

2 PLAGIARISM AND PROMISCUITY, AUTHORS AND PLAGIARISMS

RUSSEL WIEBE

When I was about 19 years old, a dissolute and desperate character, at least in my imagination of myself, a friend of mine was attending Everett Community College. He had been asked to produce a book report on Rollo May's *The Courage to Create* for a psychology class he was taking. He had determined that he did not have enough time to read the book and produce the requisite book report and asked me if I would do it in exchange for a case of beer. "Sure," I said. I read the book and produced a poor, but (barely) passing, report on the book's strengths and weaknesses. My friend passed the course. He didn't get caught. As an outsider to the entire enterprise of the academy, I didn't then, and maybe don't now, feel much in the way of guilt for my violation of academic codes of conduct. My friend never got a college degree; I doubt he ever reflects back upon this exchange. But I have occasion to think of it every time the subject of cheating comes up in one of my classes.

The classroom conversation about cheating, at least as I've observed it in classrooms over about 20 years, simply takes cheating of whatever stripe as a given. If I ask a question like "who has cheated in school?," it's the rare class in which there is more than one "no, I've never cheated" response. Far more common are the classes in which everyone admits that they've cheated. In the conversation that ensues, there is almost always both derision toward the claim that anyone might really assert that they are innocent and a pretty willing acknowledgment of shared guilt. In an abstract way, students seem to think that cheating is so much the norm that admitting it hardly needs cover. Of those

unanimous or nearly unanimous in agreement, only a few are willing to say that anything at all is wrong with the practice. The airline pilot who cheated to get his pilot's license or the surgeon doing "your mother's surgery" who cheated his or her way through medical school usually elicits a response that differentiates those activities, which are real and therefore have consequences, from school tasks, which are largely "unreal" and therefore, outside the realm of ethical consideration.

At some point in that classroom conversation, some student will ask me if I have ever cheated. Just a little sheepishly, I tell the story of my foray into ghost-writing. Maybe like many of my students, I tell that story as a kind of rationalization. After all, I seem to claim, that is the worst of what I have done in the way of academic dishonesty. It was barely cheating. Despite more years of school than I like to count and more situations in which it might have been easy to cheat—to turn in someone else's paper, to look over the shoulder at someone else's calculus answer sheet, or to peek at the proper third-person possessive of some German verb or the dative case "Stan, Stane, Stanes" (which I'm sure even now is the wrong string of Anglo-Saxon words)—I only note this one single example of academic dishonesty. Excluded from that account are all of the lies of omission and commission that I have told and not told in order to wrangle an extension on a paper or postpone the date of a dreaded exam on rat psychology or the Franco-Prussian war. I guess that in the hierarchy of cheating these examples of dishonesty seem to fall into some other category of behavior than simple cheating, which points to a key problem with any consideration of plagiarism, which is just where it fits in the hierarchy of cheating, or what campus policies call "academic dishonesty" or, as Barclay Barrios' institution calls it, "academic irregularity" (see this volume). Because categories like "academic dishonesty" and academic honesty are so fraught with ambiguity, that definition (let alone action based on those definitional attempts) seems almost impossible.

As the Internet has inevitably entered our classrooms as well as student dorm rooms, cafes, bars, airport terminals, and many other places, the simplicity of cheating appears to have increased in some exponential way. It's no longer necessary to creep into the office after hours, sneak a folder out of a filing cabinet, and make copies to appropriate another's text. All you have to do is hack a password or find an obscure repository of textual information and claim it. It's easy to cheat on the Internet; multiple articles in the *Chronicle*, *Newsweek*, and daily newspapers notice and decry the increase in academic dishonesty of all kinds. In a study on Internet plagiarism among college students, Patrick Scanlon and David Neumann (2002) surveyed the recent public attention that student cheating has received. They noted that "a perception reflected in media

accounts is that acts of academic dishonesty among students in college as well as high school have increased sharply” (p. 374). Rebecca Moore Howard (2001) wrote in *The Chronicle Review* that “if you are a professor in the United States and you have a pulse, you have heard about the problem of Internet plagiarism” (p. B 24). Several contemporary Web sites highlight both the apparent ubiquity of Internet cheating and the tone of some academic responses to the problem. The Web site Plagiarism Stoppers (2008) includes a statement that posits:

Plagiarism is a rapidly growing problem in many venues today. Because it is so easy to locate information using the Internet, students have given in to the temptation to take materials and use them for their own. This needs to be addressed by all who are in the education field—by teaching the observance of proper citation and copyright compliance AND by making sure our students know that stealing someone else’s work is wrong.

