
In the introduction to Cutting across Media: Appropriation Art, Interventionist Collage, and Copyright Law, editors Kembrew McLeod (Associate Professor of Communication Studies at University of Iowa) and Rudolf Kuenzli (Professor of Comparative Literature and English at the University of Iowa and Director of the International Dada Archives) state that the collection’s thirty-four essays “...implicitly or explicitly treat collage as a cultural practice that can intervene within mass media, consumer culture, copyright regimes, and everyday life.” Spanning media from visual art to popular music, literature to culture jamming, this series of essays challenges the litigious environment in which copyright is used as a blunt weapon to prevent reinvention of existing works and the transformative process of reuse to inform the creative cycle of ideas.

Cutting across Media is based largely on the 2005 University of Iowa conference, “Collage as Cultural Practice,” organized by the editors. A wide range of scholars, artists, authors, and critics contributed to the volume. Marcus Boon (Professor of English, York University) opens the book with “Digital Mana,” a philosophical exploration of infinity as it is tied to copying and reiteration in what he refers to as “industrialized folk cultures,” such as hip-hop, quilting bees, hackers and the avant-garde. In “Cultural Sampling and Social Critique: The Collage Aesthetic of Chris Ofili,” Lorraine Morales Cox (Professor of Contemporary Art and Theory, Union College) presents the artist’s use of collage as a method for disrupting traditional Euro-American conceptions of reality by juxtaposing collage made of Afro-American popular culture images with art historical archetypes. Jonathan Lethem’s previously published essay, “The Ecstasy of influence: a Plagiarism,” exemplifies extreme sampling reworked and reimagined to make Lethem’s own point about appropriation as a method for transformation, inspiration and cultural evolution.

Other chapters cover appropriation and copyright in music, sound collage, experimental filmmaking, multi-media art, poetry, and interventions into popular culture. The essays are not easy reading, but they are far from dry. Advanced undergraduates through faculty in art, art history, media studies, film, literature and music will appreciate the interdisciplinary treatment of collage.

Most of the volume’s thirty-four contributed essays are original—only five were previously published. The book employs an extensive reference list and includes biographical sketches of the contributors. Only one chapter has an insert of higher quality paper with color reproductions. Other chapters requiring illustrations include black and white images, though their lower quality does not adversely affect the content.

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