Copyright and Creativity

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COPYRIGHT AND CREATIVITY

by

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In *Feist Publications, Inc. v. Rural Telephone Service Co.*,¹ a unanimous Supreme Court concluded, in dictum, that “creativity” was a necessary condition for a work that is otherwise copyright subject matter to enjoy copyright protection. The case dealt with a kind of subject matter that often exhibits no intellectual creativity on its face – a complete (nonelective) compilation of factual matter arranged in a standard format – and could have been decided solely under the language of the statute defining a “compilation.” The Court’s language, however, purported to base its newly found creativity requirement in the intellectual property clause of the Constitution.² This logically means that the creativity requirement applies not only to compilations but to all types of copyright subject matter.

The *Feist* approach to copyright subject matter is problematic, both theoretically and practically, along several dimensions. Treating “creativity” as a necessary condition for copyright can force lower courts into a Hobson’s choice between underprotection and overprotection. On the one hand, requiring creativity runs the risk of market failure by leaving unprotected works like bare-bones maps and complete databases whose optimal production may need the incentive of some degree of intellectual property protection. On the other hand, it raises the thorny problem of how the scope of copyright protection relates, if at all, to the creativity required for copyright protection in the first place. The Court was specific in saying that copyright protection extends only to those components of a work that are original³ and that originality requires at least a minimal amount of creativity.⁴ But what do we do with works that

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2. U.S. CONST. Art. 1, sect. 8, cl. 8: Congress has the power “To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries.”

3. 499 U.S. at 348.

4. Id. at 358.
do not show their production creativity on their face, such as many maps or tables of estimated used car values or even skillfully make reproductions or photographs of public domain pictures. If the methodology for generating the work is the only “creative” aspect of its production, courts sensitive to the market failure problem will be tempted to include that methodology as an element of the work protected by the copyright resulting from the creativity recognized, while others will emphasize the lack of anything “new” in the final product and deny copyright notwithstanding the potential for market failure. At a minimum, courts will either ignore Feist’s explicit tie between copyright originality (including creativity) and the scope of protection or they will ignore more fundamental limitations on copyright. Where the creativity is functional or otherwise ineligible for copyright protection under the ancient limitations on copyright scope now codified in section 102(b) of the Copyright Act, courts may simply do away with or misinterpret the limitations, greatly expanding the scope of copyright protection without legislative or policy justification. This dilemma between under- and over-protection is a direct result of Feist’s creativity requirement.

*Feist* treated creativity as a *necessary* condition for copyright protection. Lower courts, however, sometimes expand the *Feist* approach and treat creativity as a *sufficient* condition. While there is no direct basis in either *Feist*’s holding or its language for expanding copyright in this dimension, the reasoning of the Court – and in particular its glossing over the tension

5. See *infra* note 37.

6. *E.g.*, CCC Information Services, Inc. v. Maclean Hunter Market Reports, Inc., 44 F.3d 61, 66-67 (2nd Cir. 1994)(estimates of used car values by the exercise of professional judgment and expertise show copyright originality); see *infra* note 70.


8. 17 U.S.C.A. § 102(b): “In no case does copyright protection for an original work of authorship extend to any idea, procedure, process, system, method of operation, concept, principle, or discovery, regardless of the form in which it is described, explained, illustrated, or embodied in such work.”
between the creativity requirement and the scope of protection – invites the conclusion that creativity deserves copyright protection.⁹ The result is that “creative” works are held to be copyright protected, notwithstanding that functionality makes patent (or trade secret) law the appropriate intellectual property paradigm.

Yet a third dimension of confusion arises from an expanded notion of the term “compilation” under copyright law. *Feist* correctly emphasized the statutory terminology for a protectable compilation, namely, a collection whose (creative) selection, coordination, or arrangement makes it an original work of authorship.¹⁰ Many courts, however, are now applying this notion of creative selection or arrangement to works that are not compilations at all and in fact fit comfortably within one or more of the express categories set forth in section 102(a).¹¹ This approach too runs a serious risk that, having found some “creativity,” courts will apply copyright without considering the traditional limitations on copyright protection, such as section 102(b).

Enamored though we are with the term, this article argues that “creativity” plays little or no useful role in copyright analysis and carries much potential for harm. Except for compilations, where the statute arguably requires creativity in selection or arrangement as a prerequisite to copyright protection, *Feist* should not be applied across the board to make creativity a necessary condition of copyright protection for other types of works. Moreover, even if we are to apply *Feist* beyond compilations to copyright subject matter generally, the creativity

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⁹ See Mark K. Temin, *The Irrelevance of Creativity: Feist's Wrong Turn and the Scope of Copyright Protection for Factual Works*, 111 PENN. ST. L. REV. 263, 271-72 (2006)(arguing that creativity is irrelevant to the scope-of-protection problem, which should be resolved by reference to the work’s purpose).

¹⁰ 17 U.S.C. § 101 (definition of “compilation”).

analysis should be limited to determining whether the quantity threshold for copyright protection has been reached. That is, treating creativity as a necessary condition for copyright protection, as *Feist* requires, cannot be a basis for treating creativity as a *sufficient* condition for copyright protection. For good reason, copyright excludes from its protective umbrella ideas, concepts, systems, procedures, and methods of operation, no matter how creative. To treat creativity as a sufficient condition for copyright protection allows copyright to arrogate subject matter that properly belongs either under patent or trade secret or outside the intellectual property system altogether.

I. Intellectual Property and Creativity

Everyone is in favor of creativity. The question for intellectual property law is, how can and should this branch of law promote creativity? The short answer is that we cannot simply maximize intellectual property rights with respect to every piece of “creativity” that comes before us and thereby expect to maximize society’s production of creativity.12

Our current intellectual property regime gives us three choices when faced with a creative intellectual work or creative element of such a work: (1) We can protect it under copyright law if it is original to its purported author; (2) we can protect it under patent law if it meets the patent standards; or (3) notwithstanding our desire to promote creativity, we can refuse to protect it at all in a given instance. How do and should we go about making this choice?

If the purpose of affording intellectual property protection is to \textit{reward} creativity, no creative works should ever be denied protection (choice 3), although we still have the problem of whether it should be protected under copyright or patent (choices 1 or 2). Yet there are many intellectual creations that go unprotected, so rewarding creativity cannot be the only goal of the intellectual property system. If the purpose of intellectual property protection is to \textit{promote} creativity, moreover, the mere presence of creativity in the production of a given work does not eliminate any of the choices from consideration. Protection under patent or copyright might promote a net gain in creativity production if the intellectual property rights granted stimulate more creative efforts than they inhibit (by tying up subject matter in exclusive rights that could otherwise be used freely by others as the basis for even newer creative works). But denying protection altogether might also promote a net gain in creativity production, notwithstanding a reduction in incentives, by allowing others to build on the creative work in question. Consequently, even where the goal is taken to be the promotion of creativity, creativity itself is not analytically useful in making the most basic intellectual property determination: Is the creativity for which protection is under consideration copyright subject matter, patent subject matter, or neither?

In the “no protection” category we take as our paradigmatic example abstract scientific theories, such as Einstein’s theories of relativity. Nobody would seriously argue that those theories are uncreative, but until they are tied to a real world application, patent law and its exclusion of abstract ideas offer their creator nothing. Copyright, too, excludes “ideas” (abstract or not) from its protective coverage, and scientific theories are universally deemed to fall under this exclusion. Consequently, merely showing intellectual creativity, even of the highest order, does not, and should not, guarantee that intellectual property rights will be recognized. This is not an aspect of the system that needs fixing. Experience has shown that intellectual property rights have played essentially no role in supplying an incentive to the Einsteins and Newtons of
the world to work on basic scientific theories. Recognition of intellectual property rights in such theories would therefore inhibit later scientists from extending or modifying the theories of those who came before them, and this loss would not be offset by an increase in the supply of basic theoretical research products.

In general, “creativity” does not enter directly into the patent analysis, because to the extent creativity is a necessary condition it is built into the more specific statutory patent standards, especially nonobviousness. Where patent protection is denied on subject matter grounds it is not the presence or absence of creativity that is responsible but the nature of the work as, for example, abstract idea or copyright subject matter. In other words, patent does not attempt to protect creativity as such. Rather, it protects creativity indirectly by granting exclusive rights in works that are novel and nonobvious advances in a relevant art. Therefore, even though patent law is designed to promote creativity, the statutory structure implicitly recognizes that patent does not protect all creativity. While the grounds for making patent-subject-matter decisions (abstract idea, useful application, copyright subject matter) are not always clear in practice, “creativity” as such does not further muddy the waters.

Bleistein\textsuperscript{13} attempted to remove a judgment of “creativity” from the copyright analysis as well. Under Feist,\textsuperscript{14} however, creativity reenters the copyright analysis at least in the negative sense that an insufficient amount leads to a denial of copyright protection. What is the purpose of this requirement, especially given that the threshold is so low?\textsuperscript{15} Except for compilations, where we have legislative instruction to look at creativity in selection, coordination, and

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textbf{13.}] Bleistein v. Donaldson Lithographing Co., 188 U.S. 239 (1903)(holding an advertising poster copyright protected and stating that judges should not be the arbiters of “art”).
\item[\textbf{15.}] Id. at 345 (stating that the requisite level of creativity is extremely low so even a slight amount will suffice)
\end{itemize}
arrangement, we cannot look to the statute to tell us the *kinds* of creativity copyright seeks to protect. Why do we protect under copyright original but mundane instructions for using a hair-care product but not a complete, accurate, and socially useful compilation of factual information arranged in a standard way that makes for easy access to specific pieces of that information? Moreover, even if we accept a low but real creativity threshold as a *necessary* condition for copyright protection, we must be vigilant in avoiding the converse, namely, that we treat creativity as a *sufficient* condition for copyright protection. Doing so runs the risk that we will apply copyright without regard to the potential availability of patent protection for the same subject matter or the potential advantages to society of free use that would result from denying protection altogether.

