

What's Yours is Mine... *Or, How to Sample Your Life*

by DOROTHY MARCIC

I'M THINKING OF TRAVELING TO BERLIN TO VISIT HELENE HEGEMANN, the 19-year-old bestselling German author who almost won the Leipzig Book Fair prize despite the fact that she freely admitted to lifting whole sections from other sources. Hegemann argued—in a properly attributed *New York Times* report by Nicholas Kulish—that given post-modern digital age norms: “I help myself everywhere I find inspiration.” If she had won, I’d ask her to share some of the \$20,000 award, in the name of someone who, as she, “freely mixes and matches.” How about mixing some of your euros with my U.S. dollars? Too bad the deutsche mark is kaput because it always held its value. Still, she’s got all that money from royalties and I am kind of cash poor right now. And given that she wrote: “Berlin is here to mix everything and everything,” I am more than happy to help her in this process.

Maybe she’s got a car. While I’m in Germany, I’m going to need some transportation and I don’t mind getting to her place to pick up the auto. But I wouldn’t ask her, or even tell her when I’ll be taking it. Isn’t it all right to use “anything at hand” that I feel “suits [my] purposes”?

After Berlin, I’ll stop off in Seattle at the home of David Shields. You know, the guy who wrote *Reality Hunger*, about how writers are supposed to take from any source without acknowledgement. And I’ll make sure to visit when he’s not there. I’d like to use his MFA degree from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. It’s probably hanging over his desk in a frame with curlicue woodcarvings. I would put it in my entranceway, so everyone could see it. The degree would come in real handy on my résumé when I am sending out articles for publication. Oh, yes, and I should also include a couple of his books as ones I wrote, just to add to the whole remix and borrowing feel of my résumé, which now includes 83 books, two Pulitzers, and three Man Booker prizes. Okay, you outed me. I do have James Frey as my life coach.

If appropriation has truly breathed life into art, as Shields claims, I think it can surely give a new spirit to my background to add his degree and books. Why, I feel so much better just thinking about it. I know he won’t get upset when I invite all my West Coast friends to his house for a party, because we are all artists and I’m working hard to break “larger and larger chunks of ‘reality’ into [my] work”—and my life. And my friends are nothing if not real.

He probably has some cool artwork on his walls and I'll select two of my favorites. My newest project is collecting pieces from famous authors. These will be displayed on my living room wall and will be my own "literary mosaic." So, David, please don't call the police (or any of you other writers whose pictures I am "sampling"), because you have helped me to figure out how to "smuggle more of what [I think] is reality into the work of art." How clever that you had the "intuition that [you] could take various fragments of [a] thing" and turn it into art. That's exactly the same identical idea I came up with, too. Thanks for reminding me about T.S. Eliot's statement: "Good poets borrow; great poets steal," though you naturally did not credit him. And I just know your paintings are going to help me build a reality-based literary mosaic. So, again, thanks in advance.

David, I too am "desperate for authenticity," and I think we can both agree with Helene that: "There's no such thing as originality anyway, just authenticity," even though Randy Kennedy wrote a *New York Times* piece about this topic that my pre-sampling brain erroneously thought was original. I am trying to learn. And let me say that right now I authentically think I deserve a Guggenheim Fellowship, so I'd like to use what might be left of yours. After all, you've said "contemporary literary prizes are a bit like the federal bailout package, subsidizing work that is no longer remotely describing reality." So, you'd be grateful to me, right? Or maybe I could just make a few calls and throw around your name, say that you recommended me. Wouldn't that be just too "raw"?

On the final leg of my trip, I'll visit Dan Brown's loft in New Hampshire. That might be where he copied much of the book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* for use in *The Da Vinci Code*. Well, copied might be too strong a word, for Brown's wife is the one who evidently read the book. That whole legal drama got more attention in the media than the winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature gets. From my secret sources, I'll learn Brown's writing schedule and will plan to arrive just when he is upside down in the middle of his inversion therapy. That will give me time to extract the title for Brown's next work, which I will use for my certain-to-be bestselling "mixed" book. If you sue me for copyright infringement, Dan, I'll say that you just might have taken the name *The Da Vinci Code* from that litigious, news-hungry, and patently jealous Russian art historian, Dr. Mikhail Anikin, who evidently does not realize that titles are not copyrightable. Even so, I'm sure the judge will begin to see the pattern here. So don't even think about coming after me.

By then I'll be back home with my euros, the memory of a nice German car ride, a few paintings from David Shields, some extra listings on my résumé, and the new book title—not to mention that Guggenheim. After that, everyone will see I am a real, post-post-modern writer and artist. I never knew creativity could be so exhilarating☀