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# Looking for a Gown – Creative Production in a Mimetic World

# Looking for a Gown – Creative Production in a Mimetic World

*Rede*

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door

Jeroen de Kloet

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*Mevrouw de Rector Magnificus,  
Mijnheer de Decaan,  
Geachte collega's,  
Geachte studenten,  
Gewaardeerde toehoorders,*

## Gowns and Flows

Let me be frank: to become a professor in globalisation studies is a bewildering task. I often joke that I have become the master of the universe, but that merely hides the problem, namely, that the word 'globalisation' by now conjures up a potpourri of meanings. So much so that it can be used in almost any study, often serving as a kind of blackboxed force. This morning we organised a seminar titled *Globalisation Redux*. The term 'redux' is often used in the film industry to refer to reedited versions of old movies. The script of the old movie I refer to was written in 1989. Indeed, not an old movie really, and certainly not marking the start of processes of globalisation, that can be traced back to ancient times.<sup>1</sup> But 1989 is a key moment for globalisation *studies*, it is the year the Berlin Wall fell and the students in China occupied Tiananmen Square. A year of hope, change and despair. The year also that Arjun Appadurai wrote his seminal essay *Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy*.<sup>2</sup> Since then, the word globalisation has spread like a virus across the world.

Let me just rehearse a random sample of buzzwords that characterises this ubiquitous globalisation discourse: The world has become flat,<sup>3</sup> hybridised,<sup>4</sup> creolised,<sup>5</sup> McDonaldized,<sup>6</sup> compressed,<sup>7</sup> networked,<sup>8</sup> rhizomic,<sup>9</sup> transcultural,<sup>10</sup> mimetic,<sup>11</sup> and full of flows and disjunctures across different scapes;<sup>12</sup> involving processes of homogenization,<sup>13</sup> translation,<sup>14</sup> appropriation,<sup>15</sup> cultural borrowing,<sup>16</sup> negotiation,<sup>17</sup> indiginization,<sup>18</sup> localization,<sup>19</sup> pollution,<sup>20</sup> and glocalization.<sup>21</sup>

Making the world, in the end, more complex, more contradictory, and more precarious.

How do we navigate in and through this discursive minefield? When presented like this, I must admit, the discourse of globalisation seems to be slightly worn out, its colours fading. The challenge we face, then, may well be: what is there left to say, to think, to write, to do, 25 years after 1989? At the *Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies* (ACGS), we answer this challenge by ‘exploring what, in its different guises and unequal diffusion, globalisation is taken to *be* and *do* in and across specific locations, and what new social, political and cultural forms and imaginations this makes possible’.<sup>22</sup> To turn that aim, that also guides this lecture, into something more palpable, allow me to move to Shenzhen.

Shenzhen is a young city, existing barely more than 30 years, just across the border of Hong Kong, with approximately ten million inhabitants – almost all of whom are migrants from elsewhere in China. Shenzhen used to be the production base of China, but with the rapid rise of wages this is slowly changing. Like many other Chinese cities, it tries to capitalise on the creative policies promoted by the state since 2005. But this idea of creation and creativity can take many different guises, until now, Shenzhen remains the place for the production of fake, or better: *shanzhai* goods, be it fashion, mobile phones, art, or buildings. The University of Amsterdam has as its rule that its gowns are not supposed to leave the university’s premises. I was lucky to have some *guanxi* – the Chinese word that points at the importance of personal relationships to get things done, and is thus equally applicable in The Netherlands – that allowed me to smuggle a gown out of this building, to take on a journey to Shenzhen. The tailor, Ms. Yang, recommended by a Hong Kong friend who is not only a university professor, but also a fashion designer, frowned when she saw the gown.

To copy that gown would be highly challenging. Ms. Yang was not sure whether she could copy the patterns *faithfully* and if the buttons with the embroidered university logo could be remade *exactly* that way. She explained she would need to dye the cloth herself in order to achieve the *authentic* blue colour. I had to leave the ‘original’ gown behind, and she would give it a try. She did manage, convincingly so – as you can see. When I travelled back with two gowns in my suitcase, one real, the other slightly less so, I was happy to have my own private gown, one that does not carry the smell of time, decay and mothballs. One, also, with a highly competitive price I can tell you.

