthetic and ethical contexts for which cultural narratives, myths and representation are key themes, issues to be examined in the final section of this article. To address this topic and make these connections more explicit, it will be helpful to begin with Deleuze and Guattari's framing of

the distinction between minoritarian and majoritarian, through which the minor literature concept is positioned.

Minoritarian in this sense is not an indicator of (numerical) minority or ethnic minority but is characterised in its difference with an embodiment or approximation of a standard that defines a majority. It is this difference from the abstract (majority-serving) standard that separates, and sets apart, the minority. Majority assumes a state of power and domination as the standard measure (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p. 105). An example of such a standard is the requirement of membership of the Académie française in order to create "official" academic art in late nineteenth century France. Membership offered prestige and a position, but required adherence to its conventions (encompassing majority i.e. white, male, elitist, values). Such faithfulness to these conventions produced art now perceived to be conservative, bourgeois, contrived and lacking in innovation. In a similar way, in adhering to prevailing conventions, the majoritarian character is a constant and homogeneous system. In this regard, majority is expressive of identity i.e. inert and invariable. This is in contrast with minorities, which serve as subsystems dependent on, but invisible within, the system. Minoritarian, in this sense, is seen by Deleuze and Guattari as "a potential, creative and created, becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, pp. 105-6). To operationalise this relationship Deleuze and Guattari go beyond a majority/minority duality, adding a third category or state: 'becoming-minor" i.e. a creative process of becoming different or diverging from the abstract standard that defines majority.

Minor literature emerges from this conceptual relationship. For Deleuze and Guattari, creativity in literature extends its authority though a minoritarian mode. Minor literature does not attempt to meet the standard but instead attempts to subvert or revise the standard: "minor

no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, pp. 17-18). In this regard, *all* great literature is minor literature to the extent that it creates its own standard. The example of Franz Kafka is used to illustrate the point. Kafka, was a Czech and a Jew writing in German, a language that although foreign to his being was also a channel for the *creation* of identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka was a great writer because he wrote without a standard view of the interpersonal problems of people. In this way, Kafka's work does not represent an established identity, but is prefigurative in giving a voice to that which is *not* given: a 'people to come' i.e. a people whose identity is a work in progress, in a state of creation and transformation.

In conceptualising the contours of minor literature, Deleuze and Guattari identify three key characteristics: the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of annunciation. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 18). Examples from literature will help to unpack these features, which will be assembled and discussed in section four. Before this is undertaken, a small number of observations should suffice as an introduction to the theme.

The characteristics of minor literature can be contrasted with those of major literature. A major literature works within a set of literary and discursive standards to foreground and narrate the way individual concerns join with other individual concerns within a social environment. These conventions, as much as the social and political setting, remain in the background. The storyline might be anchored in a specific location, but in major literature this setting serves as the context to explore the subjective experience and relationships developed between the cast of characters we encounter. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel

Uncle Tom's Cabin will serve as an example of major literature. The novel conforms to its epoch's conventions of a well written, structurally sophisticated and emotionally engaging story. The social setting of the novel is the mid nineteenth century Southern USA, defined by the condition of slavery. The novel's theme is the immorality of slavery, but the narrative structure itself focusses primarily on the relationships between the Shelby family, the St. Clare family, their slaves and their experiences as these relationships change. The novel expresses its anti-slavery narrative through conventional tropes, literary devices and stock characters (cruel slave trader, enlightened slave owner, Uncle Tom, etc.) in a way that appealed to the sensibilities of its predominantly white, Christian, readership.

In contrast, minor literature is concerned with the social 'assemblages' themselves, which are comprised not merely of characters but include other equally important entities. Deleuze and Guattari conceptualise this in three ways, particularly with reference to minor literature as a reversal of the conventional interpretation of storytelling. Firstly, this is done by presenting a perspective that is usually invisible or suppressed as the central focus, while, at the same time, conventionally dominant codes are handled as though they were alien or unfamiliar. The second way this is achieved is through a reversal of emphasis i.e. in the sense that the cast of characters express social and political forces, and these forces themselves are the subject(s) of the performance. Finally, this is approached by thinking of authorship as the adoption of collective value, in the sense that the writer does not conform to literary conventions and genres, but instead expresses the collective sentiments of the socio-political reality of the character's setting.