II. *Feist* and Creativity

*Feist* dealt with the copyright protectability of ordinary telephone book white pages – a factual compilation. As a copyright matter, the case should have been a routine exercise in statutory interpretation (muddied, perhaps, by the long “sweat of the brow” tradition that *Feist* purported to overrule). The United States Copyright Act defines compilations as works “formed by the collection and assembling of preexisting materials or of data that are selected, coordinated, or arranged in such a way that the resulting work as a whole constitutes an original work of authorship” and goes on to provide explicitly that copyright subject matter “includes compilations.” This statutory language quite plausibly requires that only creative selecting, coordinating, or arranging of the materials comprising the compilation can result in an original work of authorship. The Court in *Feist* adopted this line of reasoning in in Part II.C. of its


opinion,\textsuperscript{18} which would have been sufficient to decide the case without reference to the Constitution, but by this time the Court had already devoted two subsections of dictum to explaining that “originality” was a general constitutional mandate that included both the traditional copyright meaning of independent production (not copied from something else) and “a minimal degree of creativity.”\textsuperscript{19}

Professor Ralph Clifford accepts the \textit{Feist} creativity requirement and tries to give it meaning by looking to the sciences of psychology and neurobiology.\textsuperscript{20} He is worried that if we look solely to creativity in the final product, we will end up recognizing copyright in creative public-domain or computer-generated works\textsuperscript{21} and might end up failing to recognize copyright in works that fail to meet the “creativity” standards that we find in works of fine art.\textsuperscript{22} Based on the physiology of human brain activity, he finds that the mundane has a claim on the “creative spark” label at least equal to that for works we would term “brilliant.”\textsuperscript{23} He concludes that we can determine creativity under \textit{Feist}, as the necessary condition for copyright protection (but not for the purpose of determining the scope of protection), by first finding the expressive elements in the usual way, confirming that they were created by the human being claiming to be the author, and then insuring that the author made an intellectual choice from among multiple alternatives.\textsuperscript{24}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{18} 499 U.S. at 354-61.
\item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{Id.} at 348.
\item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Id.} at 294.
\item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Id.} at 289-90.
\item \textsuperscript{23} \textit{Id.} at 290 (creativity is usually the result of a reworking of preexisting ideas and facts within the author's brain and even a “revolutionary” concept lacks any "spark" except perhaps a misfire of some sort within the brain).
\item \textsuperscript{24} \textit{Id.} at 295-96.
\end{itemize}
He deviates from *Feist* by expressly separating the copyright-protectability question from the scope-of-protection: He would determine creativity solely for the purpose of deciding whether a work is protected at all; if the creativity threshold is crossed, a different analysis must be applied to determine whether there has been infringement.\(^{25}\) As a practical matter, divorcing the scope-of-protection and copyright-protectability questions is precisely what many courts have been doing: They find creativity in the decisions involved in producing a work, like estimates of used car values, and then determine infringement in some other way.\(^{26}\) This is essentially a return to the old “sweat of the brow” doctrine that *Feist* purported to eliminate.\(^{27}\) More fundamentally, if the scope of protection is divorced from the creativity necessary for copyright protection in the first place, what social policy goal is the creativity requirement serving?

Professor Diane Zimmerman has recently critically analyzed *Feist*’s failure to articulate a fundamental purpose of copyright that explains why creativity is a necessary condition for copyright protection.\(^{28}\) She concludes that the Court was trying to draw back from the anything-that-is-not-copied-is-copyright-protectable approach that courts had been following since *Bleistein*,\(^{29}\) which she applauds in principle but goes on to recognize that *Feist* gives no guidance concerning how far, in what direction, or to what end we should cut back.\(^{30}\) She points out that

\(^{25}\) *Id.* at 296.

\(^{26}\) The Second Circuit in CCC Information Services, Inc. v. Maclean Hunter Market Reports, Inc., 44 F.3d 61, 72 (2nd Cir. 1994), for example, found “soft ideas” in the form of estimates of used car values to be copyright protected but noted that the copying at issue was “of virtually the entire compendium” and that it was “of consequence” that there was “wholesale copying” of the compilation.


\(^{29}\) *Bleistein* v. Donaldson Lithographing Co., 188 U.S. 239 (1903).

\(^{30}\) Diane Leenheer Zimmerman, *supra* note 28, at 208-10. One of the problems, Professor Zimmerman is quite correct to point out, is that copyright in published drivel was of little practical significance in former times. Much was published without the required copyright notice, in which case it immediately went into the public domain, and even where copyright was acquired it expired after 28 years unless affirmative
the fundamental open question is what the Constitution actually does require in order to qualify as the “writing” of an “author” and that to decide that question we must get a better grip on the constitutional purpose of the copyright power.\textsuperscript{31}

I do not wish to quarrel with Professor Zimmerman’s analysis or overall conclusion that copyright should cut back on coverage using a quality standard. Surely it makes no sense to protect the trivial scribblings of the day, or even useful collections of facts like telephone books, for the extremely long period of copyright. I address \textit{Feist} from a different direction, however, and argue that “creativity” is a particularly bad choice of dimension along which to try to distinguish the quality that copyright protects from the quality it does not protect.

As an aside, we might ask whether \textit{Feist’s} creativity requirement remains good law. First, the \textit{Feist} Court’s assertions concerning the constitutional requirement for originality (and therefore creativity)\textsuperscript{32} were wholly unnecessary for the decision and therefore dictum.\textsuperscript{33} Moreover, the Court’s more recent decision upholding the constitutionality of the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act necessarily holds that the meaning of even an \textit{express} limitation on federal power in the Intellectual Property Clause is for Congress to decide, with only rational-
basis review by the courts.\textsuperscript{34} To the extent that originality is constitutionally required for copyright, it is an implied term, and “creativity” is yet another judicial gloss on that. At least logically, it would be difficult for the Court now to start reviewing congressionally determined levels of copyright protection under a sterner test.\textsuperscript{35} In addition, while moving to a qualitative standard would heighten the uncertainty concerning what is protected and increase the burdens on the judiciary,\textsuperscript{36} removing the creativity requirement would free courts from the mental gymnastics in which they now engage in determining the copyright protectability of works like maps, which everyone agrees should be protected by copyright but many of which cannot qualify as “creative” in the sense that the end product evinces the author’s personal creative choices.\textsuperscript{37}

The main objection to \textit{Feist’s} creativity requirement, however, is not that it is technically dictum, nor that it is not truly “constitutional” if Congress can override it. Nor is the objection that the creativity requirement has increased the burden on the judiciary to determine which fixed works are protected by copyright and the scope of such protection. The real objection to the creativity requirement is that it is not treated as one of a number of necessary conditions for copyright but has rather become a judicial touchstone for determining copyright protectability.

\textsuperscript{34} Eldred \textit{v.} Ashcroft, 537 U.S. 186, 208 (2003)(finding the Sonny Bono act rational and refusing to second guess Congress’s “policy” decision to treat a term extension even for works already in existence as a “limited Time” within the meaning of the Intellectual Property Clause).

\textsuperscript{35} This suggests that Congress could adopt even a database protection statute under its intellectual property power rather than having to rely on the commerce power.

\textsuperscript{36} Professor Zimmerman argues that, while the burden on the judiciary might increase, it likely could be managed. Diane Leenheer Zimmerman, supra note 28, at 211-12.

\textsuperscript{37} See, e.g., \textit{Copyright in Electronic Maps}, supra note 27, at 397-98 (outlining three post-\textit{Feist} theories for protecting maps and similar traditional “sweat” works that are in reality disguised attempts to avoid the implications of \textit{Feist}). An easy example of a map that evinces no creativity in its ultimate fixation in a tangible medium is the bare bones real estate plat map showing the boundaries of parcels of real property and basic information concerning their ownership. Such maps have been held to be protected by copyright. Mason \textit{v.} Montgomery Data, Inc., 967 F.2d 135 (5th Cir. 1992); Rockford Map Publishers, Inc. \textit{v.} Directory Services Co., 768 F.2d 145 (7th Cir. 1985); but see Sparaco \textit{v.} Lawler, Matusky, Skelly Engineers, LLP, 303 F.3d 460, 467 (2nd Cir. 2002)(site plan setting forth existing physical characteristics is unprotected by copyright absent creativity in the presentation, such as selection or elimination of detail, choices concerning informative legends, or the establishment of conventions to represent topographical features). The \textit{Sparaco} case is discussed in more detail \textit{infra} at notes 61-62.
That is, creativity is often not merely a necessary condition for copyright but for many courts is also a sufficient condition.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, the scope of protection runs to the creativity discovered. Traditional limitations on copyright – most crucially, the functionality limitation and section 102(b) – are too often left out of the analysis.

III. A Normative Framework

We are concerned here with the role of creativity in determining both the existence and scope of copyright protection. As discussed in the introduction, creativity by itself does not distinguish between (1) copyright protection, (2) patent protection, or (3) no protection. Before we can evaluate the damage done by incorporating creativity into the copyright analysis, we need a normative principle for deciding which of the three possibilities should apply to a given work or element of a work.