Some colleagues – who are, like me, Dutch – admired my gown and ordered one as well. On my next trip, my fake gown served as the original, and three further copies were made. That trip, I smuggled four gowns back in my suitcase, one slightly less than real, three even more unreal, following that logic. I was glad not to be checked by the Dutch customs, as I was not sure

how to explain that luggage. Later, during the drinks, I invite you all to check out the gowns the others wear, and try to distinguish the real from the copy. To the tailor in Amsterdam, I apologise, and promise I will not further pursue this detour in my career.

This story helps us, I believe, in exploring the leading question of this lecture: **what globalisation is taken to be and do in and across specific locations**. It points at how authenticity continues to haunt global cultural production. That issue, of authenticity, inspires the first part of my lecture. It also alludes to the power of copying and faking – the focus of the second part of my lecture: mimicry. Finally, it raises questions about the possibility of being critical, with which I engage in the third and final part: How does intensified globalisation allow us, or withhold us, from critique?

These issues closely resonate with my upcoming research project funded by the European Research Council, titled *From 'Made in China' to 'Created in China' – A Comparative Study of Creative Practice and Production in Contemporary China*.<sup>23</sup> In this project I explore, with a team of researchers,

1. What globalisation does to our understanding of creativity (which connects to authenticity) and what we can learn from China,
2. How creativity is entangled with tactics of governmentality (that I will link today to mimicry), and
3. Related possibilities of criticality.

In this lecture, I will engage with the issues of authenticity, mimicry and criticality along two different vectors. One, following my gown story, relates to **global creative production**. The other vector concerns **global knowledge production**. I will show not only how both creative and knowledge production are changing due to processes of globalisation, but also, how globalisation forces us to rethink both.

## Forward to the Past: Inauthentic Authenticities

Despite at least three decades of poststructuralist deconstruction, the desire to be authentic, and with it related ideas and ideals about newness, originality and purity, has remained at the core of creative and knowledge production. We value new ideas, new sounds, new images, new narratives. How, then, is it possible to be original in today's globalized times? Rather than validating the quest for authenticity and originality, I believe it to be more urgent to probe into the question what relations of power are at play in the production and authentication of cultural products and knowledge.

This question brings me back to my earlier research on pop and rock music from China, from my PhD time. Rock is driven by a quest for authenticity. For Chinese, this authenticity operates as a deadlock: if a Chinese rock singer like Zuoxiao Zuzhou mimics a global rock aesthetics, he will be blamed by journalists in and outside China for being a copycat. Were he to add Chinese elements to his sound, such as *pipa* or *guzheng*, he would be accused of exoticism or self-orientalism. Zuoxiao Zuzhou is thus stalked by a double-edged sword of authenticity. When I show video clips of Chinese rock music to people, they frequently respond with ‘this sounds just like our music, but we do it better, this is old fashioned.’<sup>24</sup>

This denial of coevalness, to use Johannes Fabian’s term,<sup>25</sup> continues to haunt global creative production. It produces what can be termed a binary globalism, in which the local is constantly juxtaposed to the global. Creativities that emerge outside the ‘West,’ constantly carry the burden of geopolitical representation as authenticating proof. Whereas ‘the West’ can claim to make universal rock music, in China, this has to be *Chinese* rock music. Idem ditto for contemporary art, literature or cinema.<sup>26</sup>

Hence the multiple articulations of Chineseness that permeate creative texts that happen to come from China. But, with the increased economic power and cultural confidence that characterizes China over the past decade, such articulations of Chineseness – be they references to old China, communist China or global China, have been complemented by a denial or erasure of the issue as such. Exemplary is the increased use of English lyrics by bands like SUBS, Hopscotch and Carsick Cars.

In my following case I will explain how bands negotiate the double-edged sword of authenticity through a highly self-reflexive mode saturated with parody.

