



Plagiarism, originality, assemblage

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Abstract

Although students work and live in a remix culture, composition pedagogy does not always value the discursive practices of that culture, especially when it comes to producing written work for academic contexts. The reasons for these views are historically determined and tied, at least in part, to relatively traditional notions of authorship and creativity. But “writers” in other contexts, both disciplinary and popular, have developed interesting and useful remix approaches that can aid invention, leverage intellectual and physical resources, and dramatize the social dimensions of composing in this day and age. These approaches, however, ask teachers to reconsider taken-for-granted assumptions about plagiarism and originality.

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We can only assemble among assemblages.

Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet (1987, p. 53)

1. Introduction

In this article, we consider the relationships among plagiarism, originality, and assemblage, arguing for a view of writing that shifts the emphasis from *performance* to *action* or *effect in context*. Taking seriously the social turn that has occupied composition studies since the 1980s (see, for example, Cooper, 1986; Faigley, 1986; Odell, 1985), the argument offered here follows the logic of that turn by recognizing and valuing the remix practices that can now be found in many forms of discourse, including student writing and communication. While many in the field claim to take a social approach, teachers still often expect their students to produce what are considered to be thoroughly “original” texts—texts that make a clear distinction between invented and borrowed work, between that which is unique and that which is derivative or

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supportive. In addition, this highlighted separation is frequently constructed as a hierarchy in terms of the writing process: The best work of writers is understood to be their original text with citations and borrowed materials situated as useful but less valuable support. As we will maintain, however, this distinction is not only problematic but also counterproductive, especially as teachers attempt to prepare students to be writers in their professional and personal lives.

Our argument begins with a brief discussion of the history of originality in composition, a history that has contributed to our own, often narrow perspectives on plagiarism. We then consider texts as assemblages, highlighting the rhetorical dimensions of this articulation and challenging the view that remixed texts are essentially derivative texts, a naïve and uncreative form of plagiarism. The action-oriented part of the essay looks to other places for models that work with texts as assemblages, drawing on practices from both disciplinary and popular contexts, including architecture and music remixing. The conclusion addresses concerns—legal, ethical, creative, and pedagogical—that teachers might have when thinking of assigning remix projects.

2. Datacloud: The remix

Before beginning our argument, let us offer a quick example of remix (we offer extended examples later). When Johndan was visiting Texas Tech University in the spring of 2007, Peter England mentioned he had recently read *Datacloud: Toward a new theory of online work* (2005), a book Johndan had written. In that book, Johndan discussed, among other things, ways that composition might adopt remixing practices common in areas such as music and architecture. The last chapter of the book is itself a remix based on fragments of text and image from other sources. Peter responded to this chapter with his own literal remix: He cut the pages from the printed text and rearranged them, a section of which is shown in Figure 1. Quotations that Johndan had separated from their original context and rearranged provided, in turn, the raw material for Peter's own remix as he sorted the slips of paper into new orders. Even the individual letters in the chapter title were rearranged to form new words: "Datacloud: A Text in Fragments" became "Maniac Trends: A Text Fog."

Peter England's remix provides a useful entry point into the possibilities of remix in composition. As we will discuss below, a traditional view of writing might dismiss this example as simply derivative or, at best, whimsical. From our perspective, though, such activities offer important new ways for thinking critically and productively about what it means to write, about what it means to read, and about what we value as texts in rhetoric and composition.

3. Plagiarism and originality in composition

While designing *Transworld Skateboarding* magazine from 1983–87, [David] Carson often found it necessary to design with existing photographs of marginal quality. He confronted a perpetual challenge in trying to invent a way to make the photograph and layout more interesting and dynamic for the viewer. Photographs become raw material vulnerable to extension and improvement through processes used by graphic designers to create pages—image selection,

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old message by them, buried under many new messages. The machine makes everything a message, which narrows the range of discourse and destroys the poetry of nobody home. Home is a failed idea. People are no longer home or not home. They're either picking up or not picking up. . . .

The machine cut him off.

—DeLillo, (1991, pp. 92-93)

I begin, in postmodern style, with a pastiche of quotations from, at first sign, somewhat disparate sources. . . .

—David Morley (1996, p. 326)

This is the story. These are all the various things that have happened to me in the last few weeks. But now, as I flick through the book, I see only the mess I have made. Words, sentences, paragraphs, whole pages, scoured with black marks. Mistakes. The noise gets in everywhere. Pages are ripped, or torn out completely; some discarded, others taped into new positions. There are smudges of dirt, of food, of blood. The marks where once a pressed flower lay; stains of chlorophyll, pollen, the tiny fragments of a petal.

—Jeff Noon (p. 11)

In making the four-channel video work *Dachau 1974*, my experience as a weaver directly influenced the basic structuring of the work. The content itself was taped in 1974 at the former concentration camp, Dachau. The symmetry of the architecture and the *present* ambience of this space were the focus of the recordings. The past was recorded only insofar as the sounds of the voices of the present commingled

Fig. 1. Peter England's Remix of *Datacloud*, chapter 8.

cropping, juxtaposition, overlapping, bleeding, collaging, scale change, and integration with other elements. . . .

In most photography books, each picture is plunked down in the center of a page in the manner of a museum catalog. This preserves the integrity of the photograph, but makes for bland book design. In the merged role of photographer and designer, Carson is able to have a dialog between two mediums of expression. He can even torment and torture his images without fear of violating the integrity of another person's **work**.

Philip B. Meggs (qtd. in Meggs & Carson, 1999, n.p.; emphasis in original)

This section briefly considers a primary context for our argument: the history of originality in composition, including disciplinary responses to the spiking concerns over plagiarism in colleges and universities. The field has long attacked the idea of the lone genius in the attic slaving away on a piece of written work (see Porter, 1986; Selzer, 1993). But as a practice,

composition still tends to hew pretty closely to this idea when teachers start dealing with issues of plagiarism. What we want to suggest here is that the whole issue of plagiarism is still tied to the idea of the lone, creative genius. In other words, at least one set of social forces suggests to students that using citations and quotations from source materials will be valued less than their own original text, a situation that may encourage them to conceal their sources. We also want to suggest something else: If we take either a problem-solving or problem-posing approach, as a great number of people in composition claim to do, then so-called unique texts have little inherent value. Instead, teachers should be encouraging students to learn ways to use existing information to solve real, concrete issues.

Over the last two decades or so, composition has certainly taken some major strides away from the idea of a hidden, authorial genius. Teachers no longer evaluate writing completely as an isolated, decontextualized artifact, a well-wrought urn. In fact, a key agenda item for research on evaluation has been to expand the attention given to rhetorical factors as criteria for writing and communication assessment (Huot, 1996). Teachers look at student research and thinking processes, as well as their literacy histories, in order to understand both the constructed nature of writing activities and the social development of writers (Curtis & Herrington, 2003; Winsor, 1996). Teachers intervene to assist students in invention and recursive movements back into previously invisible stages of writing (LeFevre, 1987). And teachers attempt to build a picture of individual and social processes over time (Sommers & Saltz, 2004). These practices help to dispel the romantic image of the writer as a solitary genius.

In addition, there is a strain of disciplinary scholarship that constitutes an outright challenge to conventional notions of plagiarism. Rebecca Moore Howard (2000) critiqued gendered metaphors that associate originality with masculinity and plagiarism with femininity; male-oriented metaphors, not surprisingly in our culture, can devalue dialogic collaboration. Candace Spigelman (2000) also focused on collaboration, revealing the ways in which established conventions for attribution in academia can negatively influence the dynamics in undergraduate peer writing groups. Margaret Price (2002) challenged the widespread tendency in institutional policies to construct plagiarism as a stable, monolithic concept. Because plagiarism gets defined differently in varying situations, Price argued for a situated view that is sensitive to local conventions and practices. A rhetorical perspective has also been advanced by James Porter (2006). His presentation at the 2006 CCCC convention included several examples of the ways teachers plagiarize all the time—among them, sharing syllabi (with plagiarized plagiarism statements!), using boilerplate text for administrative documents, and failing to acknowledge the bibliographic work of others. But these were offered as examples of “ethical plagiarism,” cases in which the sharing and reusing of ideas is not only tolerated but also encouraged by a community in part to help educate its members. In his rhetorical approach, Porter argued for an ethical middle ground that promotes filesharing and fair use rather than surveillance and policing behaviors.

