BOOTL3GG1NG MATTERS!!

UMA B

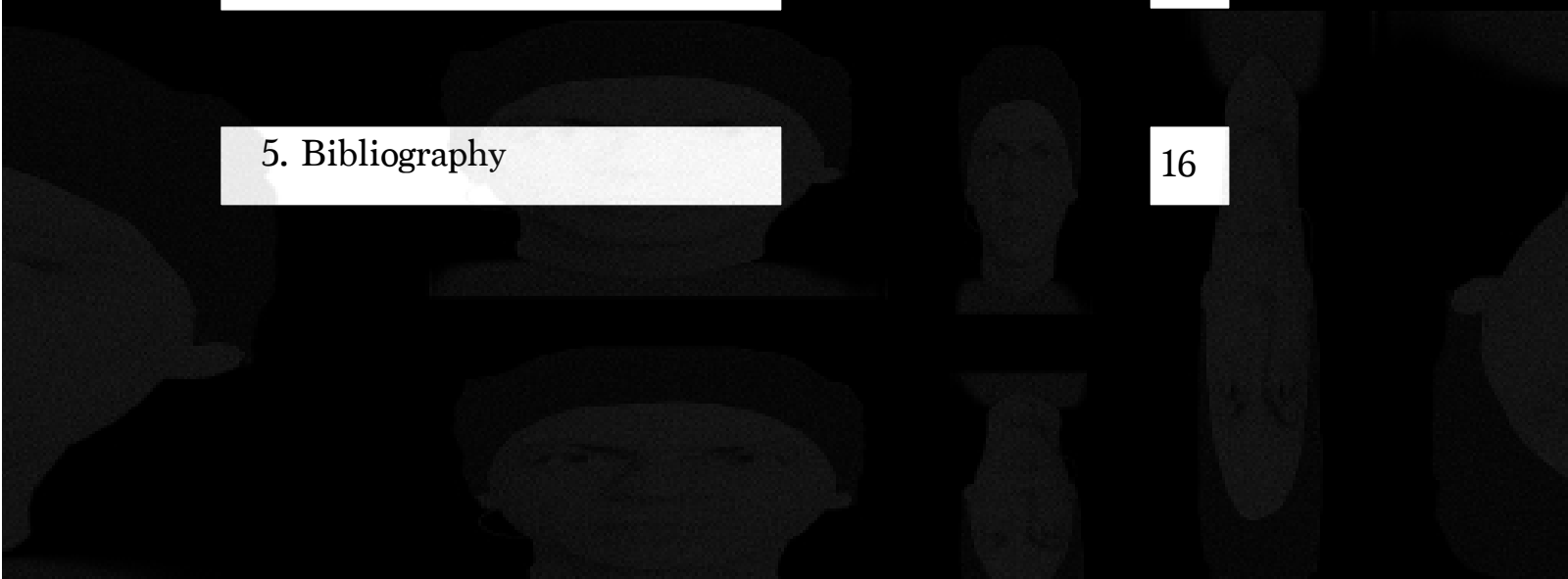
25000711



WRITINGS ON BOOTLEGGING & IMAGE REPRODUCTION

PAGE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction	01
2. Previously on Bootlegging	05
3. Case Studies	07
4. Synthesis	14
5. Bibliography	16



INTRODUCTION

Before moving to London to pursue my Master's degree, I needed to quit my job as a designer at a company in a different country, which had one of the most distressing implications: it meant I would lose my visa – and therefore my complete access – to that country, where I had spent over nine years, and nearly all years of my adulthood. It brought me into a spiral of trying to understand these large-scale, controlling systems of global borders and wealth, one which selectively privileges few over others, and more obviously, a Global North over the Global South.

The restrictions posed by borders, visas and other neocolonial systems seem rigid, but I think it is a funny business trying to organise people into rules and grids, when people are, in fact, notoriously bad are fitting into boxes – and there are deep-rooted and active narratives hidden in the underbelly of seemingly immutable systems that often show, when a level of similarity or apparent equality is achieved*. These narratives spawn the act of identifying and subverting the symbols that depict these systems, which manifest in practices like creative bootlegging – which is the main playground of my research.

My interest deepened in bootlegs when it appeared crossing borders – of class, and eventually, geography- almost irreverently. Here bootlegging takes on a more fascinating role as it not only renegotiates culture of the source material but unties itself of its fidelity to the source material. I aim to decipher these cultural codes through the methods of image reproduction and manipulation of recognisable brands like Spiderman and the Bollywood mega-celebrity Shah Rukh Khan, and their transactions with low and high culture.