In the movie *Follow Follow*, directed by rock singer Peng Lei, a ghost appears in Beijing, arriving on a flying saucer. It is a white man with shoulder-length blond hair.<sup>27</sup> When he turns around, we see Nirvana’s lead-vocalist Kurt Cobain. Indeed, Cobain returns to life in 2011, this time in a bedroom in Beijing. Since his suicide in 1994 he has been a cult figure in the Chinese underground scenes, signifying the ultimate rock and roll hero. At the end of the movie, however, Cobain confesses that rock does not belong to China. ‘Why do Chinese people like rock and roll music?’ he wonders, ‘I think it is just curiosity, later they will get bored with it.’ Then he claims, ‘So many people were calling me in China, I had to come to China. I don’t belong here. I have to go.’

The spectre of Western popular culture is literally haunting China in this movie. Peng Lei’s articulation of China being out of sync with rock culture in

the end paradoxically authenticates his position: it is a claim of inauthenticity, a claim of incompatibility, that turns him both authentic and compatible with global rock culture. It is through embracing both edges of the sword of authenticity simultaneously that he manages to negotiate his authenticity.

In the theme song of the movie, 'I don't want to imitate you,' (我不想模仿你 *wo bu xiang mofang ni*) the New Pants, of which director Peng Lei is the lead vocalist, sing...

We are not the Ramones  
We are not Joy Division  
We don't listen to pop music  
We don't do karaoke  
We are not artists  
We don't go to the Internet  
We don't want to copy you  
We don't want to become you  
We don't want to follow you  
We don't want to change to you

We all know that they go on the Internet, that they are artists. The clip itself is set in New York, rather than China. 'I don't want to imitate you' is performed in the centre of that 'you': New York. This playful and ironic denial of the other, be it the West, pop or karaoke culture, constitutes at the same time an affirmation and embracement of that other.

In their clearly exaggerated juxtaposition of binaries, the New Pants move beyond the geopolitical deadlock of global authenticity – they don't want to become you, as they are already you.<sup>28</sup> Moving from music to art, we can observe numerous instances in which claims of authenticity are intertwined with questions of global creativity. The most straightforward example is probably the artwork of Wang Guangyi, in which a social realist aesthetics referring to the Cultural Revolution in China, are combined with symbols from global capitalism, ranging from McDonalds to Coca Cola and Chanel 5. Such juxtapositions of articulations of Chineseness to 'the West' are omnipresent in contemporary Chinese art. Zeng Fanzhi's work provides another example. In his *Last Supper*, sold for US\$ 23.3 million,<sup>29</sup> we see communist red guards, all wearing similar masks, eating water melon, depicted in this biblical scene. On the walls we see calligraphy scrolls. It is an appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci's 15th-century mural of the same name. Again, signifiers of Chineseness (calligraphy, Red Guards, water melons) are juxtaposed against signifiers of 'Western' culture ('the original').

Such authenticating articulations of Chineseness can be read as instances of the production of locality.<sup>30</sup> But this production is not only entangled with the current policies of the Chinese nation-state that supports its creative industries as part of its ‘soft power,’ they are also swiftly turned into capital through the speculative workings of a global art world. The state – global art world nexus *demand*s cultural difference.<sup>31</sup>

But it would be too simplistic to read creative authenticating tactics solely in terms of a state supported capitalist logic. In the past decades, we have witnessed the desire for the local, the authentic and the original in many instances. For example, in the Dogma cinema of Lars von Trier and others, that responds to the assumed glib and overproduced aesthetics of Hollywood. We find another example in the desire for imperfection in design, architecture and even language, as studied by my colleague Ellen Rutten.<sup>32</sup>

Let’s move from creative production to knowledge production.