I have offered a normative framework for distinguishing patent and copyright subject matter by looking to \textit{functionality}, precisely defined by considering whether the subject matter in question is amenable to incremental improvement by others.\textsuperscript{39} The approach derives from the

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\textsuperscript{38} Treatment of “creativity” as a sufficient, rather than just a necessary, condition for copyright is not inherent in the Court’s analysis in \textit{Feist}. In its holding, \textit{Feist} simply does not deal with the other limitations on copyright protection beyond the originality and authorship requirements – limitations such as § 102(b). The Court may have contributed to the problem when it said that “copyright protection may extend only to those components of a work that are original to the author.” 499 U.S. at 348. The Court’s point here, however, is that not every original element in a work is protected. Facts, not being original in themselves, can be protected only through original selection or arrangement. However, the Court never said nor even implied the converse that nonoriginality was the only limit on copyright protectability. For example, an “idea” may be original to the author and even highly creative, yet it is not protected by a copyright in the work expressing the idea. Indeed, \textit{Feist} directly refers to the “fact/expression dichotomy” together with the “idea/expression” dichotomy explicitly contained in § 102(b) in stating that copyright “encourages others to build freely upon the ideas and information conveyed by a work.” Id. at 350. Nothing in \textit{Feist} suggests that ideas are unprotected simply because they are unoriginal. See Dennis S. Karjala, \textit{Distinguishing Patent and Copyright Subject Matter}, 35 Conn. L. Rev. 439, 468-69 & n.119 (2003)(hereinafter \textit{Distinguishing Subject Matter}).

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Distinguishing Subject Matter}, supra note 38, at 453-58.
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Copyright Act’s definition of a “useful article” as “an article having an intrinsic utilitarian function that is not merely to portray the appearance of the article or to convey information.”  

This definition accurately captures a wide range of highly “useful” subject matter that has traditionally been excluded from patent protection: Maps, dictionaries, novels, paintings, and all other forms of traditional copyright subject matter have no intrinsic utilitarian function other than to portray their own appearance or, more generally, to convey information to human beings. In essence, information, as such, useful though it may be, is under this definition nonfunctional and is therefore copyright rather than patent subject matter. Conversely, if a work is a useful article under this definition, it should be relegated for intellectual property protection to the patent and trade secret regimes.

Copyright’s useful article definition works well to separate tangible products, like automobiles, that have an intrinsic utilitarian function other than to convey information from tangible products, like books and paintings, that do not. It does not do as well, however, for the

40. 17 U.S.C. § 101 (definition of “useful article”). This definition was adopted with a view to the separability test for industrial designs and has direct application in the Copyright Act only for pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works. This is part of the problem in getting courts to see its policy validity in the broader normative picture. Fortuitous though it may be, the definition does capture much of the traditional distinction between copyright and patent subject matter.

41. This exclusion of traditional copyright subject matter from patent coverage has long been thought so obvious that it is rarely expressly articulated. The exceptions to patent protection that are usually mentioned are those for “laws of nature, natural phenomena, and abstract ideas.” AT&T Corp. v. Excel Communications, Inc., 172 F.3d 1352, 1355 (Fed. Cir. 1999), citing Diamond v. Diehr, 450 U.S. 175, 185 (1981), citing Diamond v. Chakrabarty, 447 U.S. 303, 309 (1980) (patent subject matter includes “anything under the sun that is made by man”). No one has suggested that the Court would extend its interpretation of Patent Act section 101 to include traditional art, music, or literature, notwithstanding that they are all “made by man.” See Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 445 n.26.

42. Computer programs, and perhaps architectural works, are more recently added, congressionally mandated exceptions to this statement. See Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 450-51 & n.50. Completeness perhaps requires noting that the Copyright Act’s definition of a “useful article” is applied by that Act primarily to the separability test for “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works”. 17 U.S.C.A. § 101 (definition of “pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works”). My use of the definition as a starting point for distinguishing patent and copyright subject matter is based on the policy view that the definition, perhaps serendipitously, actually captures the core of the distinction between the two types of intellectual property subject matter. I make no claim that Congress consciously articulated this distinction in adopting the definition.
important *exclusions* from copyright protection contained in section 102(b). Systems and processes, for example, are excluded from the ambit of copyright notwithstanding that they consist solely of information that can be applied by human beings (either directly or by using other tangible tools). The difficult question is, what kinds of systems, processes, methods of operation, etc., are excluded from copyright protection under section 102(b) and why?

The answer lies in the differences between works of technology (useful articles under the Copyright Act’s definition) and works of information: The former are amenable to objectively measurable incremental improvement, and technology develops faster and better when many people, rather than a single rightsholder, are allowed to try their hand. That is the reason for the more stringent requirements for obtaining a patent and for patent’s much shorter term of protection.\(^{43}\) We attach much less social value to incremental “improvements” of traditional copyright subject matter – most people would rather read ten different books than ten versions of the same story that differ only in small (even though “improved”) details.\(^{44}\) Systems and processes that are applied in a practical way to achieve a useful result are also amenable to incremental improvement. A method for curing rubber, for example, can be improved when computers become available by repeatedly measuring the curing temperature in real time and sending that information to the computer for recalculation of the complex equation that determines the optimal time for opening the mold.\(^{45}\) Systems and processes of this type can be made to achieve their results faster, more cheaply, more efficiently, more accurately, or in a more user-friendly way by allowing others to tinker with their component steps, without unduly undermining the incentives for their initial creation or their ongoing development. Section

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43. Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 453-54.
44. *Id.* at 455-56.
102(b) insures that copyright will not give a long-term monopoly in making such improvements to the first person who describes the system or process in an underlying copyright-protected work, such as a book.  

We must therefore distinguish between improvements in the quality of information content and improvements in the means for gathering, presenting, or using the information. Information content with no practical application other than its appeal to the judgment of a human audience, remains copyright, and not patent, subject matter regardless of whether its quality is “high” or “low.” On the other hand, methods of gathering, organizing, presenting, or using information can be improved incrementally in such ways as reducing costs, enhancing accuracy, augmenting ease of use or modification, or improving the efficiency of information transfer. Increasingly, such methods are deemed patent subject matter. While the rapid expansion of patent to cover methodologies that are not “technological” has been heavily


47. *Id.* at 457.

48. That information is always copyright subject matter does not mean that all information is protected by copyright. It means only that there can be no patent protection for information content that is not applied to some useful end other than communicating to human beings. Copyright protection may still be denied, for example, to facts or other information that is not original – in the traditional copyright sense of being the product of the purported author.

49. *E.g., AT&T Corp. v. Excel Communications, Inc., 172 F.3d 1352, 1361 (Fed. Cir.1999)(adding a field to a message record for long-distance telephone calls to indicate the primary interexchange carrier is a method constituting patent subject matter); State Street Bank & Trust Co. v. Signature Fin. Group, Inc., 149 F.3d 1368, 1375 (Fed. Cir. 1998)(business methods are not excluded from qualifying as patent subject matter). The Board of Patent Appeals and Interferences of the Patent and Trademark Office has recently rejected the argument that patent subject matter must belong to the “technological arts”; if a process produces “a useful, concrete, tangible result without pre-empting other uses of the mathematical principle,” it is patent subject matter. *Ex parte* Lundgren, 76 U.S.P.Q.2d 1385, 2004 WL 3561262, at*3, (Bd.Pat.App. & Interf.), April 20, 2004, Appeal No. 2003-2088, *quoting AT&T Corp., supra*, at 1358 (reversing examiner’s subject-matter rejection, as not belonging to the “technological arts,” of a method for encouraging a manager to achieve certain goals, such as reducing industry collusion, by basing compensation on the degree to which the firm’s performance exceeds a weighted average of comparison firms).
criticized in the academic community, the substantial similarity test for copyright infringement and the inordinately long period of copyright protection make copyright wholly inappropriate for the protection of methods that can be incrementally improved to achieve a useful result, including methods for improving the quality of information content.

IV. The Legacy of Feist

Feist’s emphasis on creativity as a condition for copyright protection has created a potential for market failure with respect to works like complete databases and bare-bones maps that can no longer qualify if Feist is applied honestly. In turn, this has led courts to stray from basic copyright principles in at least two directions. First, it has encouraged courts to protect all “creativity” that they find, without regard to whether the creativity in question is of a type appropriately protectable under copyright, under patent, or not protectable by either intellectual property regime. This can allow functional subject matter that cannot meet the more rigorous demands of patent law to obtain similar, and much longer, protection under copyright. Second, while Feist dealt with a very special type of copyright subject matter, namely, a compilation, courts have gone beyond looking for a creative selection or arrangement of the contents of a compilation to basing copyright protection on a creative selection or arrangement of any type of copyright subject matter. Once, for example, a book describing a sequence of public domain yoga exercises is deemed to be a compilation as a selection and arrangement of those exercises, the court can lose sight of other, more fundamental limitations on copyright, such as functionality. Similarly, treating a work of history as a compilation consisting of the selection

50. See Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 442-44 & nn.19-20. Recently, the issue of whether tax planning strategies can be patented has been much in the legal news. E.g., Steve Seidenberg, Crisis Pending, ABA JOURNAL AT 42 (MAY 2007).