For example, my type exploration in creating an intentional 'typo and distort' tool for 'bootlegging purposes', offered new meanings of the original content – with every iteration, the graphic distorts textually or visually, but retains its original message. A 'Spidreman' school bag sold on a rural general shop in India still remains Spiderman to the local eight-year-old. However, the 'typo' still is implicit with large cultural connotations – and treated not as language, but as a bastardised image of an original brand. A 'Spidreman' bag tells us, almost right away for those with access to internet, the rungs of class and geography where this bootleg will be found.

This brings my research to point out the nuances of cross-border cultural exchanges looked at through bootlegging, remixing and translation practices. Another point emerges, in looking at 'adaptation' as a tangential form of translation, for it affords legitimacy, while bootlegging deals in precarity. As a case study, I look at *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, the mammoth Indian adaptation of the gameshow *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* as a counterpoint to bootlegging, to clarify some areas of overlap: adaptations, like bootlegs, are rarely

indemnified of their source materials, even if they pack their own new meanings independently within their forms.

Adaptations also imply multiplicity through their circulation (Schwartz, 2023) – it expands and circulates the source material, resulting in turning the source material into a cultural meme (Dawkins, 2006), or a kind of gene, that is subject to mutation when adopted by the collective. This research, then, names this cross-cultural translation of image as a post-colonial mutation, especially when it travels from higher imperial powers to lower ones.

In the next chapters, I look at the bootlegging practices that repackage cultural blips and imperfections into 'camp' designs - and how their image-making creates a new consciousness within their respective audiences. The analyses of texts like Azoulay's *Unlearning Imperialism* and Ben Schwartz's *Unlicensed* helps to situate the context within which bootlegging emerges in the postcolonial Global South, and their complex relationship with material resource and culture, and Bourdieu's thesis on Cultural Capital weigh the translations of cultures across class.

In the synthesis, this visual and textual research then endeavours to ask the question: what does image-making and reproduction of images and their translations through bootlegging reveal about the post-colonial gaze, especially when they mutate while moving through different contexts?



Fig. 1. Top: A bootleg Spiderman watch for kids
Bottom: In one of my explorations, I created a bootlegging tool that distorts words slightly to expunge the copyright infringement. Often, these misspellings are found on bootlegged articles around the world - that deem them of lesser quality, and also humorous.

PREVIOUSLY ON BOOTLEGGING

On Systems

My interest in neocolonial systems and hierarchies sought to find *BLIPS* and inconsistencies that in turn destabilised them - and how this was seen through image-making methods. My initial experiments into this topic were led by trying to find 'alter-egos' or 'hidden narratives' behind hierarchical systems- first, through the point of labour and exploitation.

"For the colonial state did not merely aspire to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this 'visibility' was that everyone, everything, had (as it were) a serial number." (Anderson, p.184, 1983)

In his seminal work *Maps, Census and Museums*, Anderson talks about the vision of the 'coloniser' that categorises and serialises all their subjects - again, a callback to systems that catalogued people akin objects - helped to understand these systems of classification. In my work, I explored a system of playing cards, looking at the Jack as a character, as a colonial inheritance that is now ubiquitous around the world. The cards have complete clarity and visibility in their order, creating a panoptic effect that allows total surveyability. This makes it interesting to see how the serial number can distort to upend its intrinsic order.

The act of 'mutiny' within these systems were explored through Aisha Ariella Azoulay's *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.* It was a key reference at this point and her passionate unlearning of imperialism, through modifying our visualities around pre-existing structures, helped to strongly situate my project in the context of the Global South, quite simply, *unlearning* said hierarchies. She argues that imperial violence operates by treating peoples and worlds as raw material and ultimately as imperial resources (Azoulay, p.18, 2019), it helps to look at 'resource' in a new light.

In my next explorations, I further the idea of objects as resources, and stand-ins for a cultural code that carry a value greater than the object itself - introducing the aspect of Bourdieu's cultural capital into my discussions and how objectivated - (cultural capital implicit in objects) - cultural capital is read differently depending on the viewer's position, which is constantly shifting. This creates a positive reading of value, one which fluctuates according to the person's habitus (predisposed worldview, as a simplified

understanding). During this phase, I worked on an archive, with a set of juxtaposed, visually congruent objects with 'varying' values that carry implicit cultural value. The recognition of the tension between the two images is dependent of the position of the viewer. Through this lens, I could look at the power dynamics at play in the systems of the objects in the archive.