While these characteristics are almost by definition genre-defying, an example of an approach to literature combining these features is that of intertextuality. Such writings,

irrespective of other qualities it may possess, can be appreciated in enriching, modifying and creating hybrid distortions to the narrative that in turn produces that which is not already recognised, suggesting new avenues of becoming and new questions yet to be addressed. In an example to be examined further in the following section, Ishmael Reed's 1976 novel *Flight to Canada* illustrates minor literature characteristics, and does so through in a deliberate – and intertextual – contrast with the major literature features of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Reed's novel examines how American culture narrates the history of the American civil war. Reed uses real and fictional events from the 1850s and 1860s, including characters appropriated from Stowe's novel and the corresponding historical figures inspiring them, coupled with the narrator's world of the 1970s, to satirise this narrative. Conceptualised in this way, it becomes clearer why intertextuality as minor literature plays a potentially important role: i.e. such literature is a type of appropriation that resists ethical and aesthetic dominance in order to explore the possibilities of new standards. The following sections will unpack the characteristics of minor literature and exemplify this argument in more detail.

4 Intertextuality and appropriation

The concept of minor literature is relevant here because of the changing nature of production promotion, exchange and consumption of literature. There is little need to rehearse the argument that social media platforms are changing the way information circulates, with implications for the changing nature of the production and consumption of text. The point of most relevance here is that the means and circulation of writing is immense and, by implication, access to culturally specific myths, stories and history, the diversity of styles,

approaches to aesthetics and authorship available has expanded. If, in addition, there are a limited number of distinctive plotlines feeding into western literature (see, for example, Booker, 2004) then this diversity is typically channelled through a rather limited set of tropes but one potentially enriched by engaging with non-western writing or storytelling traditions. Appropriating or adapting a pre-existing location and accompanying set of characters offers different degrees of engagement with the original material and includes a variety of strategies: détournement, fan-fiction, honkadori, pastiche, transmedia and type-scene to name a few. Each is appropriative in taking an existing story or narrative device and using it as the basis of a new story or a continuation or hybridisation of the original. Using a strategy of appropriation enables issues to be elaborated and extended because other aspects of the story are already developed or the individuals established. In this way the voices repeated within intertextual work repeat to transform the work: repeating the power of difference, the conditions from which the original work emerged. The work appropriates but its transformation could equally embody an expropriation, as defined earlier.

As conceptualised this way, the focus of appropriation is to make visible the complex bonds between characters and entities within the story's social settings that are otherwise overlooked. This is not simply a matter of replacing one name for another, but does so by eliciting a diversity of styles, pushing back against dominant conventions and questioning the very defining features of literary success. As a consequence, it also implies the emergence of new approaches to literary aesthetics, politics and ethics, as Lev Grossman suggests: "[Breaking down walls] used to be the work of the avant garde, but in many ways fanfiction has stepped in to take on that role. If the mainstream has been slow to honor it, well, that's usually the fate of aesthetic revolutions" (Grossman 2013: xiii). This does not mean that minor literature can be reduced to features of intertextuality, nor that minor literature is

necessarily intertextual. Instead, examining intertextual literature through the lens of minor literature can distinguish acts of appropriation in terms of ethical responsibility, offer opportunities for challenging political dominance, and contribute to improved aesthetic transparency by challenging the aesthetic standards that support culturally dominant conventions. Once established, this approach can be applied more specifically to examine other forms of cultural appropriation.

To illustrate this insight a little more, some of the features of appropriation in literature will need to be examined. To provide some exemplification and further insights into the cultural aspects of such appropriation, the notion of intertextuality will be used to illustrate the three key characteristics of minor literature introduced in the previous section.

The first characteristic presented by Deleuze and Guattari describes minor literature as the case in which "language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 16). As a consequence, invisible or otherwise suppressed perspectives become repositioned as the point of emphasis and as such are able to challenge dominant codes and conventions, which as a consequence become rendered as foreign or incoherent.

While there is a diversity of motives, styles and modes of expression to be found within intertextual literature, a key theme is that of reversal of foreground/background. Returning to Ishmael Reed's 1976 novel *Flight to Canada* will help to illustrate this characteristic, as the flight itself is both literally and figuratively a deterritorialization. In the novel, Reed addresses the way Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appropriates the narrative framework of Josiah Henson's autobiography (*Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave*) by reappropriating the story to its rightful owners, the former slaves themselves.

Stowe's novel rescued Henson's account of his life from obscurity, but at the cost of distortion and sensationalism serving the codes, conventions and expectations of a predominantly white readership, as expressed through the lens of its white characters. Reed's corrective is a counter-distortion of history by telling Henson's story from the slave's perspective, but using deliberate anachronism, and combining real and fictitious events in ways that reverse expectations and use literature itself for the purpose of liberation. In the novel, the lives of powerful and notable historical individuals (Lincoln, Jefferson Davis, Stowe, for example) are fictionalised, presenting them as stereotypical figures, incoherent drunks and trite dupes for the reader's ridicule, while the characters representing Henson, the slaves and slave descendants he encountered in his life are given depth and insightfulness, particularly in voicing their reflections on the historical conditions for emancipation.