51. See Open Source Yogan Unity v. Choudhury, 74 U.S.P.Q.2d 1434 (N.D. Cal. 2005), 2005 WL 756558, at *4 (creative selection or arrangement of functional, public domain yoga exercises designed to improve the practitioner’s health is copyright protected).
and arrangement of historical events\textsuperscript{52} can obscure the differences in the scope of protection among literary works, which in the case of history and biography is very narrow.\textsuperscript{53}

A. Creativity as a Necessary Condition to Copyright Protection

Using creativity as a necessary condition to copyright protection runs a major risk of market failure, in that socially desirable works that are expensive to produce but cheap to copy will be under produced. For compilations, this was the problem the old “sweat of the brow” approach to originality was designed to solve. The problem, however, is more general and even precedes \textit{Feist}. Two well known examples are \textit{L. Batlin & Son, Inc. v. Snyder},\textsuperscript{54} and \textit{Hearn v. Meyer}.\textsuperscript{55} In \textit{Batlin}, a newly created version of the public domain Uncle Sam bank was denied copyright protection on the ground that its differences from the public domain original were too slight to qualify as “original” for copyright purposes. In \textit{Hearn}, meticulously reproduced illustrations of the original public domain version of \textit{The Wizard of Oz} were similarly held to lack copyright originality. More recently, the court in \textit{Bridgeman Art Library, Ltd. v. Corel Corp.},\textsuperscript{56} relying on \textit{Feist}, held that skillfully made exact reproductions of public domain art works lacked originality and were therefore without copyright protection. I take it as obvious that anyone wishing to have a copy of a famous work of art would like to have as exact a copy as

\textsuperscript{52} Jane C. Ginsburg, \textit{Sabotaging and Reconstructing History: A Comment on the Scope of Copyright Protection in Works of History after Hoehling v. Universal City Studios}, 29 J. COPR. SOC ’Y 647, 664 (1982)(arguing that a history is like a compilation, because it involves a selection and arrangement of facts together with an explanation of those facts).


\textsuperscript{54} 536 F.2d 486 (2nd Cir. 1976)(en banc), cert. denied, 429 U.S. 857.

\textsuperscript{55} 664 F. Supp. 832 (S.D.N.Y. 1987).

possible. Although the statute treats “art reproductions” as copyright subject matter, implying that Congress wanted to encourage the dispersion of knowledge and understanding of fine art by means of reproductions available to people unable to visit the various museums where famous works are housed, these decisions undermine the incentive to create such reproductions. What is the upside to protecting only “creativity” and not the tangible results of the application of mere skill and effort that compensates for this market failure?

The market failure is not limited to reproductions of public domain art. *Darden v. Peters*, 58 involved maps designed to enable a user to find a real estate appraiser in any desired location in the United States. The map designer started with public domain census maps, digitally redrew the lines to resize the maps and smooth the lines, and created a three-dimensional effect by repeating lines several times, slightly askew and in brighter or darker shades. 59 The Fourth Circuit upheld, on an abuse of discretion standard, the Copyright Office’s determination that these changes lacked the minimal level of creativity necessary for copyright protection. 60 Similarly, in *Sparaco v. Lawler, Matusky, Skelly Engineers, LLP*, 61 a site plan setting forth existing physical characteristics was held unprotected by copyright as an unoriginal representation of preexisting facts under *Feist*, 62 absent creativity in presentation, such as selection or elimination of detail, choices concerning informative legends, or the establishment of conventions to represent topographical features.

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58. 488 F.3d 277 (4th Cir. 2007).
59. *Id.* at 281.
60. *Id.* at 287.
61. 303 F.3d 460, 467 (2nd Cir. 2002).
62. The Second Circuit in Sparaco managed to err on both sides of the policy dilemma laid down by Feist. Not only did its reliance on creativity as a necessary condition lead to the denial of copyright protection for an original map or drawing depicting accurate physical reality; the court held that a site plan “capable of being
Courts in these cases legitimately fear inhibiting later creative artists if society recognizes a copyright in basic building blocks, which of course is what the public domain supplies us with. In *Todd v. Montana Silversmiths, Inc.*, for example, the court denied copyright in bracelets and related jewelry that were highly realistic copies of barbed wire, on the grounds that the jewelry lacked a substantial variation from public-domain barbed wire and that later artists would find it difficult to create jewelry in barbed wire style without infringing. Similarly, in *Meshwerks, Inc. V. Toyota Motor Sales U.S.A., Inc.*, essentially exact digital models of Toyota automobiles, prepared by careful grid-pattern measurements on actual cars and by manipulation of the measurement data to give a three-dimensional illusion on the computer screen, were held to lack new creative elements not present in the actual cars modeled. The solution, however, should not be outright denial of all copyright protection. Rather, the scope of protection should be narrowed, to the point that only slavish copying – through the modern equivalents of photocopying, like the use of molds for three-dimensional works – is held to infringe.

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65. The “substantial variation” requirement for derivative-work originality goes back to Durham Indus., Inc. v. Tomy Corp., 630 F.2d 905 (2nd Cir. 1980), and Judge Posner’s opinion for the Seventh Circuit in Gracen v. Bradford Exchange, 698 F.2d 300 (7th Cir. 1983). *Gracen* denied copyright in paintings that combined, in original compositions and brushwork, elements from the movie version of *The Wizard of Oz*.


67. The *Meshwerks* court relied on ATC Distribution Group, Inc. v. Whatever It Takes Transmissions & Parts, Inc., 402 F.3d 700, 702-03 (6th Cir. 2005), which found hand-drawn sketches of auto parts copied from photographs were not copyright protected, because the goal of the author was as accurate a reproduction as possible of the copyright-protected parts portrayed.
Otherwise, we risk a judicially induced market failure in which works of this type, socially desirable though they may be, will be under produced because the cost of creating a fine reproduction of a public domain or other unprotected work can be much greater than the cost of copying the reproduction.

B. Creativity as a Sufficient Condition – Protecting “Creativity” Wherever It Is Found

Once Feist came down, it was predictable, and predicted,68 that courts seeking to prevent market failures for “sweat” works would broaden their search for creativity in an effort to maintain the incentive to create works valued by society, such as many maps and compilations, that lacked the stamp of the author’s creativity on their face.69 They might find, for example, a creative technique or methodology for gathering or checking the factual information in a work as a basis for affording copyright protection.70 Courts might also rely on a creative methodology for


69. The creativity requirement may make a little more sense in the rare case involving traditional copyright subject matter where the purported author has made only a small variation on public domain materials. One district court judge refused to grant summary judgment to defendants on the issue of whether a one-musical-bar drum pattern looped twenty-seven times satisfied the originality requirement. Vargas v. Pfizer, Inc., 418 F. Supp. 2d 369, 372-73 (S.D.N.Y. 2005). In the context of music and literature, “originality” in the sense of “not copied” almost always implies sufficient creativity to get over the minimal Feist threshold. In Vargas, the court seemed most concerned about whether, and the defendants denied that, the full looped composition was independently created. Id. at 374. The court did not address the issue of whether the basic one-bar pattern was too simple to be protected in itself (even if original), although if this issue were decided in favor of the defendant that would have been the end of the matter. Close cases like this can pose interesting challenges to academic copyright theorists, but it is rare that a work valued for its artistic merits is also so simple that it fails to overcome the creativity hurdle.

70. E.g., CCC Information Services, Inc. v. Maclean Hunter Market Reports, Inc., 44 F.3d 61, 66-67 (2nd Cir. 1994)(estimates of used car values by the exercise of professional judgment and expertise show copyright originality); Mason v. Montgomery Data, Inc., 967 F.2d 135, 139-40 (5th Cir. 1992)(skill and judgment in selection of sources, their interpretation, reconciling inconsistencies, and depicting the information meet the creativity requirement for copyright); F.A. Davis Company v. Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc., 2005 WL 1993801, 75 U.S.P.Q.2d 1911 (E.D.Pa. 2005)(creative choice of which lab tests to include in a nurse’s pocket guide showing typical test results leads to copyright protection for the selection); Marshall & Swift v. BS & A Software, 871 F. Supp. 952, 959-61 (W.D. Mich. 1994)(numerical content of cost schedules required by state law to be used in making real estate tax assessments was copyright protected because of the exercise of creative judgment and selection, so inputting that content into a computer program for calculating tax assessments infringed).
organizing or presenting information.\textsuperscript{71} The problem is that all of copyright tradition, including \textit{Feist}, says that the \textit{scope} of copyright protection is determined by the work’s originality.\textsuperscript{72} When creativity is part of the work’s originality, a finding of creativity very naturally leads to copyright protection of the creative elements that are found in the work, even where those elements are more appropriately treated as patent subject matter or should be denied intellectual property protection altogether.\textsuperscript{73}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{71} \textit{E.g.}, Assessment Technologies, LLC v. WIREdata, Inc., 350 F.3d 640, 643 (7th Cir. 2003)(data structure grouping 456 fields into 34 categories meets the originality requirement because no other similar program used the same arrangement and the structure was not obvious or inevitable); American Dental Ass’n v. Delta Dental Plans Associated, 126 F.3d 977, 979 (7th Cir. 1997)(existence of numerous possibilities for categorizing dental information implies that any given choice is creative, including the numerical codes used to designate specific dental procedures); CCC Information Services, Inc. v. Maclean Hunter Market Reports, Inc., 44 F.3d 61, 67-68 (2nd Cir. 1994)(copyright based on choice in dividing national used car market into regions, inclusion of optional features, concept of an “average” vehicle, use of 5000-mile mileage breakpoints, and the number of years to include in a used-car price guide); Key Pubns., Inc. v. Chinatown Today Pub. Ent., 945 F.2d 509, 516 (2nd Cir. 1991)(creative choice of “organizing principle” for categories of businesses to include in a Chinese yellow page directory leads to copyright protection); Kregos v. Associated Press, 97 F.2d 700, 704-05 (2nd Cir. 1991)(choice of nine categories for presenting statistics useful in predicting the results of baseball games will be protected if creative). The Eleventh Circuit has recently upheld a finding of infringement of a kind of multiple listing service for the sale of yachts. BUC Intern'l Corp. v. International Yacht Council Ltd., 2007 WL 1774643. Here, individual yacht sellers supplied the information contained in the database but in a format created by BUC. The defendant IYC sought to create a competing service. Many of the contributors to defendant’s website had already sent the same information to BUC, so they naturally sent it to IYC in the same format. \textit{Id.} at *2. The court say BUC’s idea as “how to present brokers with information about a boat. BUC expressed this idea by selecting certain features of a boat that it thought would be important to brokers, and arranging them according to what [it] thought was the most important information first.” \textit{Id.} at *8. According to this reasoning, a competing service will have to arrange the information differently – even if it gathers all its information independently – notwithstanding that the plaintiff BUC may well have found an optimal or near optimal order for presenting information related to yacht sales.