Howard, Spigelman, Price, Porter, and others have all confounded traditional notions of plagiarism that circulate in academia, pointing out their more oppressive and harmful aspects. Still, as a field, we tend to remain fundamentally committed to that final artifact: the text that students produce. And that final text—here is the real crux of the problem—by default remains much as it ever was: a unique, creative text, the “original” words produced by the student. The ghost of the authorial, creative genius remains standing between the lines, propping up what is



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Name: _____

Instructor: _____

Course/section: _____

Date: _____

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Fig. 2. Writing program originality form from the University of Kentucky.

an increasingly unrealistic artifact in our postmodern age. Figure 2 provides an example of this ongoing commitment. According to a web site at the University of Kentucky, students sign a “Writing Program Originality Form” in order to testify to the originality of their written work. This form, which is matched by similar administrative documents at other schools, remains rooted in a Foucauldian sort of examination that is attempting, futilely, to get at the authorial genius hidden inside the student. When all is said and done, teachers seem to ask students the question: After you have read all the background material and assembled your evidence, what did *you*, just you, produce? Show us *your* words; let the words of others fade into the background.

What happens, however, if we tell students that their goal is not to create new, unique texts but to filter and remix other texts in ways that solve concrete problems or enact real social action? What if we expect and encourage them to copy other texts? Plagiarism, in these situations, becomes much less of an issue, for students are encouraged to make explicit their borrowings and appropriations. What counts, in this new context, is the ability of students to remix texts in ways that address specific issues, readers, and situations.

From our perspective, composition still focuses too heavily on the evaluation of performance—in particular, performance tied to the display of one extremely limited and outdated version of originality. We want to change the goal of writing from *performance* to *action* or *effect in context*. That is, we want to lend some weight to a movement that shifts the terrain of the assignment by shifting our approach to writing instruction and assessment: What if the “final” product a student produces—a text—is not concerned with original words or images on a page or screen but concerned primarily with assemblages of parts? Importantly, in this reconception, the assemblages do not distinguish primarily between which parts are supposed to be original and which have been found and gathered from someplace else; assemblages are interested in what works, what has social effects.¹ The distinction between original and existing fragments in a text is, if not meaningless, at least secondary. In essence, we are arguing for a reorganization that is actually implied if not valued in many rubrics for assessing writing used by teachers who take a social approach: Rhetorical purposes can be addressed in context by either original or borrowed/quoted texts without a hierarchy of distinction between the two.

Stepping back slightly, we find that one of the difficulties of evaluation in the old model is that citation practices act primarily to help teachers separate out what someone else produced (the cited texts) from what the student produced (the original text) in order to set up a hierarchy: The original text has primacy. In this model, plagiarism is frequently the result of this hierarchy. Because students still recognize the primary value placed on original text, they sometimes hide their borrowings and appropriations. But what happens if we downplay the value of originality? What if we put the emphasis on problem-solving, originality be damned?

As the title of this essay indicates, we are putting two rather conventional terms—*plagiarism* and *originality*—into conversation with a third, potentially controversial term—*assemblage*—in order to comment on the nature of writing in a remix culture. Although notions of plagiarism and originality continue to evolve, historically our disciplinary discourse has expressed an interest in such interrelated issues as working with source materials, inventing arguments, and conducting primary research. Plagiarism and originality, in other words, are two of the many tropes that have helped to organize discussions of composers and composing. But assemblage as a writing practice in academic courses is only beginning to appear on our collective radar screen despite the fact that remixed artifacts are everywhere, all around us, and not just in popular culture. We want teachers to start seeing assemblages as a valid and valued form of student writing—and of writing in general.

¹ Our final section discusses the legal aspects of this issue, which we argue should be separate but closely tied to pedagogical aspects of assemblage.

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The mix tape as a form of American Folk Art: predigested cultural artifacts combined with homespun technology and magic markers turn the mix tape to a message in a bottle. I am no mere consumer of pop culture, it says, but also a producer of it. Mix tapes mark the moment of consumer culture in which listeners attained control over what they heard, in what order and at what cost. It liberated us from music stores and radios in the same way that radios and recordings liberated generations earlier from the need to be present at the performance of live music.

The mix tape is a list of quotations, a poetic form in fact: the cento is a poem made up of lines pulled from other poems. The new poet collects and remixes. Unable to express himself in “pure” art, the collector finds himself in obsessive acquisition. Collecting is strangely hot and cold, passionate and calculating. All we can agree upon is that it’s not the same thing as making art. Or is it?

Matias Viegner (qtd. in Moore, 2004, p. 35)

For our purposes here, assemblages are texts built primarily and explicitly from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in a new context. Under our definition, “assemblage” is itself constructed from the conceptual, linguistic, and sociopolitical forces active in several different locations.

From rhetoric and composition, we borrow concepts such as intertextuality and citation, two powerful constructs that highlight the ways in which authors inevitably encounter and work with the ideas and materials of others. In 1986, James Porter had this to say about the intertextual nature of writing:

Writing is an attempt to exercise the will, to identify the self within the constraints of some discourse community. We are constrained insofar as we must inevitably borrow the traces, codes, and signs we inherit and which our discourse community imposes. We are free insofar as we do what we can to encounter and learn new codes, to intertwine codes in new ways, and to expand our semiotic potential—with our goal being to effect change and establish our identities within the discourse communities we choose to enter. (p. 41)

In this passage, which comes from an early and often-cited essay on intertextuality in rhetoric and composition, Porter troubled the view that writing simply proceeds in a totally free fashion from writer to text to reader. To participate productively in culture, we must recognize that previous discourse always-already shapes and constrains the activities of writers, that there is no neutral, non-regulated space from which to begin a writing activity. We must also acknowledge that productive participation involves appropriation and re-appropriation of the familiar often in ways that accommodate audiences by speaking to shared values and working with discourse conventions. Rebecca Moore Howard (1993) discussed one strategy writers in development use to begin learning to participate in discourse communities. “Patchwriting,” according to Howard, “involves copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes” (p. 233). Although this sort of writing behavior is typically frowned upon by those concerned with plagiarism, who tend to see it as either an unethical or uninformed practice, Howard encouraged teachers to think about patchwriting as an important stage in learning to write like an expert. Indeed, patchwriting could just as easily be thought

of as a literacy activity that helps to model controlled language use and argumentative structure.

The intertextual and social nature of texts has also been the object of considerable research and debate in many—and perhaps most—other disciplines, ranging from music and web design (discussed later in this essay) to organizational studies and technical communication. For example, in their study of the creation and use of texts in offices, John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (2000) pointed out that even the simplest, most functional texts are used in the context of other, frequently volatile and powerful social forces: What a text means and does is influenced (often significantly) by other texts it draws on and is put into contact with. And Richard H.R. Harper (1998) traced the construction of texts at the International Monetary Fund to illustrate how policy documents and actions are themselves constructed from bits and pieces of other existing documents within a highly politicized organizational context.

While such research highlights the intertextual nature of workplace texts, further work by people such as Clay Spinuzzi (2003) and Barbara Mirel (2003) highlight the ways in which some workplace texts are themselves collages of pre-existing texts, brought together by people in order to address complex local problems. Through an activity Spinuzzi termed “compound mediation,” workers bring together texts from multiple sources and often from completely different genres in order to create new texts, a process often involving breakdown, reallocation of resources, creation of new hybrid genres, and shifts in power. Similarly, Mirel’s work demonstrated ways in which experienced users manipulate advanced information displays to create onscreen texts to support complex problem-solving.

We could offer related examples from numerous other disciplines: new media design (Prior, 2007), industrial design engineering (Restrepo & Christiaans, 2005), programming (Hill & Gutwin, 2003), law (Gilo & Porat, 2006; Kahan & Klausner, 1997), cultural studies (Hebdige, 1988; Qureshi & Moores, 1999), graphic design (Carson, 2004; Lupton & Miller, 1996), and others. In most cases, the recognition of assemblages (often going under related terms such as “remix,” “collage,” or “boilerplate”) is not represented as a replacement of other methods of writing or designing but as one valid practice among many. Our intent here is not to *replace* the acts of writing prose by individuals but to *augment* practices by enriching repertoires with one more equally valued approach.

The general turn toward assemblages of various types is bound up in a broader cultural shift toward understanding texts and the world in postmodernist ways. This is not to say that all or even most of the theorists and works cited above would agree with postmodern theory, especially its more extreme forms. But in a general sense—one that suffices for our purposes here—postmodern theories, and following them, cultural studies, offer a useful way of understanding assemblages (and the related process of remixing) as simultaneously social and textual structures. For example, Foucault’s (1972) microphysics of power and archaeologies of knowledge unearthed the social, political, and material forces acting within specific locations and histories to structure not only texts but, recursively, contexts and histories themselves:

[T]hrough a mutation that is not of very recent origin, but which has still not come to an end, history has altered its position in relation to the document: it has taken as its primary task, not the interpretation of the document, nor the attempt to decide whether it is telling the truth or what is its expressive value, but to work on it from within and to develop it: history now

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organizes the document, divides it up, distributes it, orders it, arranges it in levels, establishes series, distinguishes between what is relevant and what is not, discovers elements, defines unities, describes relations. The document, then, is no longer for history an inert material through which it tries to reconstitute what men have done or said, the events of which only the trace remains; history is now trying to define with the documentary material itself unities, totalities, series, relations. (pp. 6–7)

Informed by Foucault's work as well as the Marxist ideological theories of Louis Althusser, Stuart Hall (1986) proposed "articulations" as a method and concept for understanding how meanings are formed in cultures. For Hall, social meanings are structured like languages: The meaning of any specific cultural object or concept or text arises through fluid, contested, and contingent social forces in local situations:

An articulation is . . . the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is the linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute, and essential for all time. (1986, p. 141)

In defining "assemblage" (or rather a network of definitions of "assemblage"), we bring together a wide range of texts often from communities and disciplines that might protest their alignment with others. At the same time, many of these sources do themselves construct assemblages from apparently widely separate fields: Richard Harper (1998), for example, began his volume on the International Monetary Fund with a meditation on the definition of "document" that includes discussion of literary and critical theory, including Barthes and Derrida.