There, we can observe an uncanny mirroring of the predicament of global creative production. Again, ‘the West’ can take itself quite uncritically as the authentic yardstick of knowledge, and the rest serves merely as a cultural warehouse, used not only to provide examples of ‘universal knowledge,’ but also for othering and mirroring. ‘The West’ can conveniently deny its Euro- or Anglocentrism and instead claim, implicitly or explicitly, universality. In the words of Chen Kuan-Hsing, ‘Universalist arrogance serves only to keep new possibilities from emerging, since it allows only one set of accepted analytic language to enter the dialogue and is itself a product of a specific set of historical experiences.’<sup>33</sup>

Scholars working outside ‘the West’ continuously carry the burden of geopolitical representation. As Rey Chow writes, ‘whereas the West asserts its moral claims on the basis of a universalist rhetoric traceable to the European enlightenment, China is reduced to a reactive position from which it must and can speak only in terms of its own cultural and local specifics, in terms of its own historical differences.’<sup>34</sup>

One example of an attempt to alter the balance, is the Inter-Asia cultural studies movement, as well as the monograph *Asia as Method* by one of the movement’s initiators, Chen Kuan-hsing.

Situating his argument in the ‘problematic of decolonisation, deimperialisation, and de-cold war,’<sup>35</sup> Chen posits that Asia should become a method rather than remaining an object of study. For Chen, the crux is that the partners of academic dialogue should multiply, especially beyond the borders of that fuzzy thing called ‘the West.’ Europe then becomes just one out of many possible sources of reference.

Chen's *Asia as Method* is *not* a call for indigenous knowledge, as to counter the universality of 'the West' by alleged authentic knowledge of the rest. The idea of indigenous knowledge runs frontal against the theoretical thrust of cultural studies in general, that aims to put *any* cultural prefix in a crisis if not under erasure.<sup>36</sup> It is an attempt, however, to decenter 'the West,' and search for alternative modes of knowledge production.

The problem with the issue of authenticity in the context of global creative and knowledge production is that it continues to reify the binary logic that separates the global – that in a problematic way tends to conflate with 'the West', from the local, that points at 'the rest.' Global creative production is thereby entrenched in binaries like local versus global, tradition versus modernity, the West versus the rest, and so on. Chen's *Asia as Method* offers an urgent critique on global knowledge production, yet, his plea for an inter-Asia dialogue not only runs the danger of a return of academic parochialism – now not located in Europe but in Asia, it may also be complicit with an increased Asiacentrism that we are witnessing today. It also produces its own hierarchies, in which East Asia and big nations are privileged above South and South-East Asia and smaller nations.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in critiquing binaries like global and local, we tend to discursively create what we try to contest; we end up in an uncanny circularity – again reifying a binary globalism. Would it not be more helpful to abandon the idea of the original altogether, and view cultural globalisation as a hall of mirrors, in which copies constantly reflect and refract each other?<sup>38</sup>

## Fake the Original!

What, then, are the alternatives of binary globalism? The question of how to be original may well be replaced here by the question of how to fake. We then move from the vertical desire for depth and uniqueness to the horizontal dimension of the surface and the copy. When even humans are not needed anymore to become a pop star – as exemplified by the Japanese virtual hologram star Hatsune Miku, whose virtual performances attract large audiences who sing and cheer and dance around her – can't we live in a world existing only of copies, a world where the authentic and the fake are not juxtaposed as such? My gown serves as an example that bridges both questions; it is a copy, yet feels unique precisely because it is a copy. In the process of copying, which is a process of cultural translation as well, things get lost, while other meanings may be added. Meanings that were hidden in the alleged original – itself

always already a copy – may unfold or be actualized in the process of translation.<sup>39</sup>

I use the term mimicry to refer to this process of endless copying, and related processes of the slippages and unfolding of meaning. Here I conveniently ignore not only the biological meanings of mimicry, but also its complex philosophical history, going back to Plato, Adorno, Auerbach and Bhabha, to name but a few key thinkers.

For me, mimicry gestures towards the fabrication of the absolute fake, to paraphrase the book written by Jaap Kooijman.<sup>40</sup> Mimicry always involves a slippage of meaning, an excess, surplus or trace, and as such, helps to destabilize meanings that are ascribed to the assumed ‘original.’ The desire for mimicry entails a desire of becoming like the other, while acknowledging the fact that this becoming will never be complete, will always be supplemented with a similar to, ‘*but not quite*.’<sup>41</sup>