In reflecting on a very different approach to reappropriation, Françoise Lionnet view that Francophone women novelists of colour offer insights into "border zones" of culture provides another example of this first characteristic (Lionnet, 1992). Examples of the deterritorialization of language are demonstrated by Lionnet's observation that at the periphery of cultural discourses is a heteroglossia, a hybrid language that is a site of creative resistance to dominant conceptual paradigms. The creative literary practices employed by writers of African heritage occupying these border zones reveal, for Lionnet, processes of adaptation, appropriation, and contestation, which shape identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The established conventions of story-telling found in the literature of the colonial power are invoked by postcolonial border zone writings, often for the purpose of being subverted, in particular: "to delegitimate the cultural hegemony of 'French' culture over 'Francophone' realities" (Lionnet, 1992, p. 116).

The second characteristic identified by Deleuze and Guattari is that minor literature emphasises social and political forces rather than focussing primarily on individual concerns joined with other individual concerns charted though a series of personal experiences, as is the case with major literature. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari make the following observation concerning this second characteristic: "its cramped spaces forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics. The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified because a whole other story is vibrating within it" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 17)

Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* offers a useful illustration of such political immediacy. In the novel Rhys interweaves feminist and postcolonial argument within an intertextual plot derived from, and intertwined with, Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*. Rhys' novel tells the story of Bertha Mason (under her real name Antoinette Cosway) from the character's point of view. The story begins with an account of her childhood in Jamaica, and recounts her honeymoon and unhappy marriage to Edward Rochester. The story charts her emigration to England and ultimately her confinement to 'the attic' of Thornfield Hall. The main character is, in many ways, the mirror of Jane Eyre, but as a Creole woman having lost her wealth and position in society and in a fragile state of mental health, is one that can be seen as having developed through an explicit engagement with the (political) forces of patriarchy, colonialism, racism, displacement, assimilation and slavery. It is within the cramped spaced shaped by these political forces that the madness of Bertha can be recognised and explained, and which confine her as much as her husband's servants tasked with keeping her prisoner at Thornfield Hall. In a similar way, Hanan al-Shaykh's *One Thousand and One Nights: A Retelling* (2011) and David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* (1993) develop intertextual strategies to (re)appropriate stories and characters that have been refracted through orientalist

retelling. Through the use of hybrid postcolonial cultural principles, each author shapes intextual narratives with which to explore and oppose the social and political forces of dominance associated with cultural imperialism. Both Al-Shaykh and Hwang, like Rhys, also used their texts to reappropriate from their source literature a series of mythologies with which to undermine the conservative values still present in 'decolonised' cultures. These myths become political forces to challenge discrimination and the exclusion of disadvantaged groups, such as women and LGBT communities, in their respective cultures.

The third defining of characteristic of minor literature is that it affords the taking on of collective value. It is worth quoting at length from Deleuze and Guattari to clarify what this implies:

> Indeed, precisely because talent isn't abundant in a minor literature, there are no possibilities for an individuated enunciation that would belong to this or that "master" and that could be separated from a collective enunciation. Indeed scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial and allows the concept of something other than a literature of masters; what each author says individually already constitutes a common action, and what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others are not in agreement (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 17)

Intertextual literature is a type of writing for which the notion of talent varies according to the themes, styles and objectives that characterise the relationship between the new work and the canonical work. As derivative works there are already the conditions for a collective enunciation, albeit perhaps a sense that is marginal, but it is equally a condition of great literature in forging "the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (Deleuze

and Guattari, 1986, p. 17). In examining the conditions for great literature, Claire Colebrook,

in her introduction to Deleuze and Guattari, uses James Joyce's Dublin to illustrate this third

aspects of minor literature, a Dublin Joyce portrays (in both *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*) through

themes, techniques and characters appropriated from Homer's Odyssey.