The remainder of this section illustrates one class of assemblage by providing two examples from web site design. These examples are rather involved because we want to be concrete about the nature of doing assemblage work. Figure 3 shows a template that can be downloaded for free from OSWD (<http://www.oswd.org>), a site that supports an open source community of web developers. OSWD, which was founded in 2000 by Frank Skettino, currently hosts (as of June 2007) over 2,000 templates, a forum for discussing design issues and problems, links that allow designers to compare templates with assemblages, and more. Consistent with the general philosophy and direction of open source models of software development (see Raymond, 1999), the vitality of OSWD depends, in large part, on the willingness of people to contribute and share knowledge work, to exchange intellectual labor in ways that benefit both individuals and a larger commonwealth project—in this case, improving the usability of web site interfaces. The practices on OSWD also reflect the spirit of Creative Commons licensing agreements in that contributors determine the terms and conditions under which a template can be used. In the main, these state procedures for crediting intellectual labor, which range from formally acknowledging a template (often in a backlink in a web site footer) to simply alerting designers that their templates are being employed to nothing at all. Many of the templates do not actually specify any terms and conditions of use, leaving it to people to establish their own stances toward the OSWD community. The designer of the work in Figure 3 only wants to be notified when his template is used. As he says in the text of the template itself: "I would like to know if you implement or improve upon this design. As usual, this design is free to use for anyone in the known universe."

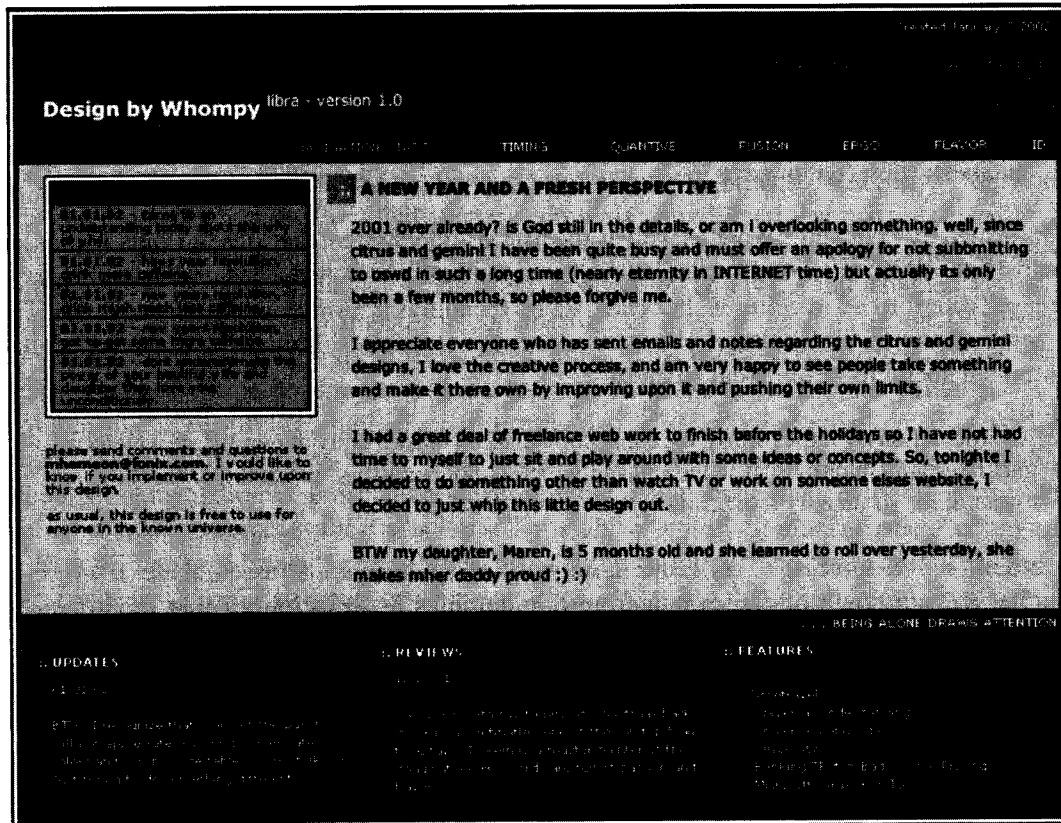
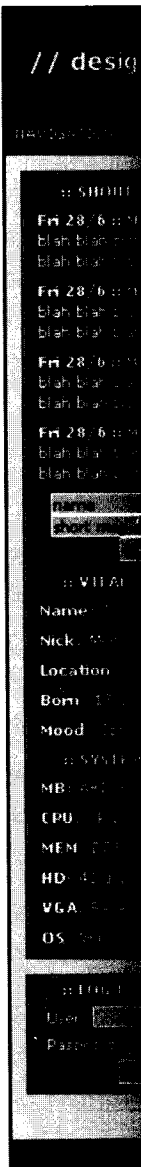


Fig. 3. A free web site template from OSWD.

Other elements help to contextualize the template for users as well. Placeholder text creates an overall impression of the design of the layout. Personal comments from the designer provide some sense of the circumstances under which the template was produced, and design notes disclose the rationale behind certain template features. Of course, the template instantiates a design vision that speaks directly to the people who first preview it and then download it. This vision involves a rectilinear grid pattern with conventional navigation bar, an area that emphasizes main content, secondary content areas for different categories of subordinate information, and a column with bordered rows for items that should be delineated in some clearly discernable fashion (the placeholder text displays a chronological organization for old news items). Although the designer did not use browser-safe colors, the color scheme is rather conservative, combining medium-ranged blues and grays into a cool, muted pattern. All of these design elements constitute a starting point for making an assemblage.

The assemblage in Figure 4 both draws on and departs from this previously developed work. Most obviously, it retains two key features of the work: the rectilinear grid pattern and the navigation bar. The main content area, however, has been converted into a space for regularized posts like blog entries. The secondary content areas have been folded into the column with bordered rows in order to create a more expansive and prominent sidebar. A second row was