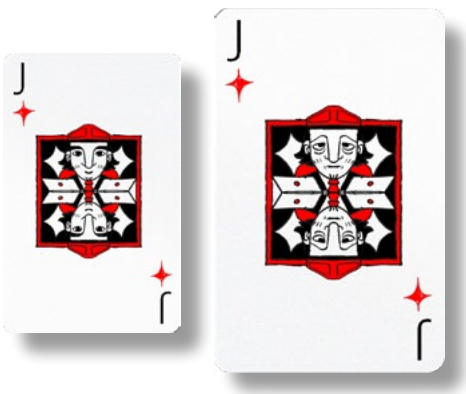


Fig. 2. Reimagining the card 'Jack' as an 'alter-ego' (the unhappy employee, Jack of diamonds) to change the 'appearance' of a cohesive system

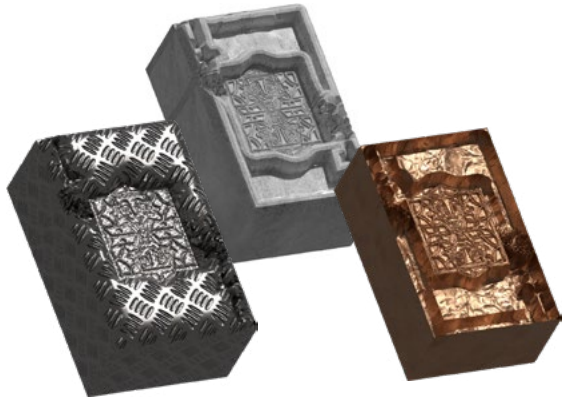


Fig. 3. Reimagining the card 'Jack' as a constant source of natural resource by changing his form to steel, cement and bronze.





Fig. 4. My archive 'same-same but different' looks at juxtaposing images that have a tension in their 'value' with each other. Top: the original episode vs. the spawned Pikachu meme; Below: Elon Musk vs. his Shanzai counterpart, Elon Ma.

On Bootlegging

Now that the base and economies within which objectivated cultural capital existed was established, it was time to return to recognise the anomalies that challenged these systems and refused to play by their rules, which introduced bootlegging to my practice. Bootlegging refuses the authority of individualised, privatised control of property. They are not fakes - they are reproductions that exist independently and take shape as something largely recognisable, but just short by a bit.

Ben Schwartz' *Unlicensed: Bootlegging as a Creative Practice* sheds much light on the mechanics and identity of bootlegging. Schwartz positions creative practice as always responding to existing images, systems, and objects; bootlegging simply makes that dependence visible rather than pretending originality appears from nowhere. By interviewing bootleg practioners, he fluidly discusses art theory, piracy, street markets, corporate branding, DIY publishing, and internet culture without treating them as separate worlds, collapsing the distinction between high and low culture in the process. For instance, Schwartz references *Shanzai Lyric*, a body of research, that reproduces the experimental use of English in Shanzai garments and items made in China, focusing on 'how the language of counterfeit uses mimicry, hybridity, and permutation to both revel in and reveal the artifice of global hierarchies' (Shanzhailyric.info, 2020)

What makes this particularly productive for my project is Schwartz's focus on the instability of authorship in the circulation of bootlegs. Bootlegging is a direct affront to the cultural capital one seeks in Bourdieu's framework, destabilising the very systems through which value is assigned and legitimised. Bootlegging is ubiquitous, but also ill-documented, given the nature of the topic - so it is better researched in design practices than a textual understanding.

Another example is 'Pakiman Cards' is an ironic exploration of the lives of South-Asian/Pakistani experiences in the UK in form of Pokemon cards, especially for those growing up in the early 2000s. Using the visual language of Pokemon cards, @piem786 uses the 'kitschy' graphic, relic of a 2000s British-Pakistani youth, discussing the cultural intersections that most South Asian immigrants navigated in the quest of assimilating well into a new society. It ties redrawing and remixing as means of reclamation.



Fig. 5. Pakiman Cards - the 'Race Card' that humorously points out the modern contradictions of racial backgrounds seen from the eyes of a brown person.