I take faking as one specific case of mimicry. The notion of the fake has, however, the same problem as we have already encountered: it produces its constitutive outside, in this case the idea of an authenticating original. In earlier work I argued for the related ideas of pollutions and impurity – both positive terms for me to engage with what Edwin Jurriëns and I call cosmopatriot cultural expressions.<sup>42</sup> Yet, also these terms tend to produce that what they aim to contest: the idea of purity. The Chinese term of *shanzhai* may offer an epistemological exit-route. It refers to a fortified mountain village outside official control, but has come to stand for the culture of fake products that are produced in primarily Shenzhen. As I explain together with Lena Scheen in a recent piece, ‘the term evokes a sense of illegality and subversion: it is copying, *but not quite*, as there is more to it than just copying. In China it has become a vernacular term, not only for painting and goods, but also houses, cars, cities; even people can be termed *shanzhai*.’<sup>43</sup>

Dafen art village is the global center for the production of *shanzhai* art. There, numerous canvases are produced as replicas of famous works, ranging from *Mona Lisa* to Vincent van Gogh and Fang Lijun (see image 1 and 2).

The colors of these works can be altered according to the commissioner’s own preferences: for example to match their sofa. Or the face of your daughter can replace *Mona Lisa*’s. The village is also referred to as an art factory, given the fact that an estimated 60 percent of worldwide reproductions are produced and shipped from there.<sup>44</sup> Dafen Art Village may help to challenge the aesthetics of high art and the workings of the art world. There, the question whether a painting fits one’s interior becomes important, just as the malleability of an art work challenges the sanctified aura of contemporary art.



Image 1 – Van Gogh on transport

Both Ackbar Abbas<sup>45</sup> and Laikwai Pang<sup>46</sup> warn in their work against a naive romanticizing of the fake, claiming that its production is deeply enmeshed in global capitalism and class exploitation. Yet, in their studies, the voices of the painters and traders are excluded. Writings on the fake generally privilege the objects, rather than the people who make them. This runs the danger of flattening their experiences to univocal rubrics like abuse and exploitation.

Inspired by the question I posed earlier – what is globalisation taken to *be* and *do* – it is crucial to actually explore *the practices* of artistic reproduction in Dafen itself. In my interviews with gallery owners and painters, a highly diverse range of experiences emerge, many are clearly proud of their work and enjoy the relative freedom painting gives them. Some were trained at art academies, others learned the skills in workshops they joined after moving to Shenzhen. Many were envious of Beijing, which they perceived to be the cold but true center of Chinese art. The authoritative discourse on what is real art thus haunts them, and challenges the pleasure in their own work. This, I think, points at the possible violence global discourses on what constitutes creativity can exert, and the problematic alliance between these discourses and critical voices against abuse of creative labor. It disavows the technologies of the self as mobilized by the makers of *shanzhai* art works in Shenzhen –



Image 2 – Lucian Freud meets Steve Jobs in Dafen Art Village

technologies that remain deeply implicated in the governmental tactics of the state and the cultural industries.

*Shanzhai* culture holds the potential to unsettle authoritative discourses on creativity and originality as well as the globalized legal copyright system that helps to keep these discourses in place. Yet, it is much harder to trace such a potential when we look at the global mimicry of *knowledge* on creativity. When doing research for my NWO-VIDI project on the Beijing Olympics in 2008,<sup>47</sup> I was surprised to see how this mega event was packaged in terms of creativity, newness and innovation. With the global proliferation of the discourse of the creative industries we witness worldwide the emergence of creative cities, or cities that aspire to become creative, with Richard Florida serving as the high priest.<sup>48</sup> The key buzzword in this discourse is innovation.

Culture and creativity are turned into capital, to lubricate the plugging of cities into a global neoliberal economy. The Dutch ‘topsectoren’ policy, dedicated to specific Dutch creative sectors, focusing on design, media, gaming,

fashion and architecture, is an illustrative case.<sup>49</sup> A disturbing one as well, given that the resources allocated to this policy come at a time when the arts in general are facing drastic budget cuts.

Not all creativities are equal, apparently.

Inspired by these top-sector policies, academic funding bodies like the NWO increasingly insist on the importance of what is termed the ‘valorisation’ of knowledge production. Knowledge has to be useful for society and to be directly applicable; it thereby should follow the agenda set by the nation-state and its multiple institutions.