> Joyce's *Dubliners* repeats the voices of Dublin, not in order to stress their
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> timelessness, but to disclose their fractured or machine-like quality – the way
>
> in which words and phrases become meaningless, dislocated and mutated
>
> through absolute deterritorialisation. What Joyce repeats is the power of
>
> difference (Colebrook, 2002, p. 119)

Colebrook explains that Joyce's Dublin is a (colonially appropriated) territory formed from

the language of religious moralism and a bourgeois commercialism such that when "free-

indirect style frees language from its ownership by any subject of enunciation, we can see the

flow of language itself, its production of sense and nonsense, its virtual and creative power"

(Colebrook, 2002, p. 114). Colebrook's observation is a useful illustration of this third

characteristic of minor literature because in avoiding any conformity to existing genres and

their techniques and traditions, and instead expressing collective sentiments of a relocated

territory, Joyce is able to recount and provide navigation points to track the social

assemblages that the characters shape from an otherwise ordinary day in Dublin in 1904. The

collective value embodied within the territory is thus further reinforced through parallels and

echoes with the ten year odyssey of Odysseus in his world.

Joyce appropriates, but not to repeat Hellenic cultural values. Instead Joyce repeats – renews

– the power of difference from which Homer's original story was created. It is also no

coincidence that Homer, in providing the first written versions of sophisticated story telling

of its type, also provides scope for the first sophisticated intertextual literature, each disclosing the power of Homer's epic to transform. These include Virgil's *Aeneid*, which presents a narrative of the Trojan War and its consequences from the point of view of the vanquished (and their place in Rome's founding myth) and Euripides' play *Trojan Women*, an account of the events of the Trojan War from the point of view of female characters. Homer's text continues to afford the repetition of difference, from Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), a postcolonial reworking of Homer relocated to the Caribbean, to Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* (2018) and Madeline Miller's *Circe*, (2018) which like Euripides' before them, portray the Trojan War from the perspective and experience of Homer's (minor) female characters.

Taken collectively, these characteristics illustrate the potential for appropriative strategies to be implemented in the service of emancipatory story-telling, in particular by repurposing other cultural values. In this way – and unlike major literature, which remains attached to the service of power – story-telling as minor literature gives a voice, a collective value, and recognises the political and social conditions shaping its characters, which in turn serves to rouse its readers. This observation that appropriation from other cultures can be liberating for marginal voices complicates many lines of critique used to denounce cultural appropriation as a unified practice. It is, however, also a powerful strategy, particularly in repurposing and disarming the language and values used to marginalise and exclude other cultural perspectives, as will be presented in the following sections. Examining the ethical and aesthetic consequences implied by the rethinking of literary works through the minor literature lens will therefore provide insight in distinguishing between cultural appropriation and cultural expropriation. This distinction is of particularly relevance for examining

creativity emerging from multiple cultural influences and in the broader debates concerning cultural exchange within the arts. It is to this theme that the article will now turn.

5 The ethics and aesthetics of cultural appropriation

Creativity within the arts often involves engaging with an aesthetic cosmopolitan appreciation of culture, often in a way that perceives itself to be "morally responsible and aesthetically discerning" (Rings, 2019, p. 161). Within this context, the use of appropriative strategies to further artistic creativity can be analysed in many ways, but the lens of minor literature helps in focusing on clarifying different ethical and aesthetic implications related to the different approaches that define the cultural encounter.

Using this lens enables a distinction to be applied to strategies of intercultural engagement based on the implications of exchange: appropriation (or misappropriation) includes instances in which characteristic narratives, techniques, symbols and artefacts are taken or imitated in a way that diminishes the original sources. In contrast, expropriation includes the act of repurposing narratives, techniques, symbols and artefacts in ways designed to enhance the original or provide benefits for the common good. While these features are only part of the defining characteristics of these concepts, when prefixed with the word "cultural" the difference is as contrasting as it is useful. Cultural appropriation thus represents an unauthorised use or imitation of characteristics, techniques, etc. from their cultural setting in a way that risks diminishing their cultural source and compromising their purpose. Cultural expropriation, in contrast, is an attempt to provide a broader access to cultural resources and spaces that have provided value for privileged beneficiaries, so that others may experience

these benefits in a way that has the potential to be mutually enhancing. Cultural appropriation, as a pursuit of majoritarian interest, preserves existing aesthetic standards, which benefit vested interests. Cultural expropriation, as exemplified by practices of minor literature, helps to question these standards, drawing attention to, or indeed challenging, the conditions that maintain vested interests and provide more opportunities for aesthetic pluralism, ultimately opening up the possibility of new standards of literature.