Bootlegging is also quick to move - most likely, it is hard to find the same kind of bootleg over and over again - it constantly evades visibility. A more recent parallel is Indian fashion brand Ozo's *Chhota Pandit x Funko Pop* bootleg (see more in the case studies). Funko Pop canonises characters through collectibility, but its roster remains predominantly Western with limited cross-cultural reach. Ozo, which focusses particularly on local subcultures in their practice, takes Chhota Pandit, a comic-relief exorcist character from Bollywood classic *Bhool Bhulaiyaa* (2007) as a deliberately low-brow, no-brainer-comedy figure, and translates him into that same collectible format. The move is another reclamation: it forces a mainstream, west-centric object to hold content it would never have chosen. The figurine was popular enough that the creator instantly produced more, and it sold out within a day (Ozo, 2026), suggesting the appetite for this kind of cultural occupation was already there, just unserved. In within a week, I was able to find bootlegs of this bootleg being sold on Instagram, where it was first released.

The faster it moves, the further away it gets from its high-fidelity- which referred me to the work of Hito Steyerl, *In Defence of the Poor Image. In Defense of the Poor Image* argues that low-resolution, degraded images carry their own political value. As images circulate, they lose fidelity but gain reach; the poor image is a document of its own movement through networks, platforms, and hands. Steyerl frames this degradation as democratisation: the image becomes accessible precisely because it is no longer pristine, and debunks the superiority of the "authentic" image. This connects directly to my project's interest in corrupting a 'pure' and 'valuable' image. Degrading an object of concentrated cultural capital disperses it, and in that dispersal, value is redistributed and renegotiated.

!NEW! On Cross-Cultural Bootlegging

Through the references of *Shanzai Lyric* and *In Defense of the Poor Image*, I was inclined to think about where these bootlegging practices were based and targeted towards. Shanzai Lyric sells their clothing at a premium in New York (as of 2026), removed from the true industry of bootleg and aims it at the discerning consumer who can tell the irony of the misspelled poetry printed on the back of the shirt. Similarly, Ozo Studios sold their Chota Pandit x Funko Pop Bootleg at an exclusive price, and was massively popular among the Indian diaspora, more so than locally.

What happens, however, when the bootleg is found in the countries making them to begin with, on perhaps, the ones making them? If there is no real access to the original material, what is the identity of the bootleg?

A parallel here is drawn here in the postcolonial

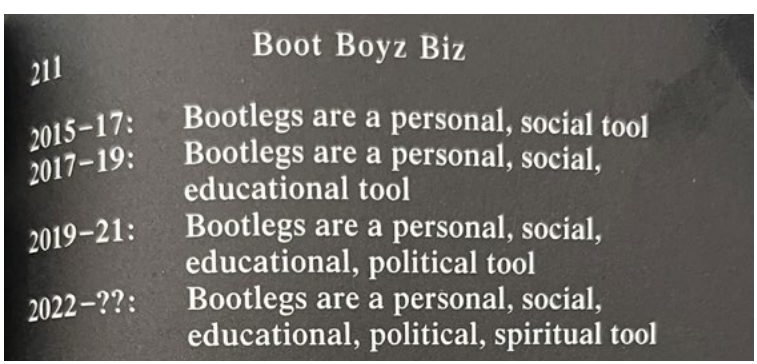
studies by Homi K. Bhabha, in his theory of ambivalence. The show achieves a 'quite/not white' quality. In its mimicry of the original material, it loses its relationship with the original image and instead takes its own form because it will always be 'othered' by neocolonial systems. Every version of the bootleg starts to exist in different parts of society.

For instance, I look at the brand of Spiderman and its many 'bootleg' adaptations, which, as it moves through culture, especially in a direction of downward mobility, it gets more removed from its original source but more embedded in the local cultures in its bootlegged image.

Given the amount of cultural information coded within a bootleg, it opens up this research on larger conversation on the nature, identity and consumption of bootlegging as a creative practice, to understand how cultural translations occurs through the process of bootlegging.



Fig. 6. Spiderman is often bootlegged in a lot of media - and the quality of the bootlegs often correlate to the strata of society which mostly access them



1: CULTURAL CAPITAL CASE STUDY

Robbins, D. (2000) Chapter 2: Socio-genesis of Thinking Instruments, *Bourdieu & Culture.* **London: Sage Publications, pp. 25-41.**

I tethered my explorations of value and its visual translations on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital: components of what Robbins describes as the 'Socio-genesis of Thinking Instruments'. The habitus of person provides them with an inherited framework of society according to which they operate (Robbins, 2000, p.26); cultural capital builds on this, understanding value as something constructed through social systems rather than inherent to objects.

Central to my project is Bourdieu's distinction between situations and positions: 'situations' are given and invariable, positions are taken in relation to the situation and the habitus that precedes it (Robbins, 2000, p.29). My project - an archive called 'same-same but different', juxtaposes visually congruent images that carry implicit cultural value. The recognition of the tension between the two images is dependent of the position of the viewer. The images are deliberately uncaptioned, and interpretation remains open across both images, or even in the space between them. To prescribe situation, or context, would interrupt the natural operation of habitus. But not captioning means to contextually blindfold the viewer, raising an interesting question: can value be read truthfully when context is not provided?