Another Web site, Plagiarized.com (2008) queries:

Think plagiarism detection services are the answer? Think again! These services don’t catch “custom essays”, and they don’t catch plagiarism when the original work isn’t already in the digital domain. If you rely on detection, you are doing a disservice to your students. Do your research. Take a look at some of the custom essay services (they probably have ads on this page). If you are thinking of spending precious resources on these services, you should take on the role of a student to test their detection rates. Buy some custom essays, have them scanned by the services you are considering. The fact is detection services help to catch the cheaters who fall into the “not so bright” category. Smart cheaters can skate circles around these services. Well designed and original curriculum, attention to detail, and a true understanding of the plagiarism problem throughout your institution are the keys to dealing effectively with the issue.

I could multiply such complaints a thousand—maybe a hundred thousand—fold. Plagiarism, it seems, is everywhere. And perhaps we have even started to notice how common plagiarism is among at least some of the more high profile among us. As I drafted this chapter, Joe Biden, an admitted—

though perhaps accidental—plagiarist, had just become our vice president-elect and Doris Kearns Goodwin, yet another apparently inadvertent plagiarist, commented upon his election both through live online coverage and in static written text.

I begin with my story of “academic dishonesty” not to court academic embarrassment—though I’ve agonized about the confession—but to suggest that it is probably the rare academic who has not engaged in some form of “dishonesty” in school or in our professional lives. Perhaps any consideration of plagiarism—whatever we might think plagiarism is—would be well-served to consider and empathize with all of the simple and complex behaviors that “academic dishonesty” encompasses.

Michel Foucault (1984) wrote that

The coming into being of the notion of “author” constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of idea, knowledge, literature, philosophy, and the sciences. Even today, when we reconstruct the history of a concept, literary genre, or school of philosophy, such categories seem relatively weak, secondary, and superimposed scansions in comparison with the solid and fundamental unit of the author and the work. (p. 101)

In asking questions like “who is the author?” or “to whom does this work belong?” we are simply asking whether or not the work is plagiarized. Is it plagiarized? Is it a fraud? Is it “genuine?” We thus find ourselves in a definitional abyss.

In an attempt to define just what should be considered plagiarism and what should be seen to fall outside that definition, Moore Howard (1995) has suggested three categories that we might consider: cheating, non-attribution, and patchwriting. She continues:

It is perhaps never the case that a writer composes “original” material, free of any influence. It might be more accurate to think of creativity, of fresh combinations made from existing sources, or fresh implications for existing materials. An important requirement of most academic writing is acknowledging one’s sources. We all work from sources, even when we

are being creative. American academic culture demands that writers who use the exact words of a source supply quotation marks at the beginning and end of the quotation, so that the reader can know where the voice of the source begins and ends. In addition, the writer must use footnotes, parenthetical notes, or endnotes to cite the source, so that the reader can consult that source if he or she chooses. Writers must also acknowledge the sources not only of words but also of ideas, insofar as is possible, even when they are not quoting word for word. Moreover, in final-draft writing, academic writers may not paraphrase a source by using its phrases and sentences, with a few changes in grammar or word choice—even when the source is cited. Plagiarism is the representation of a source's words or ideas as one's own. Plagiarism occurs when a writer fails to supply quotation marks for exact quotations; fails to cite the sources of his or her ideas; or adopts the phrasing of his or her sources, with changes in grammar or word choice. (pp. 798-799)

As Moore Howard suggested, in academic writing, at least, there is no simple “originality,” no such work that simply jumps from the student's mind to the page in some unmediated way.

