# Northumbria Research Link

**Visual plagiarism: perspectives from two institutions**

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*This workshop will explore perceptions of plagiarism and academic misconduct within art and design education, and will combine presentations from two institutions for whom use of artifacts and images is fundamental to the teaching and learning process. The session will include findings of a JISC-funded project to develop communities of practice in order to establish boundaries of acceptability and non-acceptability and in developing teaching and learning materials and discussion topics for students within the visual arts field.*

**Abstracts:**

**Blythman, M. Orr, S. & Mullin, J.** *Visual plagiarism*

There has been considerable work recently on all aspects of text-based plagiarism; however there has been little exploration of non-text based plagiarism, particularly in the area of visual forms of communication.

As the world moves more and more to a visual literacy, this lack of exploration becomes relevant to a much wider area of higher education than art, design and media disciplines. More and more students are given opportunities to express their ideas in visual forms.

While most visual forms of communication have some sense and regulation of copyright, the particular issues of plagiarism in an academic context are much less visible.

Many students have to move regularly between text and visual representation of their own ideas and the ideas of others. Confusion over rules of acceptability in the visual area leak into text-based areas for students. Clarification for students in (their often preferred) visual domain will help them apply this to the text arena by using insights gained in practice to apply to theoretical contexts (Orr and Blythman 2002; Mullin 2006).

Visual disciplines have a complex, and often ambivalent, approach to the acceptable use of the work of others. At one extreme there is fashion where high street fashion is based on close and unacknowledged copying of the catwalk; in film there is a fine line between copying and 'homage'. Sometimes there is no arena to reference and acknowledge influences (e.g. interior design). Additionally, most visual arts academic staff have learned about plagiarism through personal experience or lore. The lack of consensus among staff further confuses the issue for students.

To make inroads into this complex web of issues we aimed to enable academic communities of practice, particularly in the visual arts,  to discuss, with the aim of reaching a consensus, what the crucial boundaries of acceptability and non-acceptability are for their area.  Having reached some consensus, they were then in a position to share this with their students and develop ways of helping students understand.

We organised small groups of visual arts academic staff by sub-discipline and facilitated them to produce, for each sub-discipline, a checklist of issues to be discussed with students and a piece of supporting L&T material to advance student learning in relation to some of these issues.  Sub -disciplines were photography, interior design, surface design, textiles and fine art.

In this workshop we will outline how we carried out the project and examine the checklist of issues and the resulting teaching material.  This will follow with discussion of the particular issues arising from visual plagiarism and a sharing of good practice by participants on ways of tackling the issue.

## Porter, M. *Tackling Academic misconduct in Art and Design*

Discussions of plagiarism and other forms of "academic misconduct" usually refer to text-based cases.  The purpose of this workshop is to explore the topic within the domain of Design and Art education; specifically with artifacts and images.  The use of these elements may be occasional, within other disciplines, but they are common and fundamental within Art and Design.

A student painter might declare a work to be a pastiche or homage to the creator of the original.  A designer might, for similar reasons, "badge" his design with the name of a major, respected brand.  Can these "acknowledgements" satisfy academic standards or is it just an admission that the idea, look or style were created by another?  Should this be regarded as "academic misconduct"?  Indeed, Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) may formally protect the original and any use "actionable".

Is the "reproduction" anymore acceptable if the work copied is by an artist long dead and is a part of a mass production operation?  How many "reproductions" and parodies to the La Gioconda have you seen?  Do you find it easier to recall examples if you know that this is Leonardo Da Vinci's enigmatic "Mona Lisa"?

The quality is variable but the villagers of Dafen, China will produce "whatever the customer wants".  You may buy a single example direct or contract for 30,000 per month as Wal-Mart did.  (Paetsch, 2006)  They also offer a bespoke service to create works to your specification!

Such "copying" is not restricted to paintings but may also apply to the most complex of designs.  For example, the Shuanghuan Automobile version of the

Smart "Fortwo" didn't appear, as expected, at the Frankfurt Motor show, allegedly because it infringed Intellectual Property owned by others.  (Madslien, 2007) Zetsche, the Chinese car manufacturer's CEO, is quoted as saying,

 "In Asia in general, the culture does not define copying as something unethical".

Is the use of material on which Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) have been registered automatically evidence of "miss-conduct" unless the appropriate authorization has been obtained?  Is this a practical proposition within the constraints of a student project?  Indeed, is it acceptable to use the work of another when it might be a critical part of the final artifact; something that is not the case when a quote is incorporated into an essay.

The "policing" of such plagiarism will be hindered by the lack of good indexing for, and the limited scope of available images on the net.  Searching for a phase, while often problematic, is far easier to do than the searching for an image or design unless the "enforcer" has a good recollection of where the evidence might be found.  It can, however, be monitored and controlled by insisting that the student produce all the background work, sketchbooks, concept models, etc and is able to discuss the reasons for each step in the design process through which they have progressed.

This workshop will seek to explore, with examples, this topic and establish how others do, or may, approach this matter.