The Kolhapuri slipper set in my archive attempts to illustrate this: One pair of slippers appears unbranded; the other is labelled Prada. This brand-name helps produces a reading of value. But add context: that the first was made by local Indian craftsmen, a popular festive staple locally purchased for under £20; that the second was formerly plagiarised by Prada, sold for around £800 without credit to the original artisans- and the reading shifts drastically. Adding context can



Fig. 7. L) Prada x Made in India Collection and R) Standard Kolhapuri slippers, produced locally in India

be illuminating, but should one state it explicitly? It tends to over-explain and the narrator inadvertently propagates their own perspective, as the Prada example demonstrates. Moreover, literal translation of context risks becoming overbearing. It imposes a universalising, arguably colonising gaze: it establishes an 'other' that must be converted into a dominant language of understanding. This tends to isolate cultural capital as a locally available framework of sociology in an increasingly heterogeneous world. This limitation is especially chronic in postcolonial contexts, where the criteria by which things signify value (knowledge, labour, land, aesthetic form, social relation) were systematically reordered under colonial rule and continue to be reordered under technocratic and neocapitalist imperialisation.

Bhabha's concept of hybridity offers an insight here. Rather than assuming culture originates in one stable context and is translated intact into another, hybridity insists that culture is not translated as equivalent, but remains ambivalent, and consequently, ambiguous (Bhabha, 1984). This underlies my archive of 'value', that cannot have a singular context. It allows people to gather in a commons where context is not prescribed but added uniquely and creates a conversation around the value and cultural capital of the entities in the archive. It asks if context is what gives value its meaning, then is its translation even possible? How do we, then, produce a fair documentation of this idea of value that is so disparate yet so unanimously significant and urgent?

2: UNLICENSED CASE STUDY

Schwartz, B. (2023). *UNLICENSED: Bootlegging as Creative Practice.* **Amsterdam: Valiz.**

In Unlicensed, Schwartz opens with a particular emphasis on ambiguity as the condition that allows bootlegging to survive (Schwartz, 2023, p.16). The bootleg is by definition unofficial yet seemingly official: not an fake, but something occupying the space between. This in-between state is precisely its protection: visual difference/ informal, untraceable circulation keeps it at a safe remove from legal consequence while preserving its cultural potency.

That potency comes from familiarity. The bootleg weaponizes affect over effect- it invokes meaning about its source without disrupting or damaging the original. This can operate through admiration, as in fanart or Elvis impersonators, but it can equally operate as resistance. Schwartz introduces the 'knock-up': bootlegs that use the faultlines of the original as a means of subverting its message, particularly when the original systematically excludes a demographic that would appreciate the original. Dapper Dan's customized jacket, with its sleeves cut from Gucci garment bags, catered to those who aspired to luxury but were excluded from it, positioning itself deliberately beyond the knockoff so as not to patronise its wearer (Schwartz, 2023, p.35).

A more recent parallel is Indian fashion brand Ozo's Chhota Pandit x Funko Pop bootleg: where Funko Pop canonises Western-popular characters, Ozo's translation of a South Asian, low-brow comic relief figure into that same format not only crosses cultural registers but occupies space in a canon that had ignored it. The demand was immediate and the figurine sold out within a day (Ozo, 2026).

Copying, in this light, becomes a way of knowing and analysing the systems that govern you. Schwartz draws on method acting as a form of bootlegging experience, but the principle extends more broadly: to imitate is to learn the visual language and internal logic of a form well enough to then intentionally subvert it. Capitalism operates in the negative space of daily life in invisible, smooth and naturalised ways. The bootleg introduces a glitch. A Shanzhai iPhone that boots with an Android screen when turned on disrupts that seamlessness, making visible what is usually absorbed without friction.

Schwartz also turns to circulation in this practice- the informal economy through which the bootleg travels and, in travelling, loses standard authorship, and by extension, authenticity. With authenticity revoked, the hierarchies of high culture are destabilised, and new structures of

recog-nising value emerge. Appreciation of the bootleg belongs to an in-group not defined by traditional membership but by a common sense of recognition- a question of ‘vibe’ rather than ‘definition’ (Schwartz, 2023, p.38). Value flitters in and out of objects created either to hold it or resist it.