Brian Martin (1994) offered two interesting lists of plagiarism types. The first might serve as a kind of taxonomy and the second raises what might seem to be some embarrassing questions about academic and social practice in the realm of “acceptable plagiarisms.” Martin wrote that “the most obvious and provable plagiarism occurs when someone copies phrases or passages out of a published work without using quotation marks, without acknowledging the source, or both. This can be called word-for-word plagiarism. When some of the words are changed, but not enough, the result can be called paraphrasing plagiarism.” This sort of “paraphrasing plagiarism” resembles Moore Howard's (1995) patchwriting. Martin continued: “A more subtle plagiarism occurs when a person gives references to [an] original source, and perhaps quotes them, but never looks them up, having obtained both from a secondary source—which is not quoted. This can be called plagiarism of secondary sources.” A third and more elusive type of plagiarism that Martin described is the use of an argument's structure without acknowledgment. Related but more general is the case of plagiarism of ideas. And, finally, Martin described “the blunt case of putting one's name to someone else's work, which might be called plagiarism of authorship.”

Having highlighted what he takes to be the primary forms of academic plagiarism among students, Martin generated a taxonomy of “institutionalized plagiarism”—a list of what we might think of as at least occasionally acceptable forms of authorial behavior. The list includes ghostwriting: “when a politician, famous sports figure, business executive, or movie star gives a speech or writes a book or newspaper column, frequently the actual writing is done by someone else.” Martin noted also the phenomenon of “honorary authorship,” such as political speech writing, some comedy writing, and much bureaucratic writing. As Martin’s two lists demonstrate, the accusation of plagiarism is frequently the product of hierarchical relationships. When a student borrows a paper to turn in for a class, that’s plagiarism. When an academic borrows another teacher’s materials to produce a class lecture without citation, that’s scholarship (however sloppy). When a supervisor takes credit for an underling’s work, that’s business. As Martin’s taxonomy makes clear enough, the designation of plagiarism has at least as much to do with where you reside in a power structure as it does with whether you did or did not present someone else’s text as your own. As Martin revealed, the practice of presenting someone else’s text as one’s own is widespread and unremarkable in a variety of corporate and academic contexts.

At the same time as the plague of plagiarism has come to seem a surpassing educational problem, plagiarism has also gained prominence in our contemporary shared culture. In addition to Vice President Biden and Doris Kearns Goodwin, historian Stephen Ambrose, presidential speech writer Timothy S. Goeglein, (Derringer, 2008), and the playwright Byrony Lavery have defended themselves against charges of plagiarism. But if a student who plagiarizes in a composition class can expect some actual punishment, most of these high-profile cases result in a lot of hand-wringing but no real consequences.

I began thinking of this chapter as a chance to articulate for myself the differences among “kinds” of plagiarism, or at least of creating a taxonomy that I could use to adjudicate—if for no one other than myself—the licit from the illicit forms plagiarism might take. But I find that my imagined taxonomy is blurred. As compelling as I find Moore Howard’s consideration of patchwriting, I don’t think we can solve the problem of plagiarism (if indeed there truly is a problem) by saying that the writer is multiple, written by as much as she writes her culture. I also doubt, likewise, that—a la Barthes and Foucault and Derrida—there is such a thing as origin. Almost all contemporary literary and artistic practice acknowledges this fact. And although this certainly complicates the adjudication of plagiarism, as Moore Howard and many others rec-

ognize, I don't think we can solve the problem by saying that an appeal to an author's intention can be a viable alternative when it is the category "author" as a single, originary unit that Moore Howard and others have acknowledged can never exist. More useful (at least for me) in providing some purchase on the question of plagiarism in the composition class are the pedagogies of Amy Robillard and Ron Fortune (2007) and Kelly Ritter (2006), who seek to bring the practices of forgery, impersonation, and the use of paper mills into the structure of our classes.

Robillard and Fortune (2007) articulated that "we believe that in order to expand our understanding of the work we do with texts, we must legitimate the work of both literary forgery and plagiarism as forms of writing" (p. 185). Of course, Robillard and Fortune don't mean that we should make forgery or plagiarism legitimate forms of student writing. Rather, they suggest that by moving the study of the forger and the plagiarist to the forefront of our pedagogy, we can more accurately and compellingly understand the kinds of questions the plagiarist and the forger force us to confront.