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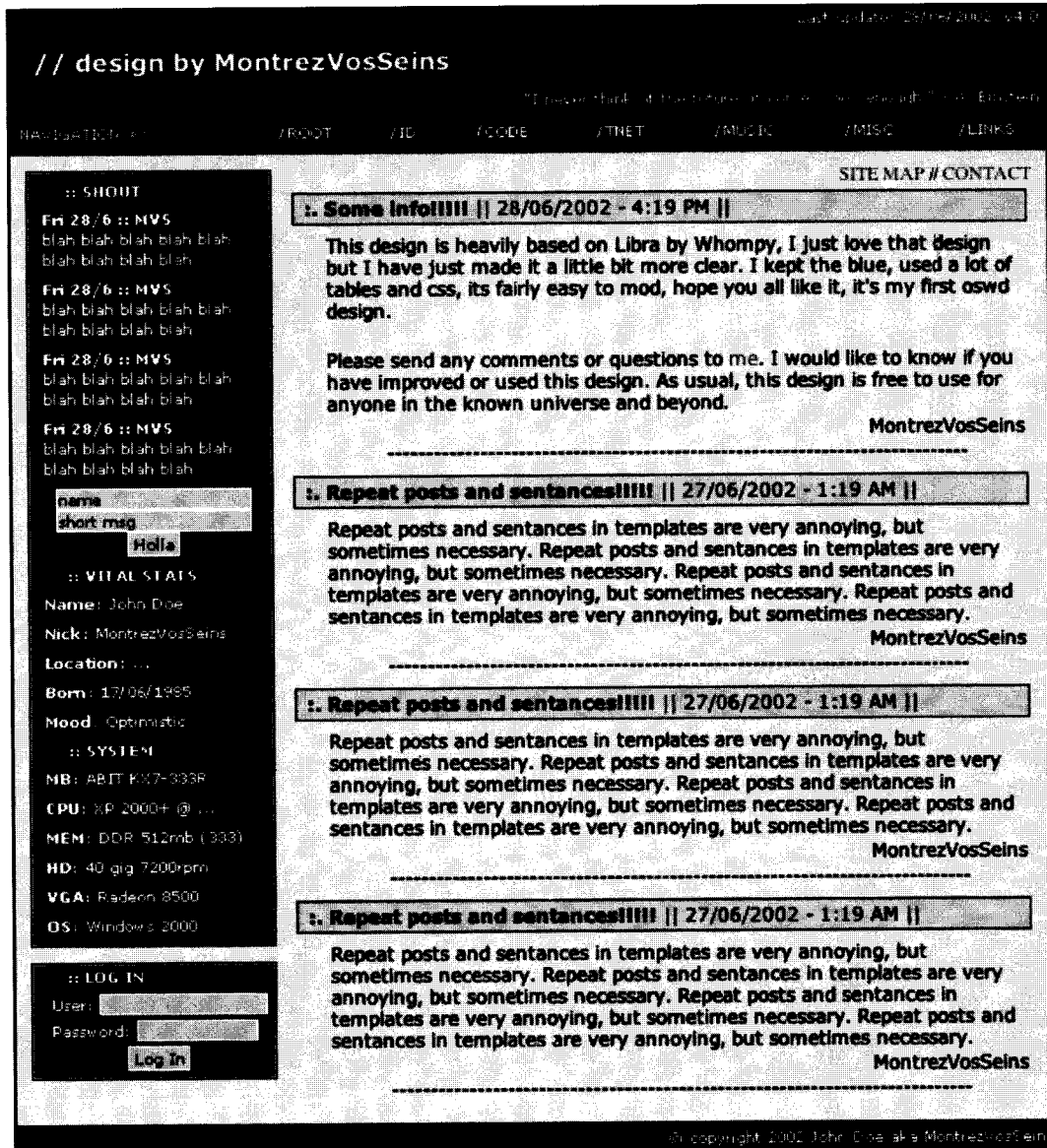


Fig. 4. Another designer's remix of the template shown in Fig. 3.

added to the navigation bar to support utility links and minor links. And the color scheme was modified in the main content area in order to emphasize headings. In sum, the design in Figure 4 amounts to a differently arranged template with new priorities for information.

The assemblage in Figure 5 is not another template. Rather, it is an academic homepage (for Stuart) based on the templates in both Figures 3 and 4. Stuart's assemblage in Figure 5 retains the rectilinear grid pattern, navigation bar, and general color scheme. It also retains a space for regularized posts but subordinates that space to the main content area in an embedded

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ABOUT ME

Stuart Selber is an associate professor of English and an affiliate associate professor of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State, where he also holds a faculty position in distance learning with the World Campus. The recipient of several publication awards, Selber is a past president of the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication and a past chair of the CCCC Committee on Technical Communication.

His research focuses on computer literacies, rhetorics of the Internet, and the social and pedagogical dimensions of academic computing. He combines qualitative methods with social theories in order to investigate the applications and implications of computers for writing and communication purposes. He is especially interested in the role of human values in technological development.

Selber teaches courses in technical communication and computers and composition. His courses for 2006 include English 418 and English 584. English 418 is an undergraduate course that investigates the theory and practice of Web design from a rhetorical perspective. English 584 is a graduate seminar that situates computer technologies in historical, critical, and contextual terms. Students can access the course websites through AWPSS, a course-management system used at Penn State.

On a personal note, I live in State College, PA with my wife, Kate Lattarel, who is an associate professor of English at Penn State Altoona. Despite the fact that work always has me in front of a computer, I try to stay fit and maintain an outdoor lifestyle. In college I ran cross country and track for the University of Delaware. After that I started doing triathlons. In my best effort to date I completed a half-ironman race (1 mile swim, 55 mile bike, 12.4 mile run) in just over 5 hours. I still fantasize about running a respectable marathon and becoming a competent Nordic state skier. It's good to have non-academic goals. 2006 races: Columbia Triathlon, Timberman Ironman 70.3.

My office hours for the 2006 spring semester are on Mondays from 1:30-3:00 and on Thursdays from 12:30-2:00. I can also meet you by appointment. My office is in 149 Burrows (south wing).

My vita is current and there are links to previously published essays in the Downloads section. I am currently working on an article that maps the institutional dimensions of academic computing.

This website is based on an open source template. I redesigned the stylesheet using Dreamweaver MX, 2004, FireFox 1.0, 2004, and various Macintosh Utilities.

Photo by Tamar London.

Fig. 5. Stuart's remix of the templates shown in Figures 3 and 4 <<http://www.personal.psu.edu/sas37>>.

(and indented) scrolling window. There are other differences, too: This version includes visual images, for example, and it simplifies the overall layout.

In key ways, the availability and widespread use of templates in activities such as web design signals a hierarchically subordinate value placed on visual elements of a text (the template) compared to primary textual elements (the textual content of the web site). This distinction allows "writers" to freely borrow templates in most contexts without being accused of plagiarism. However, the relatively recent but strong move in the field toward expanding the repertoire of writing to include media besides words on a page or screen suggests that design elements are now rising in importance in the context of writing instruction (Bernhardt, 1986;

Lanham, 1993; Wy ways in which desi recognize the call to offer only one, ver typography in design problem contexts.) asks that teachers c longer automaticall

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Lanham, 1993; Wysocki & Johnson-Eilola, 1999). Furthermore, as we begin to consider the ways in which design as a broad field understands and values assemblage, teachers should recognize the call to begin applying principles of assemblage to textual elements. (Templates offer only one, very simple example. A more complex example might discuss the role of typography in design, which relies primarily on pre-packaged typefaces deployed in specific problem contexts.) The common practice of remixing visual elements common in design thus asks that teachers consider raising the status of remixed elements in verbal texts so that we no longer automatically subordinate quotation to original text.

To this point, we have been concentrating on the similarities and differences in design features among the three web sites in Figures 3–5. But recall for a moment our definition of assemblages: They develop from existing texts in order to solve a writing or communication problem in new settings. What are the new settings for our examples? And how do the dynamics of those settings contribute to the signifying practices involved in producing an assemblage? An important premise of our argument is that an assemblage can only be assessed in context. Comparing an “original” text to its “remixed” counterpart is less important than understanding how the remixed artifact was redesigned for the new context or how the redesigned artifact is performing in that context. This perspective locates value in what works for people in problem-solving situations. The move from a focus on representation (what things mean) to action (how things function, and to what effect) is at one with the ways readers become positioned as users in online environments (Selber, 2004), with perspectives that locate usability in and across workspaces instead of in isolated artifacts (Johnson-Eilola, 2005; Spinuzzi, 2003), and with new directions in research and scholarship interested in the role of affect in communicative interactions (Slack, 2003).

The setting for the assemblage in Figure 4 is more general than the one for Figure 5. Like the template it was based on, Figure 4 is also situated in the OSWD community. But the approach of the redesign aligns this assemblage with a subset of templates that have been created to support regularized posts. In the abstract, it is somewhat difficult to evaluate the functioning of this assemblage or how its context shaped the redesign process. One clue is provided in the placeholder text, which includes the following brief statement (normalized for readability): “This design is heavily based on *Libra* by Whompy. I just love that design but I have made it a little bit more clear. I kept the blue and used a lot of tables and CSS; it’s fairly easy to modify. Hope you all like it. It’s my first OSWD design.” From this statement, it is safe to assume that the redesign was intended to be a relatively minor operation, resulting in an assemblage that retains the general look and feel of the “original” template (we use scare quotes here because the original template was clearly influenced by several popular conventions for web site design). Also, the utterance about making the assemblage “a little bit more clear” is, to our minds, anyway, an indirect way of characterizing the move to particularize the template for genres supporting regularized posts. After all, one function of genre is to illuminate the domesticated nature of social interactions, to organize the predictable and recognizable aspects of routine communication (Bazerman, 2004). Another clue into the relationship between the assemblage in Figure 4 and its use context is generated by the server software that runs OSWD: The file has been downloaded over 13,000 times since June of 2002, a number that far exceeds the download rates for the 77 other templates on the OSWD site returned in a keyword search for “blog.” Although it would be helpful to have a better sense of how the assemblage has

actually been used, we are not prepared to dismiss this descriptive statistic: People can expand the thumbnail image into a normal view without going to the trouble of downloading the file (those who download the file are probably working with it in some sort of inventive way).