These ideas opened an important register in my own work. Where I had initially focused on a singular, positive reading of an object’s value, bootlegging as creative practice introduced the possibility of intentional negotiation of value subverted not by circumstance but by design. It raised questions about how authority is dismantled through copying, how intentionality reshapes meaning, and how repositioning an object within a new circulation economy produces entirely new readings of what it is worth. By working through processes of copying, repositioning, and circulation, the project treats design not as fixed meaning but as something continuously reshaped through context and exchange, echoing Schwartz’s approach.



3: REF: KAUN BANEGA CROREPATI

CASE STUDY

Earlier this year, on my way back to London from a rainy Mumbai, I found every other billboard on the winding airport road marketing the 18th return of *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (2000-present), the hit Indian adaptation of the UK franchise *Who Wants to be a Millionaire.* The billboard featured, a larger than life (and the show's logotype) picture of its host and the fatherly veteran of Bollywood, Amitabh Bachchan. For the audience, the gameshow's appeal is hoisted through his image. Known as 'KBC' through its years of patronage and familiarity, the show is a primetime staple for India's Hindi-speaking (and often also not) audiences, and has held a strong place in Indian television and entertainment industry since 2000. Having a massive reach, of over 20 million views digitally on its streaming platform, it has always been visible for Indian audiences (Media4U). I remembered, as a young child, I hadn't known the TV show had a 'mother' show from which it was born, because it seemed so distinctly local and rooted.



Fig. 8. Every other billboard has the same advertisement with the image of Bachchan.

The show, as a visual adaptation, overlaps greatly with the qualities of a bootleg, which invites it into this research as a counterpoint to methods of creative bootlegging. **How does** *Kaun Banega Crorepati*, **despite being a formally licensed adaptation of** *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*, **complicate the distinction between adaptation and bootlegging? How does its identity as an adaptation coexist with the features of bootlegging through its imagery, and what are the implications of these blurred lines?**

While they are entwined (as we will see later in this essay), adaptations and bootlegs both bear opposite definitions. **Bootlegs are without a clear definition as they need the ambiguity to exist** (Schwartz, 2023) - but adaptations are anything but the source material it draws from, as recycled-culture. "Storytelling is always the art of repeating stories", Benjamin Walter explains it, and adaptations have, in fact, been around for as long as storytelling has been recorded. **Adaptations announce an overt relationship with their source material** (Hutcheon, 2012), and are a borrowing that is often judged against it. And quite often, they are incentivised economically.

Similarly, KBC arrived during an economic crescendo following the liberalisation of Indian

markets in the 1990s. New opportunities made the promise of a better life more visible, and the visual identity, the image of KBC - although being exactly the same as its original confirmed that: Bachchan, as the host of the show, speaks in eloquent Hindi and English, all markers of high-education in India. The show instantly **became a perceived equaliser**, offering ordinary Indians across the country, from all backgrounds, the chance to win a fortune through luck, but more importantly, knowledge (Ganguly, 2011). Despite being an adaptation of highest fidelity, the rhetoric had changed: knowledge-first framing of the gameshow, now colloquially called a quiz show, had taken on new meaning for its early 2000s Indian audience, which aligned with the apparent meritocratic promise of a neoliberal nation.





The question I prompt here is, then, **who remains the author of an original work if its audience and messaging has changed in the process of reproducing it?**

I explore this relationship of new contexts (and the lack thereof) through my experiments on interpreting bootlegging in loose definitions of sampling of music. By creating moving images that eclipse and morph the lines of samples used in two hugely similar-sounding tracks, I probe at questions of authorship, and whether it can be overridden by how its received by its audience. My experiments use the music produced by one of Bollywood's major composer, Pritam, who has faced several allegations of using samples without credit. The mainstream still absorbs Pritam's act of copying and remixing music as it resonates with the realities they recognise. I find it very interesting that without crediting the original composers, these samples have gained a life of their own, which earns them a place of bootleg. **In both cases, it can be seen that authorship is blurred but the impact on the audience stays solid.**

Adaptations and bootlegs, with their growing similarities, also have another **common ground - which lies in their circulation**. Adaptations and bootlegs both are a methods of multiplying of

Fig. 9. The visual identity of both shows is completely alike, yet it brings out different contextual meanings in both of its audiences



Fig. 10. In my experiments, the videos of two songs overlaid in each moving image, and mouse interaction (represented by the spotlight image and silver character) prompting the 'sampled' version to override the original, sonically and visually.

a source message through visual reinterpretation, which is then handed to the audience to re-experience. Barthes, in *Death of an Author*, privileges the reader to steer the meaning-making of any body of work. With this kind of transfer of authority, an adaptation such as KBC becomes defined by its audience than its creator. **And with power moving towards the collective, as opposed to the individual (Schwartz, 2018), adaptations, like bootlegs begin to multiply.**

This is evident in the many adaptations of KBC itself: Outside of the main Indian remake, there are also more vernacular ones based in the different states of India. The Hindi one, then, is upheld as the pure form through an axiomatic superiority and then the vernaculars offshoot from it. Hutcheon states it as, "appeal of an adaptation comes simply from repetition with variation, from the comfort of ritual combined with the piquancy of surprise."