Robillard and Fortune (2007) offered one possible solution to plagiarism as problem—they urged us to move the study of plagiarism and forgery to the center of the composition classroom, to make of that study the new content of composition; through an examination of "legitimation strategies" in the creation of bogus texts, students can learn how to produce similar, though perhaps ultimately more honest, versions of such legitimation. They posited that "literary forgery and whole-text plagiarism as instances of writing dependent on the production of belief rather than as instances of anti-writing can help us understand the processes by which a text is authorized" (p. 185). By moving the conversation away from the notion of plagiarism as a legal question, Robillard and Fortune make an important contribution to our ability to rethink plagiarism as a strategy in our classes. If we study legitimation as they ask us to do, then perhaps we can also study the nature of the original as Sherrie Levine (discussed later in this chapter) and other appropriators have and continue to do. Robillard and Fortune argued that

Composition's disciplinary attachment to the process paradigm together with a deep investment in our collective professional ability to differentiate between the "authentic" and the "fraudulent" have rendered the symbolic aspects of plagiarism unavailable for analysis. Just as English studies' dismissal of forgery as a species of writing has allowed us to avoid asking questions of it that we ask of legitimate writing, so too has our near dismissal of plagiarism as anything other than an

academic crime allowed us to avoid confronting asking questions of it that we ask of legitimate writing. These questions we avoid have everything to do with belief. (p. 197)

Kelly Ritter (2006) argued that a better response to whole-text plagiarism than punishment is to attempt an understanding of the motives that drive a student to purchase an essay. She concluded by noting that students who purchase essays

base their choices (of whether to purchase or produce) specifically on which site of authorship—that which resides within themselves or that which resides online—will provide the better product for gaining a college degree, which students believe is a proof-of-purchase certificate and faculty believe is in an intangible intellectual achievement.(p. 26)

Ritter suggested that students see the plagiarism question not as a question of morality but rather as a question of utility: “We cannot believe that simply bringing ethics into the classroom means that our students will either mimic what is ‘right’ or internalize what they should believe, reproducing those beliefs in their written work” (p. 31). Ritter posited that rather than treating plagiarism as a crime, we are better served to examine the paper mill and its rhetorical strategies in order to reveal the extent to which the purchase of a paper is a bad bargain.

The plagiarism question cannot be answered through better and better definitions of the term. As Moore Howard (1995) and others have shown, the term is tasked to define and organize too much at the level of the student, and, as Martin (1994) argued, too little at the level of the administrator or other high profile utilizer of text. As the search technologies of Google and plagiarism-detection programs and processes make it ever more possible to find the convergences—deliberate, inadvertent, and otherwise—of textual similarity, we can see that the problem of plagiarism is at least in part a product of the techniques of its discovery. In other words, what we didn’t used to know might not have been hurting us as much we now think it must have been.

As a kid at the dinner table, I listened to my dad tell a lot of stories from his work. He was a medical malpractice insurance adjuster, with a perhaps twisted sense of humor. He’d tell these really gruesome stories of medical accidents—the man with gangrene in his right leg whose left was amputated and

so on. For years he collected what he called “humorous incidents,” and kept the documents and notes in a manila folder. One involved a naked man, a leaking kitchen sink pipe, and a playful cat—the inadvertent image of the ball being batted funny to all but the cat’s victim. One year, my dad came home to tell us that his file had gone missing. It was sad but momentary—in its own perverse way just another humorous incident—until the day about 7 years later when my sister arrived at the house with a book called *Humorous Incidents*, made up of my dad’s humorous incident file purportedly authored by a man my dad had worked with years earlier. Of course my dad was annoyed. I suppose this had ceased to be merely a humorous incident, but my dad wasn’t sure what to do and ultimately did nothing.