The setting for the assemblage in Figure 5 is more concrete and thus easier to talk about. It is multilayered in its boundaries and includes three increasingly broad (and often overlapping) pieces: the goals of the designer (Stuart), institutional practices for web site design (at Penn State), and disciplinary directions for academic homepages (in composition and technical communication). Stuart wanted to develop a homepage that communicated his research and teaching interests, listed projects and publications and offered full-text access to at least some of them, and served as something of a gateway for students interested in the field of technical communication. And he wanted to incorporate all of this content into a homepage that did not require too much maintenance. So, for example, the assemblage relies on external sites that make it easy to organize and manage bookmarks and image albums. The practices spelled out in an institutional style guide encouraged design elements that should be common to all pages on the university web site. For instance, the assemblage places an approved university logo in its official location and works within a unifying color scheme for the institution. And disciplinary directions pushed Stuart to be sensitive to issues in developing a professional online identity and in issues of accessibility. In terms of the latter, for example, the assemblage validates for HTML 4.01, CSS, and 508 (section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act was passed by Congress in 1998 to make web sites more accessible to people with disabilities). Neither Figure 3 nor 4 validates for 508. All of these forces—personal goals, institutional practices, and disciplinary directions—helped to shape the design of the assemblage in both visible and invisible ways.

As rhetorical objects, assemblages—a powerful form of rhetorical invention—are themselves open to association and remixing into other assemblages in other contexts by other writers and readers. To take another close-to-hand example, weblogs (including those driven by remixed templates such as those discussed above) are locations for remixing a wide range of materials: quotations from (words, texts, images both still and moving), links to, and summaries of other texts on the Web; updates on books, movies, and music the weblog author is currently reading, viewing, or listening to; commentaries on the weblog author's experiences; short or even long original essays; and more. For many academics (and others), weblogs are a primary form of writing as assemblage and remix.

Johndan's weblog, for instance, provides examples of many of those forms of assemblage: template, link, summary, text, image, and original text.

Figure 6 shows posts from a several-day period (the full first page of the weblog includes posts from the last two weeks) that involve a mix of original and found content from numerous sources. The first is the template itself, a modified version of the default templates included with MovableType 3.2, the server software that the weblog runs on. Johndan has modified the default template in several ways:

- changed the color palette,
- added in a title (“work/space”) and subtitle (“like a little box”),
- created a navigation bar along the top for other (non-weblog) portions of the web site (“survey|read|learn|other|about”), and

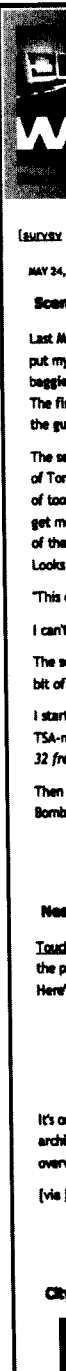


Fig.

work/space

[survey | read | learn | other | about]

MAY 24, 2007

Scenes from the Burlington Airport

Last Monday morning, at 6 am (!) at the Burlington airport's security checkpoint, I dutifully put my coat, my shoes, my wallet, my loose change, my two carry-on bags, and my Ziplock baggie holding all my sub-3-oz toiletries for easy inspection onto the x-ray conveyor belt. The first screening guy (with rubber gloves on) holds up the Ziplock baggie and shouts to the guy at the end of the line, "More than 3 oz!"

The second guy comes over to get the bag (pulling on rubber gloves), and pulls out the tube of Tom's of Main toothpaste that has like an ounce of toothpaste in it. (Backstory: The tube of toothpaste was on the counter before I left, and I figured an ounce of toothpaste would get me through three days.) He holds up the tube of toothpaste, which has had the end part of the tube rolled up over and over until there was this little ounce of toothpaste left in it. Looks sort of pathetic.

"This container holds eight ounces."

I can't come up with a response, so I look at him in a sort of "Of course!" kind of way.

The security guy gets an embarrassed look on his face, and says, "I know there's only a little bit of toothpaste left, but the container could hold eight ounces."

I start to point out that the TSA-mandated Ziplock baggie my toiletries are in—the TSA-mandated Ziplock baggies that the other 300 people in line are also using—could hold 32 freaking ounces of liquid.

Then in that "life flashes before my eyes/Fox News Live Coverage of the Toothpaste Bomber Trial" way, I say, "You can confiscate that."

Posted by johndan at 10:46 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

Near Field Communications Weblog

Touch is a project and associated weblog that covers near field communications. Most of the posts are primary sources to Touch's own work rather than pointers to other sites. Here's a snip from their About page:

Touch is a research project looking at the intersections between the digital and the physical. Its aim is to explore and develop new uses for RFID, NFC and mobile technology in areas such as retail, public services, social and personal communication.

It's one of those weblogs that, when you discover it, you spend an hour reading the archives. See, for example, this design brief on [touch as an interactive medium](#), or this overview (along with presentation slides).

[via [New Media Initiatives Blog](#)]

Posted by johndan at 09:15 PM | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBacks \(0\)](#)

CityWall: Public, Collaborative Touchscreen

Search

Search this blog:

Search

About

Johndan Johnson-Eilola
Clarkson University

Feed

RSS+XML

Doing

what am I doing...
revising an article (accepted w/rev about three months ago, now I just have to do the revisions)
about an hour ago

Follow johndan at <http://twitter.com>

Recent Posts

- [Scenes from the Burlington Airport](#)
- [Near Field Communications Weblog](#)
- [CityWall: Public, Collaborative Touchscreen](#)
- [Inexpensive Dual Head \(or Tri Head\) Monitor Setup](#)
- [Lifetracker: Workspace Contest Finishes](#)
- [Imagine a world of no more privacy](#)
- [The Buzz: Information VIZ](#)
- [Getting In Touch With Your Inner Radioactive Child](#)
- [On the Ephemerality of Digital Information](#)
- [Smithsonian Images and Fair Use](#)

Reading

Looking At

flicker daily zeitgeist

Fig. 6. Screenshot of first page for work/space weblog <<http://www.johndan.com/>>.

- reorganized the right, vertical navigation column categories and added new ones (“Feed,” “Doing,” “Banner Photo Credits”) in addition to other things.

The photo credits for the banner indicate a second-tier remix in which several workspace-related, Creative Commons-licensed images (including one by Johndan but also images from other people posted to Flickr) are cropped and, in some cases, color corrected to create a collage for the background image of the banner.

The entries in the weblog itself (which might be traditionally called “content”) pull material from a number of sources: The first post is a (slightly) interesting personal narrative about an encounter between Johndan and the Transportation Safety Authority at the Burlington, VT Airport over a nearly empty tube of toothpaste and an entry describing, linking to, and quoting from a weblog about “near field communication” (communication among technologies within small, local contexts). Later entries on the main page of the weblog often include links to other sites and very brief descriptions of those sites:

- CityWall, a public, collaborative touchscreen installation in Helsinki that automatically pulls in images and pictures from Flickr and YouTube that have been tagged with the word “Helsinki” (groups of users can rearrange the images to create public collages, which are themselves another form of remixing);
- a new, inexpensive computer video card that supports multiple monitor setups;
- a contest calling for users of another weblog to post images of their own workspaces;
- a book on very small, very inexpensive chips (RFIDs) that can be embedded in objects designed to support activities like warehouse inventory but that can also (in some cases) allow easy surveillance without the subject’s knowledge;
- an information visualization tool developed at Georgia Tech;
- a glowing, green lamp cast in the shape of a sitting child.

A traditional approach in composition would create at least two hierarchical levels of value among these materials: The quotations, links, and default elements of the template would be valued less than the original text (original images, personal narrative, and summaries). After all, one might say, the other materials were all pre-existing: Johndan merely found them.

But if we examine these original materials more closely, that distinction begins to break down. The workspace image shot by Johndan for use as one image in the banner, for example, was clearly already “out there.” The personal narrative, similarly, is merely (or not so merely) the memory of an event that took place in a public space between several people (only one of whom was the author) in a complex institutional situation also inhabited by several hundred other, harried travelers and TSA employees.

To what extent are any of these original elements completely the work of Johndan? Very little, it would seem: The personal narrative reconstructs a pre-existing situation (perhaps imperfectly) by drawing on words and rhetorical patterns for comic personal narrative of which Johndan (like most people) has read very, very many. And this narrative (a rare category of post on the weblog) is itself largely composed of pre-existing words and phrases. And is the image that Johndan shot in the banner graphic original? Yes, in a traditionally legal and artistic sense. For although the image is a reproduction of a real-life scene, the history and philosophy

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of photography as an art understand that photographers make decisions about when to shoot an image, how to compose and frame a scene, the selection of specific lenses and settings for the camera (in this case, a Canon 350D DSLR with a 10–22 mm wide-angle lens² to capture a horizontally wide expanse at close range), and various decisions about post-processing for color correction, cropping, exposure modification, and more.