\bibitem{72} \textit{E.g.}, 499 U.S. at 348 (“Originality remains the \textit{sine qua non} of copyright; accordingly, copyright protection may extend only to those components of a work that are original to the author”).

\bibitem{73} An extreme pre-\textit{Feist} example is the district court opinion in Lotus Development Corp. v. Paperback Software Internat'l, 740 F. Supp. 37 (D. Mass. 1990), holding that a spreadsheet menu command hierarchy is copyright protected. While this holding, along with that of its sister in Lotus Development Corp. v. Borland International, Inc. 799 F. Supp. 203 (D. Mass. 1992), was eventually overturned, 49 F.3d 807 (1st Cir. 1995), \textit{aff’d by an equally divided Court}, 516 U.S. 233 (1996), the court’s reasoning was stunning for its emphasis on creativity over all traditional limitations on copyright protection, especially those based on functionality and section 102(b). In response to defendant’s argument that the Lotus spreadsheet had become a standard, so that other spreadsheet manufacturers had to copy it in order to be competitive, the court stated, “Copyright protection would be perverse if it only protected mundane increments while leaving unprotected as part of the public domain those advancements that are more strikingly innovative.” 740 F. Supp. at 79. Copyright law is not at all perverse when it leave the protection of innovative functionality to the patent and trade secret regimes. That is the essential lesson of \textit{Baker v. Selden}. The district court in \textit{Lotus} simply forgot that these regimes exist, assuming that if copyright did not apply the innovation would be part of the public domain.
Two recent cases illustrate the problem. In Southco, Inc. v. Kanebridge Corp., Judge Alito correctly concluded that part numbers assigned by a manufacturer of a variety of fasteners are not protected by copyright. The plaintiff Southco had developed a numbering system that used a particular digit or group of digits to signify a characteristic of the product in question. Defendant Kanebridge was a Southco competitor that used its own parts numbering system but distributed its products with a comparison chart using Southco’s numbers to show the Southco fastener to which the Kanebridge product was equivalent. Southco asserted copyright infringement, not for use or application of the Southco numbering system but for copying the numbers themselves onto the comparison chart. The court concluded that the part numbers themselves were copyright unprotected because they are the mechanical product of applying the rigid rules of the Southco system. To the dissent’s argument that the part numbers were “expression” rather than idea, Judge Alito responded, “The relevant question is not whether the numbers represent an idea, as opposed to the expression of the idea, but whether the numbers possess the requisite spark of creativity needed for copyright protection.”

While the Third Circuit majority got to the right result in Southco, all the opinions in the case illustrate the pernicious effect of looking for creativity in the copyright analysis. The majority found no creativity in cranking a number out of a formula, but presumably would have considered going the other way had creativity been found. The dissent had no trouble finding

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74. 390 F.3d 276 (3rd Cir. 2004), en banc.

75. The majority opinion correctly states that, because ideas cannot be copyright protected, Southco focused on the part numbers themselves. Id. at 282. The dissent takes issue on this point, notwithstanding Southco’s concession that it “was not claiming infringement by the use of its system for creating part numbers but only in the part numbers themselves.” Id. at 292 n.9 (Roth, J., dissenting and quoting from Southco brief). Judge Roth argued that Southco was conceding only that the idea to develop a coding system was unprotected, as it asserted throughout the litigation that its “coding process” was covered by the copyright. Id. Given that section 102(b) also excludes any “process” from copyright coverage, one wonders how Judge Roth could credit this argument with any merit.

76. Id. at 285.
creativity, because Southco’s system and the resulting parts numbers were only one of many possibilities for expressing the “idea” of using a code to convey product characteristics. Even the concurring opinion of Judge Becker was willing to afford copyright based on creative choices of which characteristics to represent in the system, which values to permit, and the choice of symbols. It concludes that, because the number of such characteristics was limited and dictated by industry standards, consumer preferences, or objective characteristics of the fasteners, the scènes à faire doctrine denied originality.

Judge Roth in dissent even went so far as to say that impairing Kanebridge’s ability to compete with Southco in the market for fasteners was not the type of competition that copyright law is concerned with, citing a notorious dictum in the Apple Computer decision from the early 1980’s in support. It would be hard to make a more profoundly incorrect statement about copyright law than this. To say that copyright does not protect against competition in the underlying product market (as opposed to the market for literary and artistic works as such) is not to say that copyright is unconcerned with its effects on such markets. Most of the most important limitations and exceptions to copyright, such as fair use and section 102(b), serve the purpose of insuring that copyright protection does not interfere with markets beyond that for copies of the work itself.

77. Id. at 292.
78. Id. at 288.
79. Id. at 293; Apple Computer, Inc. v. Franklin Computer Corp., 714 F.2d 1240, 1253 (3rd Cir. 1983).
80. See J.H. Reichman, Computer Programs as Applied Scientific Know-How: Implications of Copyright Protection for Commercialized University Research, 42 VAND. L. REV. 639, 685, 691-92 & n.288 (1989) (copyright is designed to regulate the market for literary and artistic works and its protection of utilitarian works can become a tool for restraining trade in copyright-protected products; functional works have narrow copyrights and copyright is overridden where the reproduction right would interfere with the use of functional features); Dennis S. Karjala, Copyright Protection of Computer Software, Reverse Engineering, and Professor Miller, 19 DAYTON L. REV. 975, 980-81 (1994) (citing cases stressing the importance of insuring that copyright does not displace patent for the protection of functional works); Sega Enterprises Ltd. v. Accolade, Inc., 977 F.2d 1510, 1523-24 (9th Cir. 1992), amended by Order and Amended Opinion, D.C. No. CV-91-3871-BAC, Jan. 6, 1993 (“an attempt to monopolize the market by
Creativity simply should not be an issue in a case like Southco. The critical policy issue is whether Southco should have copyright protection for its numbering system as against a competitor who uses the part numbers derived from the system to identify equivalent parts from both companies. The trial court thought the system should be protected, notwithstanding that it had to some extent become an industry standard. Section 102(b), however, expressly excludes “systems” from the protective coverage of copyright. While there may be some dispute concerning the extent to which the word “system” as used in ordinary speech is an excluded system under section 102(b), given the majority’s prior determination that Southco’s numbering system was not protected, the conclusion that the actual part numbers generated by the system are also unprotected follows as a matter of course. In Baker v. Selden, the forms necessary to implement the unprotected (but surely creative) accounting system were held unprotected, because they were necessary incidents to using the system. Similarly, the number generated by Southco’s system to portray a given copyright-unprotected product, such as a screw, is uniquely making it impossible for others to compete runs counter to the statutory purpose of promoting creative expression”.


The Numbering System, with its unique, non-intuitive and highly complex attributes, easily satisfies the standard for originality. It was created out of nothing, and has developed to some use as an industry standard. . . . It is expandable as new products are developed, and is of use to Southco employees and customers. Each digit represents a different characteristic. Southco decides which digit represents which characteristic. Southco decides which characteristics it will describe with the Numbering System. The Numbering System is original.

82. 17 U.S.C. § 102(b); see supra note 8.

83. Judge Roth in dissent in Southco argued that the “idea” involved in the case was Southco’s decision to use a code to describe its products, so that the particular numbering rules, and the numbers it generated, chosen by Southco to portray its choice of the products’ relevant characteristics, were expression of that idea. 390 F.3d at 291-92. Judge Roth further treated “idea” and “system” as largely interchangeable but says that “system” can also be used to indicate the means by which an idea is implemented. Thus, the “system” in question is merely the expression of Southco’s idea. Id. at 292 n.9. This approach to section 102(b) would largely if not wholly read the word “system” out of the statute. The statute is clear: Copyright protection in a given work does not extend to any idea, system, procedure, method of operation, concept, and so forth. Copyright may perhaps protect a few things that in ordinary language might be classified as a “system,” but it behooves anyone who chooses to use any of the section 102(b) terms to describe an element of a work to explain, by rational argument, why copyright protection is not denied by that fundamental provision of the statute.

84. 101 U.S. 99, 103-04 (1879).
necessary in using the system to describe that product. Consequently, the part numbers themselves are unprotected as necessary incidents of the use of a copyright-unprotected system, regardless of whether they, or the system, are creative.