When creativity and knowledge have become so much part and parcel of the workings of the nation-state in a time of globalisation, when mimicry of knowledge produces hundreds of cities that are all unique and creative, when academics are required to be full time relevant and innovative, then I wonder if a turn towards the notion of *shanzhai* suffices. Of course not.

What are the possibilities of criticality, when culture – either to secure a sense of authenticity, or as a force of mimicry – has become so much part of the tactics of governmentality?<sup>50</sup> And what role can knowledge play in this?

## Towards a politics of possibility

The question of governmentality is necessarily dovetailed by the question of criticality. This third and final part of my lecture is inspired by Michel Foucault, who claims that ‘where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.’<sup>51</sup> Given that power implies resistance, but that resistance is always already embedded within the system of power, as there is no outside to the system, then what is there left to do?

Bruno Latour exclaims that critique has run out of steam.<sup>52</sup> Climate sceptics tell us that the idea of global warming is a construction that serves the interests of certain groups. The Foucauldian critique on power and knowledge has deterritorialized to the political right. In other words, we need to look for other tools. Inspired by Latour, Giseline Kuipers explains how a ‘critical stance (...) has been incorporated into many media products, which increasingly cater to savvy audiences well-versed in critical viewing modes.’<sup>53</sup> And, in a similar vein, Jan Teurlings shows how the society of the spectacle has mutated into the society of the machinery, within which the focus on representations is complemented by an obsession with the machinery that produces these representations.<sup>54</sup>

Call me naïve, or utterly romantic, but I do think one major task of the humanities remains to develop and enable critique on the contemporary global condition. A critique that helps to look better and to challenge deeply engrained patterns of in- and exclusion.

In addition to critiquing governments, academic funding bodies, universities and cultural industries for hijacking culture and creativity, we need different imaginations that unfold different possibilities, that help us to imagine the world differently. One important insight that Appadurai expressed already 25 years ago, and that continues to inspire me, is that the work of imagination is a social practice, with real social implications. One example that illustrates the importance of imagination comes from the Japanese movie *Kamikaze Girls*, by Tetsuya Nakashima.<sup>55</sup> In it, we see how its lead protagonist, Momoko Ryugasaki, who is part of the Lolita subculture, takes her inspiration from the French Rococo time. A time long past and a place far from Japan serve as a symbolic toolbox for the development of a subcultural lifestyle that permeates everyday life intensely. It shows how, as Appadurai claimed, ‘the past is now not a land to return to in a simple politics of memory. It has become a synchronic warehouse of cultural scenarios.’<sup>56</sup>

When cultures are imagined, as Benedict Anderson tells us,<sup>57</sup> and imagination is a social practice, as Appadurai hastens to add, then how can we force imagination to take a sidetrack or U-turn? How do we find lines of flight out of the contemporary global condition? In the words of Blixa Bargeld, leading vocalist of Einstürzende Neubauten:

Was ist ist  
Was nicht ist ist möglich  
Nur was nicht ist ist möglich  
[What is is, What is not is possible, Just what is not is possible]<sup>58</sup>

Or, as Appadurai pointed at in his recent book *The Future as Cultural Fact*: we need to look for a politics of possibility to conquer a politics of probability. The latter is embedded in increased risks in today’s world that instigate a wide range of surveillance and security techniques.<sup>59</sup>

One example of such politics of possibility comes from Francis Alÿs’ artwork *When Faith Moves Mountains* from 2002. Alÿs is a Mexican-based Belgian architect-turned-artist. He gave shovels to 500 volunteers and asked them to use their shovels to ‘move’ a sand dune 10 centimeters from its original position.<sup>60</sup> In its ephemerality the work questions the notion of meaning itself. The collective enterprise is as senseless as anything else, after the performance, the dune hasn’t changed, yet, during the process of shoveling, new

social bonds were created, a new collective emerged, constituting a politics of conviviality, ultimately of possibility.<sup>61</sup>

Yet, one cannot help but wonder, this collective followed the orders of an artist, as such, it mimicked a mode of totalitarianism reminiscent with the modern history of Latin America. The work reflects upon the issue of wasted and futile labor, but what about the material conditions of these volunteers, who gains from the work, and who does not?<sup>62</sup> In its title, the work clearly refers to, and likely questions, religious faith. We can move a mountain, or better, a sand dune, for one meter, but to what avail?