So if personal narrative and photography are creative acts, they tend to rely less on traditional notions of authorial genius and more on the very skills called on by remixing: decisions about how to frame, re-frame, modify, and hide various aspects of pre-existing scenes. The available space of choice, for example, of selecting exposure and aperture settings, is a large one, but in practice it is relatively limited. And taken as a whole, the number of choices made—framing shots, choosing camera settings, and making post-processing decisions—is a very large one, but those choices are still fundamentally acts of remixing or making assemblages. The cultural history of photography bears this out in the battle over whether photography was Art or simply Technique.

While we could continue to maintain that original composition and remixing lie on different planes of value, the distinction between the two planes or levels seems increasingly difficult to maintain.

In part, we provided these examples to respond to the concern that remixing is tantamount to stealing. That view misses what is really going on, at least in many projects. First, creating assemblages requires the same rhetorical sophistication as any text: One must do much more as a designer than download templates and replace their placeholder items with real content. Second, the designs on which assemblages are based introduce another element into the rhetorical situation, making that situation all the more complex and challenging. Third, those designs themselves often derive from conventional practices that cannot be attributed to a single person or project—practices that, in a very real sense, reside in the public domain, the commons. Fourth, many assemblages make their borrowings explicit or obvious, even trading on their connections to other work. Fifth, and finally, the communities that support assemblage practices encourage exchange and re-appropriation. In fact, some of these communities exist only to sustain remix processes and products. Although there are legal and ethical issues to consider (which we raise in the final section), the context for assemblages is decidedly rhetorical.

5. Other models: remixing, architecture, design patterns

In 1960s Paris, the Situationists initiated concepts like the *dérive* or psycho-geography, but these days that sense of wandering through an indeterminate maze of intentionality can become the totality of the creative act. Selection, detection, defining morphologies, and building structures, that's what makes the new art go round. The challenge is to keep creating new worlds, new scenarios at almost every moment of thought, to float in an ocean of possibility. The DJ "mix"

² The importance of such information as a creative part of photography is supported by the inclusion of EXIF data in most digital cameras; EXIF data records camera and lens settings so that photographers can review those settings at a later date to better understand the influence of the settings on the resulting photo. Flickr images include EXIF data, when provided by the camera, for posted images.

is another form of text and its involutions, elliptical recursive qualities and repetitions are helping transform an “analog” literature into one that is increasingly digitized.

Paul D. Miller AKA DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid (2004, n.p.)

The assemblage model advanced here has emerged more fully and explicitly in other fields, some of which composition has begun paying attention to. Although we only introduce a few of these fields, you can probably add others once the framework of concerns and practices is clear. Indeed, many disciplines, at least around the edges, are beginning to recognize the patchwork character of design activities, including writing.

Remixing finds its home in a wide terrain of disciplines, most famously in the work of turntablists and hip-hop artists in the 1970s and 1980s but increasingly in film and graphic arts.³ There is even a new composition textbook titled *ReMix: Reading and Composing Culture* that plays off of this movement in a central way (Latterell, 2006). Generally speaking, remixing involves assemblages of variously sourced media into new texts. Popular examples include *The Gray Album* by DJ Danger Mouse, a remix that combined The Beatle’s *White Album* with Jay-Z’s *The Black Album*; *Rebirth of a Nation* by DJ Spooky, a remix of DW Griffith’s 1915 silent film, *Birth of a Nation* (in the remixing, DJ Spooky created a counter-narrative to the racist elements of the film by focusing and lampooning those elements visually and musically); and Rob Ryang’s extremely popular remix of Stanley Kubrik’s film, *The Shining*, which placed fragments of the film in a much different cinematic genre (Figure 7), an effort that extends down to the selection of the font for the title shown in the trailer (Figure 8). In this last example, the remixed artifact amounts to an alternate-reality version of the movie, a two-minute trailer for an upbeat film that Kubrik probably never envisioned and that Jack Nicholson probably never realized he was acting in.

As Figures 8 and 9 show, the remix operates at even a fundamental choice such as the title of the purported film: “The Shining” of the original includes the initial article in order to suggest an imposing monument; the remix version drops the article to connote a smaller, less formal sense. Similarly, decisions about typography for the title text in each lends force to different articulations or possible meanings for the assemblage as a whole: “The Shining” in tightly tracked, sans serif uppercase supports a more threatening, less humanistic articulation of the unwinding whole than the mixed case, loosely tracked remix with its oversized titles (the dots over the “i”s).

As we discuss later, remixing often challenges legal issues related to intellectual property use. Danger Mouse, for example, was served with a cease-and-desist order by EMI, who owned rights to the Beatles’ *White Album*. Remixing as a form of composition inhabits a contested terrain of creativity, intellectual property, authorship, corporate ownership, and power.

On similar functional and creative ground, but less contested legal terrain, extensive use of assemblages can also be found in web design, and interface design in general, with the

³ Mickey Hess (2006) argued that the hip-hop sample parallels many of the goals of academic citation even as it enacts its practices in a different system.

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Fig. 7. *Shining* remixed trailer using footage from *The Shining*. (Nicholson voiceover: “I’d do anything for you.” Soundbed: Peter Gabriel’s “Solsbury Hill”.)

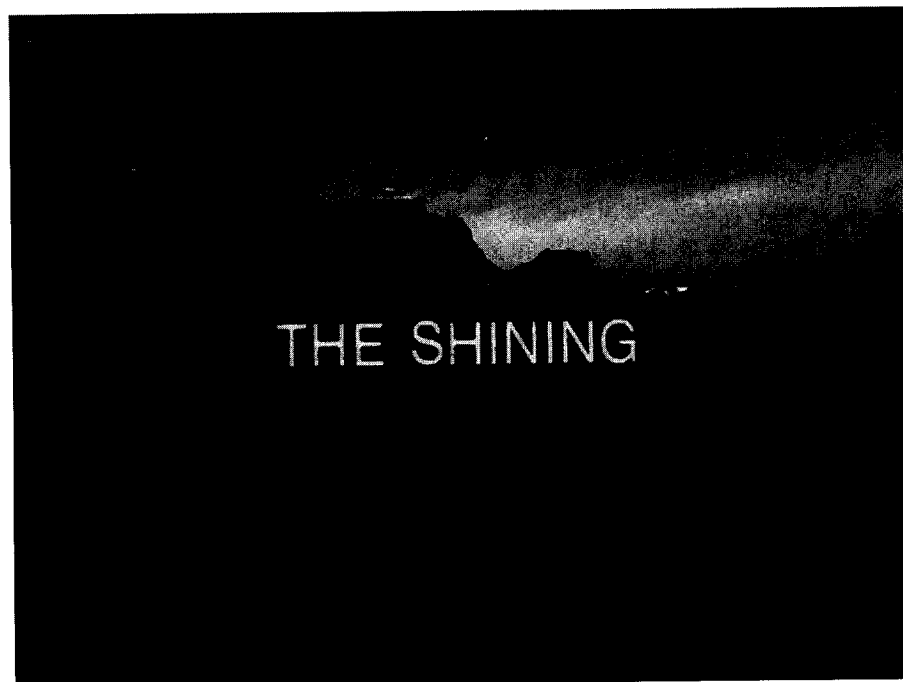


Fig. 8. Title screen for *The Shining*.



Fig. 9. Title screen for *Shining*.

increasing use of what are called “design patterns.” Design patterns are something of a micro-genre, routine and repeatable responses to local, very small-scale situations (even as they may reference larger goals, such as usability and empowerment).

Design patterns pre-date modern interface design. Their origins are in Christopher Alexander’s (1997) influential architectural work, *A Pattern Language*. Alexander’s set of 253 patterns provides a language, a grammar, and a syntax for combining architectural forms for solving different types of social and spatial problems. The patterns span a full range, from the distribution of towns to ring roads to beer halls to corner doors and secret places. As Alexander pointed out, the hypotheses are “all tentative, all free to evolve under the impact of new experience and observation” (p. xv).

The varying scale and use of the pattern components are combined, then, into assemblages, a tentative oscillation between whole and fragment, driven simultaneously top-down and bottom-up. The smaller-scale components both support and remake the larger:

People have a tendency to think about *the* sitting room, as though a building, and especially a house, has just one room made for sitting. Within this frame of reference, this one sitting room gets a great deal of care and attention. But the fact that human activity naturally occurs all through the house, at a variety of degrees of intensity and intimacy, is forgotten and the sitting spaces throughout the building fail to support the real rhythms of sitting and hanging around. (1997, p. 674)

The images in Figure 10 illustrate “child cave” patterns developed from the observations of the ways in which children enjoy inhabiting small, cave-like spaces when they find



Fig. 10. “Child cave” patterns suggesting pattern language.

them. The pattern language of a building—“hanging around” in commons are a farmhouse kitchen scale, the window as a utopian, the nature of the larger aspects is the ongoing pattern language texts, remixed concrete.