Every version of KBC serves a particular, esoteric group of people. The meteoric impact of the show evolved this adaptation in a form of 'cultural' gene, or "memes"—units of cultural transmission or units of imitation—that, like genes, are "replicators", that keeps propagating itself in culture (Dawkins, 2006). There is a **growing self-awareness in these 'memes', a recognition of the parent but still iterates on it as it trickles through different rungs of culture.**

For instance, one iconic adaptation of KBC is through the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008), directed by Danny Boyle. It is the reach of the *Slumdog* that built more intertextual references, like in *Family Guy* and *the Office* (see figure below). Hutcheon quotes, in the *Theory of Adaptation*, "for the reader, spectator, or listener, adaptation as *adaptation* is unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text'. This means, no matter how removed the 'meme' is from the source, **there is a metacognition of its root that can never be rid, and creates a self-awareness around its multiplicity.**

This is seen further in archival collection on the internet, where KBC or *Who Wants to Be A*

Millionaire? signify a wider cultural gene, greater than its parts and universal for those who are familiar with the source material.



Fig. 11. *Slumdog Millionaire* as the bootleg KBC > the bootleg of KBC bootleg *Slumdog Millionaire*; Same image and deeply intertextual.

This tendency allows to reflect in a bootlegging perspective. I experimented with it by equally 'reproducing' the image of a public figure or brand - in my versions, Bollywood superstar Shah Rukh Khan- by looking at their lookalikes and impersonators. The 'different bootlegs' reveal the relationship they have with 1) the original source/celebrity and 2) their audiences. The many bootlegs of Khan, live or manmade, from the actual actor's brand to a low-fi party



Fig. 12. Questions from the show become meme currency on the internet

impersonator, **all serve a different function of the same image.** It is, in fact, interesting to see how **quality changes in these images with each iteration,** and marks their place in pop-culture, and as bootlegs.
If bootlegging and adaptation are so closely intertwined, **where does the frictions in their overlap lie?** While it is obvious that legitimacy is one of the foremost distinctions: adaptation can secure it, while bootlegging remains precarious - **the distinction is also classed.** The economic and institutional capital required to license and protect an adaptation is often unavailable to those working through informal networks. Yet, as an adapted or bootlegged image moves from a position of imperial or neoliberal powers into another context, **it inevitably mutates from its authorship, producing new meanings and hybrid identities.** The mutations that happen while these 'cultural genes' move across class and



Fig. 13. Shahrukh Khan from his true image to a low-fi party impersonator, each version accessible to only certain designated audiences, divided by class

geographical borders are also seemingly honoured more by bootlegs than by adaptations, as adaptations like KBC still answer to a 'higher order'.

Bootlegging, by subverting legitimacy, **democratises the process of its reproduction, while adaptations, in their reproductions, reaffirm the structures that define them.** It is through circulation their resolution decreases as their accessibility increases.

Yet, however many new meanings they acquire, both remain under the shadow of the original, which can still override their claims to authenticity. **Adaptation can buy legitimacy and become subordinate to its source; the bootleg, bastardised as it is, must continue to operate in its shadows.**

SYNTHESIS

This research comes together to explore the myriad ways bootlegging as a creative practice subverts the expectations of visibility and control set by the overpowering neocapitalist and neocolonial controls. Research on bootlegging is seen mostly when the bootleg is in action - as the it often comes and leaves swiftly (before it can be weighed for its authenticity) but its impact can be seen through understanding the power dynamics that surround it. The '*IMAGE*' of the bootleg is its biggest tell - from a high fidelity bootleg to something more creatively interpreted like the Ozo Funko Pop, **the reproduction of the image is its dominant method of circulation - and circulation is its dominant mode of existence.**