The work itself is already ridden with contradictions and questions. But, I like to insist, in its deliberate performance of senselessness, its preposterous mobilization of a massive labor force, and its fleeting nature, it serves as a lesson in futility,<sup>63</sup> and articulates a rhetoric of failure.<sup>64</sup> It thereby also helps to undermine globalized ideologies of progress and innovation.

Critique remains often embedded in large claims regarding our social and ideological world. The object of critique can be as vague as globalisation, or global neoliberalism. As my fascination for the work of Alÿs attests to, the forms of critique I am looking for are less grand, more local and specific, and more personal and intimate. They mirror everyday life in unexpected and disturbing ways. They can come from both the so-called high arts as well as from popular culture, but also from our research practices.

Rather than separating creative and knowledge production, as I did in the previous two sections, allow me to think them together here, and make, to conclude, a brief plea for three virtues that are important in both domains:

### (1) *Craftsmanship*

In the constant demand for output, originality and innovation, the craft of not necessarily doing something original, new and cutting edge, but simply of doing something well – the craft of making paintings or chairs, of conducting music or research – runs the danger of being marginalized and ignored. Craftsmanship, according to Richard Sennett, ‘names an enduring, basic human impulse, the desire to do a job well for its own sake.’<sup>65</sup> When we return to the example of the *shanzhai* painters, my argument to take their practices more seriously also implies taking their craftsmanship more seriously (see image 3).

And then the craftsmanship of us as researchers? Close reading of objects and letting them speak back, as Mieke Bal shows us,<sup>66</sup> in combination with long term, grounded empirical research in the field, and a mobilization of methods that draw from the humanities as well as the social sciences, is be-



Image 3 – Painter Huang Zhende ‘replicates’ an artwork

coming more urgent. In my own research practices, I try to combine close reading of cultural objects with interviews in the field and analysis of media texts related to the objects. Indeed, I do think it is important to move away to other places, and to include field research as part of the repertoire of the humanities. This is a task we cannot, with due respect, leave to anthropology and area studies only.

For example, in the HERA project on single women and urban space in Delhi and Shanghai, we combine close analysis of different cultural texts and ethnographic methods.<sup>67</sup> The latter involve, aside from interviews, walks-along with people through the city and cultural mapping methods.

## *(2) Slowness, Doubt and Modesty*

Speed is a driving force of globalisation, and vice versa. Let me present you the skyline of Shanghai from 1989, and the one from 2013.<sup>68</sup> A similar indication of the speed of changes, triggered by what we may term a compressed globalisation, comes from a comparison of the subway map of Beijing in 2000, and the map of today (see image 4 and 5).

But the culture of speed permeates our lives much more profoundly than urban change alone. It pushes us to produce, to deliver, to work, to run. In-

## 北京地铁运营图及车站等级 Routemap & Station Grading



Image 4 – Beijing Subway in 2000<sup>69</sup>

spired by a recent piece by Giseline Kuipers,<sup>70</sup> the virtues of slowness, doubt and modesty in both creative and knowledge production are pivotal in order to work against the culture of speed and haste. As she claims, ‘because we are never sure, we have to keep asking.’<sup>71</sup> This doubt can be translated into an insistence on the specificity of our claims and their contingency upon time and place. This implies more modesty about the claims we make, and the impact we may have.