_F.A. Davis Company V. Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc._ is another example of a court’s going wrong by focusing on creativity as a necessary and sufficient condition for copyright protection. At issue was a set of pocket reference guides designed for use by nurses in the field as a quick reference to data that they might need in counseling and treating patients. The court’s analysis starts from “the basic principle of copyright law . . . [that] a work will be protected if it evinces even a minimal level of originality or creativity,” which is to say (incorrectly) that a minimum level of creativity is sufficient for copyright protection. The court found nearly verbatim copying of a blank form to be used by nurses in assessing a patient’s condition – a form that guided the nurses step-by-step through the information they would need to obtain from the patient. The plaintiff’s work also contained a section listing common laboratory tests related to a variety of topics, and included a range of expected values for each test. The author sought to select and organize the tests that she thought “would be the most useful to nurses and nursing students.” The court noted that different quick reference guides used different laboratory tests and headings. The defendant listed all of the same tests as plaintiff but for about ten, organized under virtually the same topic headings: “Significantly, Defendant has copied not the factual aspect of this section (the lab values), but rather the subjective, creative aspect of this section (the inclusion of certain laboratory tests over others).” The court therefore found a likelihood of

86. _Id._ at 511.
87. _Id._ at 514-15.
88. _Id._ at 515.
infringement for purposes of a motion for summary judgment with respect to the blank forms and the lab test section.

Setting aside for the moment the blank form problem, basing copyright on creativity in the choice of lab tests to be included in a pocket reference guide for nurses forces every maker of such guides to make other choices, even where the first person’s choice is optimal. In F.A. Davis, the plaintiff sought to select the tests she thought would be most useful to nurses. The existence of other guides containing a different set of tests does not show that the choices are just a matter of personal taste. More likely it shows plaintiff’s belief that the earlier guides were not as useful to nurses, and to the extent that she is correct, her own guide comes closer to an optimum. No one can say exactly when an “optimum” has been achieved, but the primary way we get closer to such optimums is by trial and error. Copyright in any given selection prevents others from trying to improve further by making minor adjustments – and if plaintiff has achieved something close to an optimum, she will have a very long-term monopoly in that optimal methodology for delivering information.

As a policy matter seeking to cure market failure, what calls for protection in a case like this is precisely what Feist says cannot be protected by the copyright, namely, the plaintiff’s efforts in collecting and verifying the accuracy of the expected ranges for the tests she included in her reference guide. It is impossible on market failure grounds to justify protection afforded to

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89. For a discussion of the relationship of blank forms to our creativity focus, see infra text accompanying notes 111-119. Courts split three ways on the copyright protectability of blank forms: Some deny copyright altogether, some recognize a copyright but afford only “thin” protection so that essentially only verbatim copying infringes, and some find creativity in the selection or arrangement of items to be filled in and would find infringement by any form seeking substantially similar information. See Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 482-84. When blank forms are viewed as a tool by which the user acquires information from those who fill out the form, copyright’s poor fit as a protective scheme becomes apparent. Forms are designed for ease of use, including expectations based on prior use by the form fillers, and accuracy and completeness in the information sought. In medical and similar contexts, there will often be an optimal or near optimal selection of information that is most useful, and these optimums are achieved by incremental improvement, as users make changes, often based on feedback from users, to better meet their needs. Id. at 484-85.
such efforts for the long term of copyright, but because independent collection of identical information would not infringe even if “sweat” protection were recognized, subsequent authors seeking to supply improved reference guides could compete with the same quality product.

When courts use creativity in the selection of tests to be supplied as the touchstone for copyright protection, a subsequent author infringes even if, as in the actual F.A. Davis case, she does her own legwork in collecting the information relevant to the tests chosen, and even if she believes that the tests chosen for presentation are an optimal set.

There are many more examples, ranging from “created” facts in compilations and maps, valuations, systems and methods for presenting and organizing information
valuations than that of cases like CCC Information and Kapes. In all these cases, people are trying to establish the single correct value of something. While different experts will come up with different numbers, in principle there is only one correct number, just as there is only one correct way to arrange the fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls to reproduce the originals. Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 478. The social goal is not to have a variety of esthetically pleasing guesses about these numbers but rather to have as close an approximation as possible to the actual value, and that is something that is achieved most efficiently by allowing incremental improvement by others. If market failure inhibits the creation of such numerical valuations in the first place, we can consider applying copyright (clumsy though that would be given its long period of protection) or appealing to the legislature for sui generis legislation that supplies an appropriate degree of protection. Creativity in the production of such numbers, however, is wholly irrelevant.

Feist's creativity requirement actually sends them in the opposite direction.

C. Expansion of the Notion of "Compilation"

(valuations than that of cases like CCC Information and Kapes. In all these cases, people are trying to establish the single correct value of something. While different experts will come up with different numbers, in principle there is only one correct number, just as there is only one correct way to arrange the fragments of the Dead Sea Scrolls to reproduce the originals. Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 478. The social goal is not to have a variety of esthetically pleasing guesses about these numbers but rather to have as close an approximation as possible to the actual value, and that is something that is achieved most efficiently by allowing incremental improvement by others. If market failure inhibits the creation of such numerical valuations in the first place, we can consider applying copyright (clumsy though that would be given its long period of protection) or appealing to the legislature for sui generis legislation that supplies an appropriate degree of protection. Creativity in the production of such numbers, however, is wholly irrelevant.

93. Kregos v. Associated Press, 937 F.2d 700 (2nd Cir. 1991)(creativity in the choice of categories for presenting information concerning the pitchers starting in upcoming baseball games is sufficient to confer copyright protection).

94. Key Pubs., Inc. v. Chinatown Today Pub. Ent., 945 F.2d 509, 516 (2nd Cir. 1991)(creativity in the "organizing principle" for the categories in a Chinese yellow page directory protected by copyright – with no explicit recognition that section 102(b) precludes the protection of any "principle").

95. American Dental Ass’n v. Delta Dental Plans Associated, 126 F.3d 977, 979 (7th Cir. 1997)(exercise of professional judgment and expertise in devising a taxonomy of dental procedures is creative because there are many ways of classifying such procedures); Practice Management Information Corp. v. American Medical Ass'n, 121 F.3d 516, 521 (9th Cir. 1997)(copyright held to protect, but for copyright misuse, a "coding system" that assigned numbers to 6,000 medical procedures).

96. Kepner-Tregoe, Kepner-Tregoe, Inc. v. Leadership Software, Inc., 12 F.3d 527 (5th Cir. 1994).(creative methodology for teaching managerial leadership and decisionmaking protected and infringed even by a system that delivered the same content with different words).

97. Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 468-517.
Feist dealt with a particular type of copyright subject matter, namely, a compilation. The language of the statute was perfectly adequate to allow the Court to decide the case as it did, without reference to the Constitution.98 By constitutionalizing the analysis, however, the Court set lower courts off on the search for creativity as a sufficient condition for protection of any work, and not only creativity in general but specifically creativity in so-called “selection or arrangement.” The reasoning thus comes full circle and everything becomes a “compilation.”

Section 102(a) of the Copyright Act supplies a nonexclusive list of types of works that can qualify for copyright protection, such as literary works, musical works, and sound recordings.99 It goes on in section 103(a) to specify that the “subject matter of copyright as specified by section 102 includes compilations and derivative works.”100 The basis for protecting creative “selection or arrangement” in compilations derives from the statutory definition of “compilation” as a collection of preexisting materials or data whose selection, coordination, or arrangement makes the work as a whole an original work of authorship.101 This special treatment was presumably thought necessary to insure that the protectable elements of compilations and derivative works, if otherwise eligible for copyright protection, would not be excluded on the

98. See supra notes 32-33 and accompanying text.
99. Section 102(a) reads as follows:

   Copyright protection subsists, in accordance with this title, in original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression, now known or later developed, from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device. Works of authorship include the following categories:
   (1) literary works;
   (2) musical works, including any accompanying words;
   (3) dramatic works, including any accompanying music;
   (4) pantomimes and choreographic works;
   (5) pictorial, graphic, and sculptural works;
   (6) motion pictures and other audiovisual works;
   (7) sound recordings; and
   (8) architectural works.

100. 17 U.S.C. § 103(a).
ground that they were not copyright subject matter. It does not remove the other limitations on copyright protection, such as section 102(b), the merger and scènes á faire doctrines, or the Baker v. Selden channeling principle that functional subject matter (as defined above\textsuperscript{102} be subject to the patent (or trade secret) rather than the copyright regime. It most surely does not assimilate all of copyright subject matter specified in section 102(a) into the “compilation” definition.

If we take a very literal approach, there is likely no work of authorship that is not a “compilation.” A novel, for example, is a selection and arrangement of words (or letters), a musical work is a selection and arrangement of notes, and a painting is a selection and arrangement of forms and colors. Indeed, even patent subject matter becomes a “compilation” under this approach. A car, for example, is a selection and arrangement of parts. It only complicates, and therefore potentially confuses, the analysis to treat such works as “compilations,” protectable under copyright if the selection or arrangement of their compositional materials is “creative.”\textsuperscript{103} The functional nature of automobiles takes them out of copyright altogether, regardless of how creatively their various components have been selected and arranged.\textsuperscript{104}

Yet, many courts and commentators, especially after Feist, have adopted precisely this approach. One can understand how courts dealing with subject matter categories for compilations and taxonomies have fallen into this error. After all, a compilation is a collection

\textsuperscript{102} See \textit{supra} notes 39-50 and accompanying text.

\textsuperscript{103} See \textit{Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra} note 38, at 484 n.182.