Architecture the re-emergence suggests a structure offer extreme patterns are a of its Development from numerous

Figure 12 designs. As Y

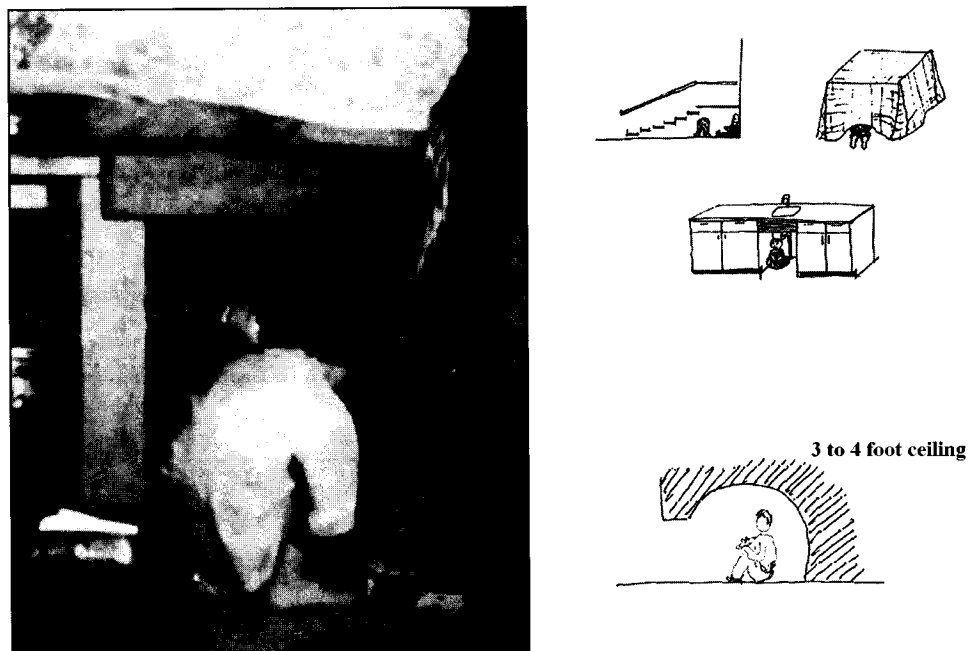


Fig. 10. "Children love to play in tiny, cave-like spaces." Children inhabiting small spaces and illustrations suggesting pattern options from Alexander's *A Pattern Language* (pp. 927-929).

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them. The pattern language re-understands the overall goal—providing space for sitting in a building—by referring to the concrete activities, "the real rhythms of sitting and hanging around" in order to suggest different small, collective spaces to support those activities: commons areas at the hearts of buildings, waiting spaces, private terraces on the street, the farmhouse kitchen, the room of one's own. Or, at an even smaller scale, the fire, the sitting scale, the window seat. So while in one sense Alexander's pattern language might be seen as a utopian, visionary project supporting universal goals, both the hypothetical and tentative nature of the patterns as well as the ways in which smaller elements can modify and drive larger aspects tends to subvert utopian goals except in very distant ways. Instead, what matters is the ongoing conversation between local and global. The possible rhetorical moves of the pattern language are a reservoir drawn on by an architect to address problems in specific contexts, remixed into an assemblage. The assemblage works at the intersection of principle and concrete.

Architectural design patterns may seem only distantly related to writing at first glance, but the re-emergence of Alexander's work in disciplines such as programming and web site design suggests a stronger connection to communication. For web and interaction designers, patterns offer extremely useful methods for understanding genres of textual design and use. Design patterns are available from numerous sources. Even *Yahoo!* has started to offer them as a part of its Developer Network forum. As Figure 11 shows, web and interface designers can choose from numerous, small-scale interface elements that they can integrate into their own work.

Figure 12 shows the page for the Breadcrumbs pattern, a stock component of many Web designs. As *Yahoo!* describes the pattern, breadcrumbs are good for helping users see where

The screenshot shows the Yahoo! Design Pattern Library website. The browser address bar displays "http://developer.yahoo.com/ypatterns/". The page header includes "YAHOO! DEVELOPER NETWORK" and "Design Pattern Library". A left-hand navigation menu lists various categories: NAVIGATE (Breadcrumbs, Faceted Navigation, Fly-out Menus, Horizontal Bar, Hub and Spoke, Left Navigation), Tabs (Module Tabs, Navigation Tabs), EXPLORE DATA (Auto Complete, Calendar Picker), Pagnation (Item Pagnation, Search Pagnation), ORGANIZE DATA, GIVE FEEDBACK (Ratings & Reviews, Architecture Review, Rating an Object, Writing a Review), PERFORM ACTION, and CUSTOMIZE (Drag and Drop, Drag and Drop Modules, Drag and Drop Objects). The main content area features a "Welcome" message, a "What's a Pattern?" section, and a "Recent Patterns" section. The "Recent Patterns" section includes six examples, each with a small image and a description: "Animate Transition" (Designer needs to communicate that an object is changing its spatial relationship within the page), "Collapse Transition" (The designer needs to communicate that an object is no longer of primary importance, yet wants to keep it available in a smaller form), "Dim Transition" (Designer needs to communicate that an object is of secondary importance), "Expand Transition" (Designer needs to show the detail of an object in its context or reveal a previously collapsed object), "Fade In Transition" (Designer needs to communicate that an object is being added to the page or application), and "Self Healing Transition" (Designer wants to show that an object has been removed from a list of objects).

Fig. 11. Main design patterns page at Yahoo!

they are in a large web site, especially their location in the hierarchy of a site in relationship to the root or home page.

Design patterns, then, offer a set of resources that can be added to or remixed to create a new artifact. In theory, a web designer could draw on one or more pools of design patterns as well as fragments of other existing documents—clip art, music, text, and more—to create a brand new site. In theory, it is possible to create a new web site without having created any new text. Most notably, the value of such a web site to users rarely considers whether or not the design team used Creative Commons or commercial clip art, whether or not the text on the screen was composed by a freelance technical writer or the web designer. A web site is typically valued for its effects in context.

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Breadcrumbs Pattern - Yahoo! Design Pattern Library

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Getting Started Latest Headlines

Developer Network Home Help

YAHOO! DEVELOPER NETWORK

Design Pattern Library

Yahoo! Developer Network > Design Pattern Library > Breadcrumbs

Breadcrumbs

Problem Summary

The user needs to be able to navigate up (towards the root page) and have an understanding of where she is in relation to the rest of the site.

EXAMPLE:

Travel > Guides > North America > United States > New York > New York City > Things to do

Things to do in New York City (547)

REFINE RESULTS BY SORT BY: Popularity | Name | Distance

City: **Boston** (153)

Breadcrumbs showing the Things To Do page for Boston, MA in Yahoo! Travel's travelguide

Use When

- The page displayed is within a hierarchy of pages and is not the topmost page.
- The user cannot easily navigate through the hierarchy via other local navigation methods. For example, if the page is fairly deep in a hierarchy, the breadcrumb maybe the simplest way to provide navigation.
- The page may be arrived at from an external source (e.g., a search results page) and the user will need a sense of context.

Solution

- Display a horizontal list of labels starting with the topmost page and continuing down the site's hierarchy to the current page.

Labels

- Where possible, labels should match the title of their corresponding page.

Transferring data from developer.yahoo.com...

QUICK JUMP

- [Solution](#)
- [Rationale](#)
- [Accessibility](#)

RELATED PATTERNS

- [Browsing](#)
- [Narrowing History](#)
- [Fly-out Menu](#)
- [Horizontal Bar](#)
- [Hub and Spoke](#)
- [Left Navigation](#)
- [Module Tabs](#)
- [Navigation Tabs](#)

AS USED ON YAHOO!

- [Yahoo! Travel](#)
- [Yahoo! Directories](#)

BLOG

- [Blog Article](#)

Show with revisions

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Fig. 12. Breadcrumbs design patterns page at Yahoo!

As suggested above, architecture provides an extensive array of examples for practices based on assemblage. The use of visual quotations constitutes a key feature of postmodernist and deconstructivist architecture (Tschumi, 1996; Venturi, 1966). Cases of plagiarism, as ethical and legal accusations, are notable for their exceptional rarity. For example, a lawsuit against David M. Childs, a partner at Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, alleged that Mr. Childs plagiarized a design by Thomas Shine (created when Shine was a student of Childs). As Fred Bernstein (2005) noted in a *New York Times* article, "It wasn't the accusation ... that seemed puzzling. The surprise was that Skidmore's motion for dismissal had been unsuccessful" (n.p.).