It can also be transformed into creative practices that slow down, that put a stop to the flow of the everyday, such as the cinema of Tsai Ming-liang. As a recent book by Song Hwee Lim shows, long takes, static camera, a lack of diegetic and non-diegetic sound and a lot of the banality of everyday life characterizes slow cinema.<sup>72</sup> It resonates with the slow movement and the current attention for sustainability – all quite middle class, privileged preoccupations. But also modes of being that indeed may help to counterbalance a culture of speed. Christoph Lindner shows in his work the multiple ways in which visual culture strategically intervenes in contemporary urban spaces and communities to interrupt processes and conditions of globalisation. We need more such moments of interruption in a culture of continuous acceleration, confidence and excellence.<sup>73</sup>

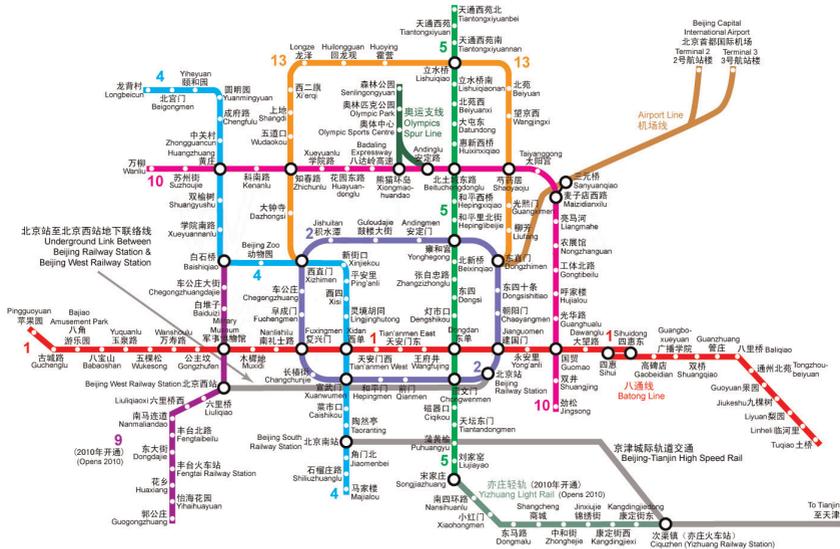


Image 5 – Beijing Subway in 2014<sup>74</sup>

### (3) Pleasure and Fun

Let me reiterate my argument. Rather than engaging with the question what globalisation *is*, I have explored what globalisation is taken to *be* and *do* in and across specific locations.

I have shown how the issue of authenticity remains a driving force behind global cultural and knowledge politics, producing its own hegemonic fault lines. I argued that mimicry, faking and *shanzhai* culture may allow for an escape route out of that predicament. It may be in the field of creative production, but becomes more problematic in knowledge production. There, the global proliferation of a discourse on creativity and innovation, as well as the call for the valorisation of knowledge, have made culture and knowledge part of the tactics of governmentality of the nation-state, the global cultural industries, funding bodies, and the universities worldwide. How, then, can we be critical?

Driven by a commitment to the social and political force of imagination, I have argued for craftsmanship, slowness, doubt and modesty. Allow me to close with a third virtue, as banal as it is vital: the importance of pleasure in



Image 6 – Tatming during the 2012 concert

what we are doing. Pleasure offers a line of flight, albeit temporarily, out of the pressures and boredom of everyday life.<sup>75</sup>

Today, for example, it is my party.

*It's My Party* is also the title of a song by the Hong Kong pop duo Tatming. Written especially for the 25th anniversary of the band, performed in a series of four sold out concerts in the biggest pop venue of Hong Kong, the Coliseum, the song's title is deeply ironic. It – and here I draw on a study conducted together with Leonie Schmidt and Yiu Fai Chow<sup>76</sup> – refers to the celebration of the band as much as it refers to the Chinese Communist Party. The carnivalesque song expresses a postcolonial invitation to join this different party, one in which we dance, poke fun at authorities and ridicule those in power. It mounts up to a political claim on the right to the city and a personal right to make merry. It is this spirit of pleasure, ridicule and fun that I hope we can recuperate in both creative production as well as knowledge production, here and everywhere.

Or, as Anthony Wong sings:

Dusts from the past are yet to settle, we must continue our party  
For years and months, I dance what I dance, it's called life.  
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.<sup>77</sup>

## Dankwoord

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Tenslotte, Yiu Fai. Jij was mijn eerste interview voor mijn PhD. Dat gesprek is nooit verstomd. Zelfs nu je alweer drie jaar in Hong Kong woont slagen we erin door te praten, te dansen en te lachen. It's not *my* party. This is *our* party.

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