I guess I could say that this was an instance of plagiarism—though I confess I’m not sure that it really was. It seems to me that something wrong had happened, but my dad did not write the incidents; he was just the person who originally put them on the page and brought the documents together. If we think of the manila folder that was the humorous incident file we can think of the crime—if there was one—as the theft of property. But anyone who reads understands the limits of that idea of textual ownership. I could say that this “theft” was close to my friend’s use of my work to pass his psychology class at Everett Community College, though there are some obvious differences. He had my consent; in fact, he paid for my consent. Whatever my friend was (plagiarist, slacker), he was also a consumer. He got exactly what he paid for. The guy who stole my father’s file, whatever else he might have been, was a thief. Perhaps he was a plagiarist. He could probably be seen to have committed a fraud in presenting those incidents as his own experiences. But if we consider the totality of this process from my dad’s collection of events, usually marked by their occurrence as descriptions in “incident reports” submitted to various insurance companies, through the stories he made of those events (and continues to tell to this day) to the placement of “copies” of those incident reports into a manila folder, through the removal of that file from my dad’s possession through some clandestine means to an unknown set of events that led to their publication, we can see both plenty of room for dishonest behavior (though perhaps no more dishonest than my friend’s and mine in the production of that book report) and room for change, transformation, and possibly even “genuine” authorship. The incidents about which or upon which my Dad built his stories were not themselves the stories.

Those “incidents” as more or less discrete ontological events, were in fact available to anyone as the means of making a story. Any reading of the incident reports would include facts—for instance, the free-swinging genitalia of the naked plumber—but not the enabling context, the story, or the acts of

compilation and authorship that made humor of those incidents. It is not clear to me that those incidents, collected in a folder and kept in a filing cabinet, constituted property that could really be stolen in the way that you could steal a hundred dollars. But, at the same time, I'm also pretty sure that there is a significant way in which my dad was the author of his humorous incident file. I'm certain that he is the author of the stories he makes of those incidents. I might even say that in some way he is made by those stories, or at least the guy I know as my dad is made of those and hundreds of other stories that he and I tell about him. But that guy—my dad—remains intact after the humorous incident file is stolen. Indeed, the theft of the file becomes yet another humorous incident in its own way. Perhaps there is no less postmodern guy than my dad, by which I mean no one who seems less like an amalgam of others. Yet, as my dad's own appropriation of other's reports to make his stories seems to suggest, his own authorship of the humorous incident file is at best dependent on the narratives of others; our ability to make of the stories solitary meanings attached to solitary authors comes to an end. As the actual insignificance of the theft of my dad's humorous incident file shows, my dad's ability to own, to tell, to compile, to publish, and to author all of those stories isn't stolen. They aren't taken from him when the file is. It might be argued that something else—credit, money, whatever—is, but my dad isn't truly diminished by that.

Malcolm Gladwell (2004) noticed the ways in which plagiarism can actually benefit its victim. In writing about the plagiarism case of Bryony Lavery and her play *Frozen*, Gladwell reported that when he read her play—which included lines taken directly from an essay he had written—and faxed her a letter objecting to her theft, he felt that

Almost as soon as I'd sent the letter, though, I began to have second thoughts. The truth was that, although I said I'd been robbed, I didn't feel that way. Nor did I feel particularly angry. One of the first things I had said to a friend after hearing about echoes of my article in *Frozen* was that this was the only way I was ever going to get to Broadway—and I was only half joking. On some level, I considered Lavery's borrowing to be a compliment. A savvier writer would have changed all those references to Lewis, and rewritten the quotes from me, so that their origin was no longer recognizable. (p. 41)

Gladwell suggested that his own "aura" is actually enhanced by Lavery's "borrowings." He noticed, too, the ways in which Lavery's uncomplicated taking of his text might have been "complicated" by a savvier writer, which sug-

gests exactly the difficulty of some of our students' plagiarisms. Example after example of plagiarisms that I have encountered in composition and literature classes display just the lack of sophistication that Gladwell noticed in Lavery's borrowings. Papers downloaded from the Internet and turned in with the URL still displayed on the corner of the page, papers submitted with the names of authors who are not students in the class, and papers with class names and numbers that are not those of the class for which the work is submitted are just the grossest of these examples, but so too are examples that come much closer to Moore Howard's (1995) patchwriting.