Although there are as many disciplinary approaches to architecture as there are to text, the majority of architecture, in practice, concerns itself with solving problems in local contexts

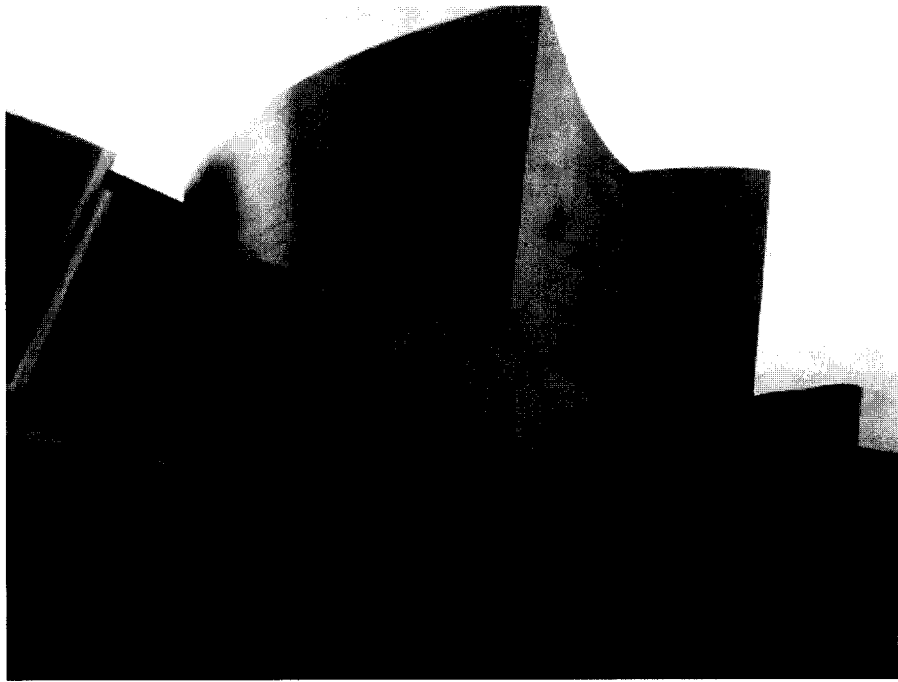


Fig. 13. Gehry Disney Concert Hall (Flickr photo by le): <<http://flickr.com/photos/peem/95547667/>>. Used under a Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 license.

(a practice that is true, if not self-evident, even in architecture that seems out of place or artificial; admittedly, in some cases, “problem definition” may attempt to situate local users in ways that disagree with user interests). As Robert Venturi (1966) argued in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*, “The architect selects as much as he creates” (p. 43). Architecture values assemblage, with even the most distinctive voices in architecture drawing heavily on fragments from previous work by others—whether those fragments are the forms of the Platonic circle and square from Vitruvius being rearticulated thousands of times in the assemblages of gothic cathedrals over centuries (Scully, 1991, p. 155) or more “alien” elements such as the use of organic, sweeping forms drawn from nature like Frank Gehry’s early stylized fish motifs (Dal Co, Forster, & Arnold, 1998, p. 11) that eventually emerged in the outlines of Gehry’s distinctive works such as the Guggenheim Museum in Balboa or the Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles (Figure 13).

6. Conclusions and concerns

It is suggested that a collage approach, an approach in which objects are conscripted or seduced from out of their context, is—at the present day—the only way of dealing with the ultimate problems of, either or both, utopia and tradition; and the provenance of the architectural objects introduced into the social collage need not be of great consequence. It relates to taste and conviction. The objects can be aristocratic or they can be “folkish,” academic or popular. . . .

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Societies and persons assemble themselves according to their own interpretations of absolute reference and traditional value; and, up to a point, collage accommodates both hybrid display and the requirements of self-determination.

Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (1984, pp. 144–145)

To conclude, we would like to address a few of the less obvious or more problematic aspects of our argument about plagiarism, originality, and assemblage. These aspects involve legal, ethical, creative, and pedagogical concerns.

Plagiarism, as an academic concept, has traditionally been bound up with the related but largely separate legal issues associated with intellectual property. And despite the best efforts of people in composition to intervene in these legal struggles in positive ways, the legal dimensions of intellectual property will continue to be a major concern. For example, from one way of looking at it, the standard emphasis in writing on the ability to paraphrase a source has two functions: one academic, the other legal. The academic function supports the hierarchy of original text over source text by requiring students to restate a source text in their own words in order to make it their own. The legal function skirts some intellectual property regulations by changing the concrete, surface-level features of a text so that the IP owner can no longer claim ownership. In other words, in terms of copyright, only the surface-level expression of a text is protected by copyright. In a double-gesture, a subsequent writer can paraphrase an existing text (changing the surface-level expression while retaining most of the underlying structures and ideas) and also attribute the underlying structures and ideas to the author of the source text. In this way, both academic (source of ideas) and legal (ownership of surface-level expression) aspects are tied together in relatively unexamined ways.

If teachers reconfigure writing as assemblage, we take away the automatic push for paraphrase (it is still allowed, but not primary—a writer paraphrases when the borrowed text must be massaged to make it more useful in a new context). At the same time, though, perhaps we are being more intellectually honest: If we continue to support the “original” versus “borrowed” hierarchy, we continue to support existing IP law. Moving away from that hierarchy means supporting a world in which IP still exists, but exists to support circulation and reuse, something more in line with Creative Commons licenses in which “original” authors actively encourage remixing outside of (or alongside of) capitalism. There is a wide range of Creative Commons licenses available, but most of them are focused more on citation—and the corresponding creation of assemblages—than on profit. By untangling the academic function from the legal function, we open up assemblages and remixes to examination in terms of our academic and pedagogical goals: What is the value of source texts (quotations) in relation to the value of the new text (remix or otherwise)? We want to argue that quotation and plagiarism continue to be largely connected, in a hierarchy of value with theft at the bottom and art at the top (not withstanding Picasso’s “Good artists borrow; great artists steal,” a maxim often cited but only rarely fully embraced except as a postmodern-ironic rhetorical move). Assemblage remains caught in the middle of this hierarchy, positioned as something slightly better than plagiarism (when properly attributed) but not as valuable as an author’s original text.

For many teachers, plagiarism has primarily been an ethical concern: We do not want students to claim that they wrote something they did not actually write. Most thumbnail

definitions of plagiarism on syllabi frame the issue exactly like this, as an issue of academic honesty. We are probably not going out on a limb here when we say that honesty is generally a good thing. The difficulty, for us at least, comes because that honesty is not just honesty for honesty's sake but framed in the hierarchy we have been discussing: part of a binary arrangement between "original" text and "borrowed" text. Students are told to be honest about making clear the division between the two so that we, as teachers, can more effectively place primary value on the original text in our assessments.

But if we take away that hierarchy, we remove the impulse for students to lie about it. If a piece of the assemblage is valued primarily for its function rather than its place in a hierarchy, students are no longer pushed so hard to hide the citations for their sources. In fact, if skills at making assemblages are made the focal point, then teachers would want to put great value on the ability of students to find existing chunks of text they can reuse. Re-inventing the wheel becomes an inefficiency, a misplaced waste of effort.⁴ "You borrowed that chunk? Great! Where did you get it from? Maybe I can use it, too."

In the end, as we see it, this all comes down to a reconfigured notion of "creativity," one more in line with postmodern work. Creativity is no longer, as we said, re-inventing the wheel, which does not remove creativity but shifts it to the assemblage: Take what already exists and make something else, something that works to solve problems in new, local contexts. Creativity, in this rearticulation, involves extensive research, filtering, recombining, remixing, the making of assemblages that solve problems. Citation is no longer a way of marking subordinate elements in a text to downplay their value in student work but a way to reward students for their new skills, to situate texts not only in pre-existing but new contexts.

Learning to value assemblage and remix as valid practices and products in writing must take place in the context of a broader set of issues in writing: outcomes and assessment. We return here to a goal raised near the beginning of our essay: writing as a form of problem-solving (or at least problem-exploration). Writing situations are, at base, problem-solving situations in one way or another. From very concrete issues (*How can I convince my reader to take X action?*) to very abstract (*How can I help my reader/viewer/user to explore the richness of this complex situation in terms of their own experiences?*) to very personal (*How can I examine my own relations to the world around me?*). Each of these stances steps back from routine writing practices—genres, media, style—in order to open a terrain of possible activities. Producing original text in the form of an essay or report is only one possible response—not necessarily the best possible response—among many. So while a writing pedagogy might focus on the production of original text in some instances, it might also focus just as productively on assemblage, remix, or collage in the same way. At a broad level, admitting such forms to our pedagogy requires we avoid automatically slotting them into a hierarchy that limits their value in specific situations.

The shift we are suggesting is a pretty simple if powerful one: Stop encouraging students to produce "original" texts all the time. Tell them, at least occasionally, to work on texts that are complete assemblages. The documents might not look that much different than what we are getting now, at least in some cases. It is a small shift, as we said, but a powerful one.

⁴ The field has promoted such skills frequently over the last decade under the guise of various forms of knowledge work (see Johnson-Eilola, 1996), one emergent and crucial job skill in postmodern times.

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