\textsuperscript{104} Of course, an original “selection and arrangement” of public domain colors in paint on a canvas will be protected by copyright, but not as a “compilation” but rather as a pictorial work. Similarly, a toy bear made up of individually unprotected features, such as button eyes and sewn mouth, will be protected if those features are combined in a unique (or at least uncopied) way. Boyds Collection, Ltd. v. Bearington Collection, Inc., 360 F. Supp. 2d 655, 664 (M.D. Pa. 2005). The bear, however, qualifies as a sculptural work, so there is no need to bring “compilations” into the analysis.
of facts or other materials, so if the categories into or by which those materials are selected or arranged are “creative,” it would seem almost inevitable that those categories define the statutorily required “selection, coordination, or arrangement.” Yellow page classification categories, however, as well as medical- and dental-procedure taxonomies, are parts of a system for delivering information to consumers in a user friendly and standardized way. Like a system for numbering replacement parts, these classification schemes are amenable to incremental improvement in things like the efficiency and ease with which users can find and apply the information they need. They are therefore functional in the sense that has


106. Practice Management Information Corp. v. American Medical Ass'n, 121 F.3d 516, 521 (9th Cir. 1997) (coding system for medical procedures copyright protected).


108. See Robert Dorit, By Any Other Name, 95 SCIENTIST, No. 2, March-April 2007, available at http://www.americanscientist.org/template/AssetDetail/assetid/54776 (arguing that the categories we create for naming diseases are the starting points for specific therapies and that the nomenclature goes well beyond semantics – everything from diagnosis to cure depends on getting the name right).

109. See supra notes 74-84 and accompanying text.

110. Standardization is also an important consideration with many of these classification schemes. It was argued in the American Dental Association case that the modifications the defendant desired to make would impede communications by introducing nonstandard terms and categories. 126 F.3d at 981. Within any given industry, some means of insuring an appropriate degree of uniformity is almost surely desirable. The issue is whether each professional group should work out on its own how to set and vary standards or whether intellectual property law should supply the enforcement power to the creator of the basic standard. See Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 499 n.245. Most professional organizations have reasons independent of intellectual property inducements to develop standards, and recognizing copyright rights in such standard classification schemes can prevent the kind of tinkering around the edges that often leads to systemic improvements.

Model codes are another example of works designed for a functional goal, namely, to regulate the affairs of people subject to them when adopted into law, that can be and usually are incrementally improved by the tinkering of many. The Sixth Circuit has recognized that, once a model code is adopted into law, it may be freely copied, as the law of the jurisdiction in question (as opposed to the model law proposed by the author). Veck v. Southern Building Code Congress Internat'l, Inc., 293 F.3d 791 (5th Cir. 2002) (en banc). It would treat the model code as protected, however, until adopted into law, meaning that others could not use it as a base for further improvements. See generally Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra note 38, at 500-05. A federal district court recently seized on this distinction in holding that a model code resulting from extensive collaboration among code officials, commentators, and professional staff was sufficiently creative to be covered by copyright. International Code Council, Inc. v. National Fire Protection Ass'n, 2006 WL850879, at *15 (N.D. Ill. 2006). While the court considered the possibility of merger, it did not look at the more basic limitations on copyright deriving from the functionality principle and Baker v.
traditionally distinguished patent and copyright subject matter and should be excluded from copyright protection under section 102(b).

A similar choice-of-category issue arises for the long-troublesome problem of blank forms. Baker v. Selden denied copyright protection to a blank form necessary to the implementation of a copyright-unprotected accounting system,\(^\text{111}\) and a Copyright Office regulation would deny copyright to forms that “are designed for recording information and do not in themselves convey information.”\(^\text{112}\) Still, even before Feist courts sometimes struggled to protect what they saw as a creative way of seeking information,\(^\text{113}\) and in Kregos v. Associated Press\(^\text{114}\) the Second Circuit treated the choice of categories for a blank “pitching form” for baseball games as a compilation,\(^\text{115}\) basing copyright protection solely on the creativity in the selection of those categories.\(^\text{116}\) To the extent we believe that predicting the results of baseball games is independent of the information on which experts (whether self-appointed or otherwise) base their predictions, the choice of categories for such a pitching form can be treated as essentially subjective, like the proverbial list of the 100 Best Restaurants of X. On the other hand, if we believe that some items of information are better than others for making predictions of baseball games (or earthquakes, or heart attacks), recognizing copyright in the choice of items

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\(^{111}\) Selden. Again, “creativity” was enough for copyright protection.

\(^{112}\) See supra text accompanying note 84.

\(^{113}\) 37 C.F.R. § 202.1(c).

\(^{114}\) E.g., Norton Printing Co. v. Augustana Hospital, 155 U.S.P.Q. 133, 134-35 (N.D. Ill. 1967)(suggesting that originality and intellectual effort in the design of forms should lead to protection).

\(^{115}\) 937 F.2d 700 (2nd Cir. 1991).

\(^{116}\) Id. at 706.

\(^{117}\) Id. at 704-05, 709; see also Advanz Behavioral Management Resources, Inc. v. Miraflor, 21 F. Supp. 2d 1179, 1191 (C.D. Cal. 1998)(denying copyright under Ninth Circuit precedent but arguing that “creative expression” in the selection of topics covered by a blank form deserved protection).
chosen for analysis risks giving a long-term monopoly to the first person who comes up with the optimal set of choices and inhibits incremental improvement in methodologies for making such predictions.\textsuperscript{117} The proper analysis of a blank form, therefore, is not as a “compilation” but rather as a literary or graphic work.\textsuperscript{118} As such we might seek to alleviate the worst type of market failure by protecting blank forms thinly against slavish copying, but its function as an information-delivery tool strongly cautions against any stronger copyright protection.\textsuperscript{119}

Courts have not limited their “compilation” analysis, moreover, to methodologies for classifying information. For example, in \textit{Aaron Basha Corp. v. Felix B. Vollman, Inc.},\textsuperscript{120} the court treated jewelry pendants in the form of baby shoes as a compilation of specific choices concerning size, shape, proportion, and ornamentation as well as coordination and arrangement of the ornamental features.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly, the court in \textit{Compaq Computer Corp. v. Ergonome, Inc.}\textsuperscript{122} treated seven phrases and four illustrations in a book about the ergonomic use of computers as a

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{117} Professor Durham has pointed out that the approach of Kregos actually confers a broader copyright than one in a validly predictive formula for combining the factors, because the formula would necessarily use the factors. Alan L. Durham, \textit{Speaking of the World: Fact, Opinion and the Originality Standard of Copyright}, 33 \textit{Ariz. St. L.J.} 791, 835 (2001).
\item \textsuperscript{118} The Ninth Circuit in Bibbero Systems, Inc. v. Colwell Systems, Inc., 893 F.2d 1104, 1108 n.3 (9th Cir. 1990) thus correctly refused to treat the medical insurance form in question as a compilation once it had denied copyright protection as a literary or graphic work under the blank-form doctrine.
\item \textsuperscript{119} \textit{Distinguishing Subject Matter, supra} note 38, at 485.
\item \textsuperscript{120} 88 F. Supp. 2d 226, 230 (S.D.N.Y. 2000).
\item \textsuperscript{121} \textit{See also} Lone Wolf McQuade Assocs. V. CBS Inc., 961 F. Supp. 587, 594 (S.D.N.Y. 1997)(treating a copyright-protectable film character alternatively as a nonfactual compilation of carefully selected traits). Fortunately, the \textit{Aaron Basha} court’s unnecessary treatment of jewelry as a compilation did not interfere with its infringement analysis; the court denied infringement based on absence of similarity in the expressive details and the “total concept and feel” of the works in question. 88 F. Supp. 2d at 232.
\item \textsuperscript{122} 137 F. Supp. 2d 768 (S.D. Tex. 2001).
\end{itemize}
protectable selection and arrangement of the individually unprotected elements and expressly refused to distinguish the protectability of compilations from other types of works.\footnote{123}{Id. at 772-73. The court even cited with approval the district court opinion Lotus Development Corp. v. Borland International, Inc., 831 F. Supp. 223, 231 (D. Mass.1993), \textit{rev’d} \textit{by an equally divided Court}, 516 U.S. 233 (1996), which treated an interface menu command hierarchy as a protectable compilation. 137 F. Supp. 2d at 774.}

More serious problems can result from applying \textit{Feist}'s selection and arrangement rationale to functional works or works, such as histories, biographies, or rule books, for which the scope of protection is thin in order not too severely to inhibit the efforts of later authors seeking to deal with the same material. For example, in \textit{Open Source Yogan Unity v. Choudhury},\footnote{124}{74 U.S.P.Q.2d 1434 (N.D. Cal. 2005), 2005 WL 756558, at *4.} the court concluded that a sequence of public domain yoga exercises would be protected as a compilation if arranged in a sufficiently creative manner. The copyright claimant asserted not only that he arranged the exercises in an esthetically pleasing manner but also in the best design to improve the user's health.\footnote{125}{Id. at 469. His analysis is based heavily on the notion that the design of a computer program involves the real creativity, while the coding is often routine. \textit{Id.} at 452-53. He is very likely correct in this regard, which strikingly demonstrates the danger of basing copyright on notions of “creativity.” Mr. Wilkins’ perfect logic gets the intellectual property policy exactly backwards. The policy basis for protecting computer software under copyright instead of relegating programs, which are functional works under anybody’s definition, to their fate under patent and trade secret is that the \textit{object code} is subject to market failure (whether or not it is creative, although we may assume that original code passes the low \textit{Feist} threshold). That is, code is expensive to create and cheap to copy, and most programs are ineligible for any...} However, if he \textit{has} come up with a new and nonobvious way of improving health, he should be eligible for a method patent. Copyright should not be used to circumvent the substantive requirements of patent law for functional works.