The minor literature paradigm also emphasises that the ethical and aesthetic implications of cultural appropriation are interdependent, as are the implications of cultural expropriation. This is because appropriation and expropriation are not neutral processes; exchange is always dependant on factors beyond the immediate goals of the transaction or encounter. Instances of appropriation predominantly serving majoritarian interests are thus both ethically and aesthetically implicated. This is because exploiting cultural products developed by marginalised groups to serve the interests of dominant social groups reshapes them according to the logic of the commodity form (see Kulchyski 1997, p. 617). In this form, ownership is stripped from those with fewest resources, value is extracted and rather than recognition and reconciliation, coercion is used to define (and impose) ethical and aesthetic standards. These standards might welcome or appreciate otherwise excluded female or minority ethnic artists and writers, but they do so, perhaps for tokenistic reasons, in the interest of the values determined by the dominant culture. Conforming to this logic, minority cultures can be mined or harvested in ways that support the interest of established power relations because the work of art derives its value not from its role as a cultural intermediary or its mode of communication or in cultivating cultural appreciation but as a circulating commodity.

In contrast, instances of expropriation occur when creativity associated with marginal cultures or dominated social groups is produced in accordance with cultural resources developed by dominant social groups in order to challenge the standards that maintain and legitimise such cultural dominance. The ethical and aesthetic implications are interdependent because by addressing exclusion and inequality, this form of engagement provides opportunities for re-examining existing aesthetic standards, as exemplified by recent attempts to 'decolonize' the arts curriculum (see, for example, Prinsloo, 2016).

In addition, the cultural appropriation/expropriation division is an important distinction that helps to position different aspects of cultural exchange. A majoritarian usage involves taking ownership of cultural phenomena without questioning the image or essence of its own sense of cultural identity. It expresses *extensive* multiplicity, in that adding more instances does not change the nature of its identity. For example, European and American art of the past century owe a debt to non-western cultural sources; however, the resulting western art, as artistic creation, derives its value in being captured and filtered by 'gate keepers' and 'arbiters of taste' serving European and American cultural measures, i.e. the aesthetic frameworks and foundations that match/reduce the art work to established criteria, determining which artefacts are to be accepted as 'fitting' works of art and through which markets they are to be consumed. As Baudrillard observes:

> Modern art wishes to be negative, critical, innovative and a perpetual surpassing, as well as immediately (or almost) assimilated, accepted, integrated, consumed. One must surrender to the evidence: art no longer contests anything, if it ever did ... it never disturbs the order, which is also its own. (Baudrillard, 1981, p. 110)

In contrast, a minoritarian usage expresses *intensive* multiplicity i.e. it doesn't just match features already established, but each additional example alters the composition of the group. In this way, minoritarian practices will take cultural artefacts, practices, content or styles and use them in ways that help to shape the possibilities of their identity and make connections, which in turn shape other identities. For example, intertextual writing, such as Reed's *Flight to Canada* discussed earlier or indeed fan-fiction, expropriate the characters of a canonical work and insert them into novel relationships so that new aspects of identity or its setting can be elaborated and extended beyond its established world. In this way, the voices repeated within the intertextual work are not those of the author of the original *or* the derivative work, but are intermediaries, (re)writing the literary event that opens up new possibilities for the reader (see Attridge, 2004; 2010). The voices of intertextual works repeat much that is 'canon' in order to transform it: repeating the power of difference by repeating the *conditions* from which the original work emerged, as the Joyce/Homer example demonstrates.

Such writing also subverts the logic of established ethical and aesthetic standards, undermining both the logic of the commodity and the conventions of categorising talent. It does so by blurring market boundaries and disrupting market forces: much of this writing, as exemplified by fan fiction, is exchanged free of charge and often circulates in draft form or otherwise incomplete and frequently disseminated anonymously (or pseudonymously). In appropriating from established literature, such work often defies copyright and asserts its existence not by appealing to criteria established by literary criticism but by justifying its relevance in customizing and 'supplementing' established works. Indeed, it often defines itself in terms of its opposition to the values or implicit assumptions insinuated or implied within the original work. It is in this regards a 'dangerous supplement' – "It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; if it fills, it is as if one fills a void"

(Derrida, 1976, p.145) but as writer Joss Whedon observes: "Art isn't your pet – it's your kid. It grows up and talks back to you" (Whedon, 2012)

Focussing on the beneficiaries of appropriative practices is a useful device in ensuring that standards, both ethical and aesthetic, are reviewed so that intercultural engagement becomes an opportunity to enhance appreciation of perspectives derived from a variety of cultures and to enrich artistic creation. The negative issues identified with cultural appropriation cannot be addressed by majoritarian strategies such as tokenism, patronising encouragement or quotas to refresh an otherwise pre-established artistic canon. Minoritarian approaches, such as expropriation or cultural/artistic transculturation are required to reflect an appropriate measure of responsibility and cultural awareness in defining an inclusive, meritocratic, creative, engaging and critical approach to artistic creation, i.e. a conception of the arts that contests and disturbs the order, reclaiming this role for the avant garde once more.

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