Circulation implies multiplicity, which manifests in many forms - from a degradation to a 'poorer' image, through 'sampling', or even method acting and impersonation - **but there is always a mutation happening in this cultural 'meme' of an image that keeps getting bootlegged and translated, especially when travelling through cultures with varying power dynamics.** We see this through examples of sampling of music in my studio work, which explores the lost context of the 'borrowing, or thought as irrelevant. Bootlegging, with every iteration, gets more *ROOTED* as it is adopted by the collective than owned by a overarching individual or corporation, as it is inherently democratic, even if dissenting. Bootlegging is also entwined with adaptation - while adaptation owns the legitimacy to be visible, bootlegging is covert and underground. This **brings class distinction as a factor to the process of bootlegging** - while some bootlegs, like the works of Shanzai Lyric, or the 'fake' 'Guccy' shirts, sold at the prices of real Gucci allude to a creative practice - the industry that produces the bootlegs in their true form remains unrepresented and rather unpaid, and concentrated to one part of the world.

It makes sense then, as I visually express a bootleg of Shah Rukh Khan through his multiple versions, starting from his true image to a wax statue for viewing at Mdm. Tussaud's, to an impersonator with the lowest fidelity to his likeness – it carries cultural markings.



Homi K. Bhabha's theory of ambivalence discusses this: ambivalence talks about a state of full imitation but not fully embodying the original source, in the context of the colonised

imitating the colonizing force. When an image, through its original form or that of a recycled meme, moves from a culture of higher imperial power than to one with lesser, it will and does mutate. There is, as Bhabha coins, a sense of hybridity which allows new culture to flourish through their existing conditions, but that does not erase the histories that have created those conditions, and they are often the catalyst to transformation. Bhabha also talks about ambivalence of the colonized – in my reading, the post-colonized- one which unsettles the colonizer- in my reading, the imperialist culture.

My research moves forward with the question of how can I, then, use image-making [[*using methods of reproducing, reinterpretation and remixing*]], to give identity and legitimacy to these **bootlegged mutations that seek to destabilise mainstream systems of productions, and allow them to take up space as legitimate works, and not just unwelcome anomalies?**

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anderson, B. (1983). Census, Map, Museum. In: *Imagined Communities.* London; Verso, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, pp.163–186.

Azoulay, A.A. (2019). *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.* London: Verso, pp.1–57

Barthes, R. (1977). 'The Death of the Author'. In: Heath, S. (trans.) *Image, Music, Text.* London: Fontana Press, pp. 142–148.

Bhabha, H. (1984) "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." pp.125–133 https://doi.org/10.2307/778467.

Dawkins, R. (2006) *The Selfish Gene.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ganguly L. (2011) "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? in India" In: *Global Television Formats : Understanding Television Across Borders,* edited by Tasha Oren, and Sharon Shahaf, Taylor &Francis Group, p.35

Hutcheon, L. (2012) *A Theory of Adaptation*, Taylor & Francis Group. ProQuest Ebook Central, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/ual/detail.action?docID=1016075.

Kaun Banega Crorepati (2000–present) Television programme. India: Star Plus / Sony Entertainment Television

Ozo (2026). *Chhota Incense Stick Holder.* [online] ozoworld.in.

piem786 (2025). *Pakiman Cards.* Available at: https://www.instagram.com/p/DN8WH8EjLuJ/?img_index=1/ [Accessed 06 Nov 2026].

Schwartz, B. (2018) *'UNLICENSED: Experimental Jetset'*, Walker Reader, 25 October. Available at: https://www.walkerart.org/reader/bootlegging-experimental-jetset/ (Accessed: 9 November 2026).

Schwartz, B. (2023). *UNLICENSED: Bootlegging as Creative Practice.* Amsterdam: Valiz.

Slumdog Millionaire (2008) Directed by Danny Boyle and Loveleen Tandan. [Film] Los Angeles: Fox Searchlight Pictures.

Steyerl, H. (2009) *"In Defense of the Poor Image"* e-flux [Preprint], (10). Available at: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image.

Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? (1998–present) Television programme. United Kingdom: ITV. Created by David Briggs, Steven Knight and Mike Whitehill.

IMAGES

Fig. 1. Spiderman watch sourced from https://www.are.na/block/28359249

Fig. 6. Sourced from Reddit.

Fig. 11:
Family Guy (2016) 'Road to India', Season 14, Episode 20.. Available at: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4863464/ (Accessed: 07 November 2026).

"Company Picnic" (2009) *The Office*, Season 5, episode 28. NBC Television, 14 May. [Image/Screenshot]

Fig. 12:
- Shamecation: question: https://www.are.na/block/284379
- Chrome question: https://www.are.na/block/45344506