Courts have taken similar approaches with respect to various aspects of computer programs. For example, in \textit{Softel, Inc. v. Dragon Medical & Scientific Communs., Inc.},\footnote{126}{118 F.3d 955, 963-64 (2nd Cir. 1997). See also Jon S. Wilkins, Note, \textit{Protecting Computer Programs as Compilations under Computer Associates V. Altai}, 104 \textit{YALE L.J.} 435 (1994). Mr. Wilkins concludes, “Comparing software to traditional works of compilation and considering the principles used to protect compilations strongly suggest that courts should protect the selection and arrangement of computer programs.” \textit{Id.} at 469. His analysis is based heavily on the notion that the design of a computer program involves the real creativity, while the coding is often routine. \textit{Id.} at 452-53. He is very likely correct in this regard, which strikingly demonstrates the danger of basing copyright on notions of “creativity.” Mr. Wilkins’ perfect logic gets the intellectual property policy exactly backwards. The policy basis for protecting computer software under copyright instead of relegating programs, which are functional works under anybody’s definition, to their fate under patent and trade secret is that the \textit{object code} is subject to market failure (whether or not it is creative, although we may assume that original code passes the low \textit{Feist} threshold). That is, code is expensive to create and cheap to copy, and most programs are ineligible for any...}
court concluded that a creative combination of functions performed by a computer program was protected as a compilation, and therefore even independently written code performing the same functions could infringe.127 This effectively protects SSO at a very high level of abstraction, namely, at the level of the overall functions performed by the program, and ignores the carefully drawn limits on the protection of computer software established in the seminal case of Computer Associates Internat'l Inc. v. Altai.128 Similar errors have been made with respect to the functional aspects of user interfaces. For example, in Compaq Computer Corp. v. Procom Technology, Inc.,129 threshold values for five parameters related to a computer hard drive and used as input to a computer program that analyzed the risk of hard drive failure were held to constitute a copyright-protected compilation. Determining the optimal values for the parameters and using them together with a computer program to determine the risk of hard drive failure can lead to a patented method, provided the requirements of patent law are met. Protecting the set of values as a patent protection because they incorporate no nonobvious advance in the art of using computers to accomplish the functions of the program. Creative program design and SSO are not subject to the same type of market failure and, in any event, are protectable under patent law if they comply with patent’s more stringent requirements. There is therefore no policy basis for bringing noncode functionality under the copyright umbrella. This analysis is also supported by the statutory definition of a “computer program” in section 101 of the Copyright Act. See, e.g., See Dennis S. Karjala, A Coherent Theory for the Copyright Protection of Computer Software and Recent Judicial Interpretations, 66 U. CINCINNATI L. REV. 53, 66-77 (1997)(hereinafter A Coherent Theory).

127. See also Secureinfo Corp. v. Telos Corp., 387 F. Supp. 2d 593, 612 (E.D. Va. 2005)(stating that nonliteral program elements, even if individually unprotected, may be protected if compiled in a unique or creative way); Positive Software Solutions v. New Century Mortgage Corp., 259 F. Supp. 2d 531, 535 (N.D. Tex. 2003)(holding that data structures designed to interoperate with a program written in Structured Query Language (SQL) were copyright protected because they had the requisite degree of creative expression); eScholar, LLC v. Otis Educ. Systems, Inc., WL 2977569, at *16-17, 76 U.S.P.Q.2d 1880 (S.D.N.Y. 2005)(overall selection and arrangement of the fields in a data model constituting a new way to order and process preexisting data may be copyright protected). For a critical analysis of the Softel decision, see Dennis S. Karjala, Copyright Protection of Computer Program Structure, 64 BROOKLYN L. REV. 519 (1998). The Positive Software court confessed to “some puzzlement” over the argument that commercial compatibility might trump copyright in the computer software area on the ground that traditional copyright subject matter would never allow entertaining such reasoning. 259 F. Supp. 2d at 536 n.9. The court thus wholly failed to see the important limitations on software copyrights that are necessitated by software’s functionality. See supra note 126.

128. 982 F.2d 693 (2nd Cir. 1992)(establishing the abstraction-filtration-comparison test for the copyright protection of computer program structure, sequence, and organization). Properly applied, the Computer Associates test allows protection solely for literal program code and close paraphrases of that code. A Coherent Theory, supra note 126, at 80-81.

compilation under copyright reduces competition in the copyright-unprotected hard-drive market and allows copyright to make an end run around the stricter requirements of patent law.

One of the more extreme applications of compilation analysis to user interfaces occurred in *Engineering Dynamics, Inc. v. Structural Software, Inc.* This case involved formats for inputting data into programs for engineering structural analysis. The Fifth Circuit concluded that arranging several dozen inputs formed a copyright-protectable work, because the result was only one of many ways for expressing a mode of computerized structural analysis. While the court later says that we must be “cautious” in applying copyright to functional works, it paid at best lip service to *Baker v. Selden* and section 102(b). The opinion actually states that the plaintiff had refined its input formats to accommodate users’ desire for greater speed, flexibility, and ease of operation. That alone should have raised serious questions of whether the input formats were an unprotectable “method of operation” under section 102(b). The court also implicitly recognized the importance of incremental improvability in noting that the defendant’s program managed to perform the same functions as plaintiff’s with significantly fewer inputs but thought

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130. 26 F.3d 1335 (5th Cir. 1994), supplemented 46 F.3d 408 (5th Cir. 1995).

131. Actually, the plaintiff in this case did not register the underlying program and relied on its registered user manuals, which specified the input formats in question. *Id.* at 1339.

132. *Id.* at 1342. The court thus fell into the trap of treating the absence of merger – that is, the existence of many ways to accomplish a given function – with the creativity necessary to sustain a copyright. That absence of merger alone cannot lead to copyright protection is shown by *Baker v. Selden* itself. There are infinitely many ways of doing accounting. The existence of many other accounting system possibilities does not lead to protection of the specific system chosen, because it remains functional and is properly considered for intellectual property protection, if at all, under patent law. See *A Coherent Theory*, supra note 126, at 81-82. A number of cases take a similar approach, especially in the computer software arena. E.g., Harbor Software, Inc. v. Applied Systems, Inc., 925 F. Supp. 1042, 1049 (S.D.N.Y. 1996)(programming choices regarding the structure by which a user initiates a process could be made in other ways so the plaintiff’s particular choice was protected). Professor Clifford concludes that *Feist’s* creativity approach to copyright originality leads to the conclusion that a finding of intellectual creativity depends solely on (1) multiple ways to express something and (2) an actual selection by the author from the available array of choices. Ralph D. Clifford, *supra* note 20, at 295. He may well be correct about the requirements of *Feist*. However, regardless of how we go about determining the existence of creativity under *Feist*, the limitations on copyright protection contained in section 102(b) and the functionality doctrine of *Baker v. Selden* remain.

133. 26 F.3d at 1338.
this strengthened the case for copyright protection by showing the existence of “creativity” in choosing the format. 134 So again we see “creativity” misused to bring patent subject matter into the copyright camp. In analyzing the harms caused by this approach, we should note that the input formats inform not only the human being concerning what data to input, which under incremental improvability reasoning should be enough to deny copyright protection, like a blank form or classification system. The input formats also “inform” the computer program that analyzes the data. Once the formats are chosen, regardless of how efficient the choice is, the program will not work properly unless data is supplied in the chosen format, and no competing program can accept a user’s already assembled and entered data without using the same formats. 135

CONCLUSION

134. Id. at 1346.

135. A Coherent Theory, supra note 126, at 108. Judge Posner similarly concluded that a data structure involving 456 fields grouped into 34 categories was not so obvious or inevitable as to lack the minimal originality required by copyright although infringement was denied on other grounds. Assessment Technologies, LLC v. WIREData, Inc., 350 F.3d 640, 643 (7th Cir. 2003). Again, we see the absence of merger treated as sufficient to confer copyright protection, without any discussion of the limitations arising from Baker v. Selden or section 102(b). In Madison River Management Co. v. Business Management Software Corp., 387 F. Supp. 2d 521 (M.D. N.C. 2005), the plaintiff Madison supplied data to the defendant BMS, which organized the data in a relational database. Madison made nightly “snapshots” of the database for the purpose of preparing reports using the data Madison supplied. After a dispute between the parties over Madison’s alleged overuse of the database, Madison brought suit and BMS asserted copyright infringement as a counterclaim, based on the nightly snapshots. The court concluded that subjecting the raw data to the database structure designed by BMS involved sufficient originality to give copyright in the database, via BMS’s copyright in the software governing the database. Id. at 535. Moreover, in denying Madison summary judgment on fair use, the court emphasized that the database structure constituted “the very advantage of running the reports from the [BMS] database instead of from raw data.” Id. at 537. The court thus failed to recognize the functionality of the structure that it was protecting under copyright. Structuring the database created a method of operation for using and manipulating the stored data just as the menu command hierarchy in Lotus created a method of operation for using the Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheet program. Lotus Development Corp. v. Borland International, Inc., 49 F.3d 807 (1st Cir. 1995), aff’d by an equally divided Court, 516 U.S. 233 (1996). Again, the search for “creativity” blinded the court to the functionality and section 102(b) limitations on copyright protection.
Even as a necessary condition to copyright protection, creativity badly interferes with the policy goal of using copyright to avoid market failure. Accepting, however, that the current statutory definition of “compilation” requires creativity as a necessary condition for that particular class of copyright-protected work, courts must bear in mind that creativity is not a sufficient condition for copyright. Indeed, because intellectual property policy requires that creative works can receive either copyright protection, patent protection, or no protection at all, “creativity” should be banned from the copyright analysis (or, in the case of compilations, at least after it is determined that the Feist threshold has been met). Instead, functionality (properly defined) and section 102(b) should channel works (or elements of works) either to the patent or copyright regimes, after which their protectability under those regimes and the scope of their protection can be determined in accordance with the principles appropriate to each regime.