About two thirds of the way through her "Sexuality, Textuality, The Cultural Work of Plagiarism," Moore Howard (2000) admitted, "I don't like cheating. I'm mad when I discover that a paper has been ghostwritten. I don't think teachers should look the other way" (p. 487). These three sentences—offered almost in staccato, in a paragraph of their own—can be imagined by anyone who has encountered or engaged the academic discourse of the plagiarist. I can imagine Howard replying to a colleague as she makes her argument for the pedagogical utility of patchwriting or argues that the student who failed to provide adequate citation to his paper was not a cheater but misguided. I can imagine the anxiety of Moore Howard's response as she types into Google or some other search engine the suspicious sentences from some unnamed student's work only to find that work exists in a prehistory that is more than, or different from, the postmodern "death of the author." The line is not just the theoretical result of the student/author/non-author's situation or situatedness in a discourse, but also, and perhaps more (most?) importantly a line written by someone else.

Elaine Whitaker (2001), for example, responded to Moore Howard in *College English*, noting that, "for Howard, plagiarism is a purple cow—something you don't expect to see and don't wish to be. To me, nullifying the term is a form of erasure. I think we need a collective noun that will allow us to label all of the forms of textual appropriation that are likely to get our students in trouble with us or with others" (p. 374). Jonathan Malesic (2006) argued: "I believe in relentlessly exercising my students' critical abilities, but I also believe in punishing plagiarism. A student who plagiarizes refuses to be educated. There shouldn't be room in my classroom for that kind of student. Indeed, that person is not really a student at all" (p. C 3). Maybe we could say that Malesic and Whitaker represent one side of the contemporary debate over plagiarism. They are pretty much untroubled by the postmodern critique of the author, by any of the fancy semantical games that I or anyone might play in relation to the possibility of an origin from which to copy, and are pretty sure that they know plagiarism when they see it.

Moore Howard's reply—she doesn't like cheating and she is capable of anger—expresses both the ambiguity and the anxiety that any discussion of plagiarism generates. Despite my certainty that plagiarism is a complex issue that cannot be separated from other issues of academic (and even personal) honesty, I don't like plagiarism either. I too have had the vertiginous moment of realization—"I don't think this paper was written by this student." In a movie I admire called *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the character Billy Kwan asks "what then must we do?" He quotes his source as a text of Tolstoy's I don't know. If we don't like plagiarism but we aren't sure how to define it—what then must we do?

Since I began teaching composition as a graduate student I've been engaged in the job of ferreting out the plagiarist. For a long time that was a pretty clear mandate. The first "plagiarism" I dealt with was simple. I was teaching a freshman writing class and two students in the same class turned in the same paper—word for word. Like Moore Howard, I can get mad even now thinking about it. Neither student confessed—not even when confronted with the (was it truly?) shocking evidence of two identical papers, one with one name on it, and the other with another name. I suppose that I can infer that one or both of those students had framed a dishonest intent. Apparently one of them had copied the other and the copier would seem to have been the guilty party. But which one was it? Both students maintained their innocence.

In the late 1970s the artist Sherrie Levine began to engage in a form of post-modern art known variously as appropriation, plagiarism, or rephotography. In a well-known series of photographs, she reproduced nude photos of Edward Weston's son Neil. She displayed these works under the title "After Edward Weston." To examine the ways in which a consideration of Levine might speak to or about plagiarism in the comp class, I quote at length from Courtney Colbert (2005), a student who describes the "scene" of Levine's "crime" or intervention, or plagiarism, or forgery, or theft:

In 1977, the Witkin Gallery in New York bought original Edward Weston photographic negatives from his son Neil Weston. They then commissioned artist/photographer George A. Tice to make new prints from some of those negatives for a collection that the gallery was going to show/publish. Tice was already a well-established artist at the time and had many pieces of his work in permanent collections throughout the

country. He went ahead and reprinted the negatives and had this to say about the process; “I’m not in business as a printer. I take an image and I make it an art object. I memorize it. It becomes mine.” It is important to note that a lot goes into re-printing negatives beyond simply skill in photographic printing. A person reprinting photographs has the opportunity to embellish and interpret the negative in any way they please. In this way, Tice was able to do things in the printing process that might not have been done in the same fashion (or done at all for that matter) had Edward Weston done the printing himself. The Witkin Gallery had a series of large posters made to promote the publication and featured six of the reprinted negatives. An artist named Sherrie Levine rephotographed the prints featured in the poster and placed them in a show under the idea that they were her photographs... her art. The ideas inherent in most acts of appropriation in art fall along the lines of challenging originality within art. Levine made sure to emphasize this by giving the work the title, “After Edward Weston.” This act of appropriation brought a lot of attention to Levine and her work. In fact, George Tice attacked Levine under the charges that he was a victim of copyright infringement and that Levine should be shunned for her “forgeries.” The prints Levine made were not identical to the ones printed by Tice. Her reproductions of the photographs from the poster were changed subtly in size and clarity (due to the fact that they were photographed from a mass produced poster).

Rosalind Krauss (1985) analyzed Levine’s copies, and stated that Levine’s work “seems most radically to question the concept of origin and with it the notion of originality. Levine’s medium is the pirated print, as in the series of photographs she made by taking images by Edward Weston of his young son Neil, and simply rephotographing them, in violation of Weston’s copyright” (p. 168). Krauss’s point—that there can be no true original—is one made again and again in postmodern criticism: for instance, in Derrida’s critique of origin and in Foucault’s “death of the author.” An original, whether in words, picture, or photographs, has never been and never will be seen has become a critical orthodoxy in both composition and literary studies.

Indeed, that critique of origin is one pole of Moore Howard’s (1995) claim that we can no longer see patchwriting or other forms of collaborative writing as plagiarism because this view of plagiarism derives from a notion of the sin-

gular and original author. Although I find the critique of origin compelling, I'm concerned that Moore Howard's (2000) solution to this problem is to appeal to authorial intention: "The comprehensive term plagiarism asserts a unity among disparate textual practices; it often differentiates intentional and unintentional violations but derives these judgments from features of the text, not from actual author's intentions. It asserts a moral basis for textual phenomenon that are a function of reading comprehension and community membership, not ethics" (p. 474). I suggest that Moore Howard's claim that authorial intention can simply be known smuggles the unitary romantic author back into the discussion of plagiarism. If we could simply untangle authorial intention, then the issue of plagiarism, which is the problem of its definition, would already be solved. The author differentiated from all of his or her sources, either does—or perhaps more often does not—respect, acknowledge, and cite the necessary sources and is thus a plagiarist. But the problem of the author, as Foucault inquires, is precisely this problem of relation, priority, and so forth. It is one aspect of that problem that Levine foregrounded through her "interventions." Don Keefer (1991) described defenses of Levine's work, noting that Rosalind Krauss (1985)

tells us that Levine's activity is no more parasitic than Weston's. He after all, Krauss concludes, was borrowing the classic forms of order and representation of the past. Moreover, Weston with his camera produced an image, or copy, of something that had been constructed. Levine, therefore, reveals to us, that her copy is no more than a copy of a copy.

As Levine's work makes clear, the appeal to "authorial intention" can't produce what Moore Howard and others seem to desire, which is a plagiarism policy grounded in what the author meant to do. To do so is simply to reinstitute the idea of a single unitary author, an original, if you will, who can frame the intent to deceive and produce a forgery. The most difficult aspect of identifying "intent" in the way Moore Howard (2000) suggested is that the "text" of that intent remains frustratingly unavailable. Although I often suspect that my students are not sophisticated plagiarists in the way of Sherrie Levine and others, that suspicion remains grounded in instincts that seem to defy definition.

