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Essay 1 Draft 4

The Ownership of Writing

As writing developed from the first few marks on stone and clay to an eloquent and extensive collection of various languages, so did the number of literate individuals capable and willing to write. Growth of our world’s cultures has instilled literacy in an every growing population of readers and writers, and has brought us to the present day, where writing is so ubiquitous and connected within language and subset communities that discerning what has been written and what hasn’t becomes a challenge. The notion that most works have already been produced in some form hinders the ability of writers to produce unique articles. Yet writing is still referred to as an ‘individual’ art, and has entered a stage of turmoil in modern government with respect to copyright laws. In a world empowered by vast human resources and access to information, the use of language in authorship is awarded a somewhat antiquated extension of the writer’s identity and personal property.

In James Porter’s “Intertextuality and the Discourse Community” an idea is presented that the whole of writing, and in fact all forms of information distribution, have become huge intertextual melting pots. The gist of his argument is best captured by “The traditional notion of the text as the single work of a given author, and even the very notions of author and reader, are regarded as simply convenient fictions for domesticating discourse. The old borders that we used to rope off discourse […] are no longer useful.” (Porter, 2). Porter acknowledges the roots of our constructs for ‘writer’ and ‘reader’; he explains that they served a purpose and that with modern culture they are simply convenient artifacts to categorize and refer to literate persons. Furthermore, he presents the idea that in order for a person to be a writer a background and usage in intertext is inherently assumed. All writers reference each other in order to make their work more acceptable and capable. For example, fans of the television series “Lost” have assembled a rather massive congregation of hypertext, a close relative to intertext, present in the film series, which range from allusions to “Alice in Wonderland's” white rabbit to incorporating detective story “Bad Twin” (Vaughn 1-7; Landow 1). Whether known or not, everything a consumer reads is laced into an intricate web of culture, and by studying and witnessing the English language, he or she is indelibly marked with the signature of society. To write, then, becomes to use and reuse what is witnessed in experiences. Intertextuality takes away from writing by turning every essay into a collaboration of every artist who has ever written on a topic. Intertextuality gives generously to writing by providing every author of an essay with the tools and views required to generate and evolve a comprehensive profile for his or her work. Note that intertextuality is not some blockade to original writing, but is an inherent framework of writing that dispels the notion of individuality and frees every opinion, view, and thesis from a single owner.

Individuality is broken. Broken because we live our lives as individuals. Every aspect of life that is learned is new, and is usually gained from intuition and context. This means that to an individual, the revelation of a new aspect of the world is personally sought after and discovered, and is owned by the mind that has done the work to reveal it. At some point in life, many people experience a shift in their view of the world, drastically or gradually, from the solid definition of “This is what the world is.” to “This is what the world has become because of people before you, and it will continue to change.” We assume as children that existence is absolute, and that the world and everything about it is concrete. Any such new concept belongs to the individual who realizes it, but is shared by everyone who arrives at the same conclusion. The details of a person’s upbringing are his or her own, and are regarded as purely original. Yet, the general flow of growing up and living within a community is very general, and people can be classified and grouped together based on common experiences. The dichotomy of introvertly owning every aspect of a being and assigning life as individual and extrovertly realizing that everything is churned together in a global collaboration of language provides a new definition of individuality. All writing is suddenly individual, which is to say the act of writing is individual. Copying text is excused because it skips the process that allows it to become unique: no internal mechanisms generated it and the author's mind has not designed the language of its own accord. But even if an author writes a piece that is word for word the same as something already finished, it is still individual. The writing is still incomprehensively dissimilar because the mind that created it was separate from the mind of the previous work, and the infinitesimally small differences in nuance and purpose of that writer exist. The internal work of generating an external composition literally binds originality to a work. This means that individuality is only discernible by the author, and is to be a closely guarded ideal of the privilege of literacy.

Writing is a freedom. In the most basic sense, writing or the concept of literacy opens a person to contribute and participate in a cultural or global community. Just as esteemed attributes such as chivalrous conduct and the idea of a gentleman have been and are looked up to as the passage to a better life and world, so should writing be granted a lofty status associated with universal sharing and knowledge. To be an author is to have access to the privilege of guarding the intelligence of a given discourse community and to understand the independence granted by writing. Several rather tricky obstacles are set before the modern global community. The ability of humans to experience and understand the world around them is stifled by laws which claim they may not own a concept. The ability to write without worry of overlapping a billion other texts is essential to the literate. Without such an adaption, mankind will continue to self-tax its intellect. Only understanding the duality of individuality will teach us that to write is to authenticate and to share in the base of language is to forgo previous misconceptions of property and modern entitlement.

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