In this description of Levine's "forgeries," her work, Weston's work, and Tice's work can be seen to illuminate the problems of the plagiarized essay encountered in almost any of our classes. Although Tice apparently called Levine's works "forgeries," I think this is one conclusion we can agree not to draw. Whether Levine's work is legitimate—that is, proper, moral, and accept-

able—as art is either (or perhaps both) an aesthetic and a political question is not simply a question of her intentions, which are no doubt complex. I think it is clear that Levine’s work calls into question the idea of a forgery just as it calls into question the idea of an original. By calling this and other works “After,” Levine highlighted the relation her work has to a source; and, in doing so (and in other ways), it does not efface the source. At some level, her work actively depends upon that source. For Levine’s work to be a “forgery,” she would have to have endeavored to obstruct our recognition of the relation of her work to Weston’s. By calling her work “After,” she declines to do that. On the other hand, her relationship to Tice does seem somewhat problematic. She does not call her work “after Weston through Tice” or some other clumsy homage to both the photographer and the printer. Tice’s claims to an artistic role in the production of the Weston photos are effaced by Levine’s “intervention.” But of course that effacement is licensed by our understanding of the nature of the photograph as something taken “in the field” and then “developed” by a technician. I doubt if many of us credit the woman who staffs the photo center down at the Rite Aid when we show our photos. And while Levine’s failure (or omission) to credit Tice certainly erases his artistic role in the creation of the Weston prints, that erasure is licensed by practice.

My own first encounter with Levine’s works resulted in my asking the question “what can be photographed?” And perhaps this question can help us think about what kinds of writing we can or will allow in our classes. What makes Levine’s photo of another photo unacceptable? In general, I think most of us would say that almost anything can be photographed—our dog, coffee table, son or daughter, our parents, our houses, our friends, cars, books. The list is truly endless and the dissemination of these photos is ubiquitous with smart phones and Web 2.0 technologies.

On the wall of my office is the photograph of a picturesque lighthouse just outside the coast town of Bandon, Oregon. Although the photo is “original,” my wife took it with her new digital camera and I printed a copy on my digital printer, bought a two dollar frame and hung the picture on the wall to remind me—all pathos and sentimentality—of the beautiful and borrowed summer that my family spent with my mother just months ago. In another way the photo is nothing but a cliché—absolutely conventional and unoriginal—all pathos and sentimentality. The lighthouse in the background of a conventional beach shot—the stuff of dollar post cards in beach shops up and down both coasts. To think about plagiarism and forgery at all, we have to engage the

question or the differentiation of the enterprise of the writing class. What do we want to have happen? The “badness” of my wife’s photo (or perhaps its goodness, when seen from the angle of my mother’s recovery) cannot be separated or understood except in terms of its associations, which are not simply the intentions of the photographer or the viewer, but the unspeakable threshold upon which they meet.

In a *New Yorker* article, Gladwell (2004), himself the “victim” of a high-profile plagiarism, asked whether or not a charge of plagiarism should ruin one’s life. His conclusion is a sort of qualified “no.” His essay is an illuminating take on a plagiarism case that seems somehow more real than the plagiarisms we may be called on to deal with in our classes, if only because it happens outside the cloistered walls of the academy. Gladwell asked one of the central questions of any conversation on the subject of the plagiarist: “So is it true that words belong to the person who wrote them, just as other kinds of property belong to their owners? Actually no” (p. 44). This is merely the linguistic version of the question Levine seems to force upon us: To whom does the object photographed belong? To whom and under what circumstances can words be said to belong to someone? Can we really say that once a picture has been taken that picture becomes an object outside the realm of the photographable? This question becomes even more vexed when we think of the nature of language as a shared medium. If we do not all “own” the words, then the words themselves are worthless. In fact, to the almost exact extent that we “own” a single word, that word will become without value either to us or to anyone. The precondition of writing is the shared vocabulary, the fact that we are all in language together.

Perhaps inevitably, I, too, have become a collector of incidents however un-humorous—of appropriation, theft, plagiarism, art—whatever we can agree to call these textual “events.” Although the convergence of Levine’s photos and my students downloaded papers is apparent to me—I mean I can see that although my students might (or at least theoretically might not) lack Levine’s self-consciousness—the accusation that Levine faced had its source in exactly the feelings that I had when my students turned in another’s work as their own.

I got a paper last week that referred to a play by John Van Brugh that we had not read in my class. In fact, it was a play I had never read and the paper compared *The Country Wife* (which we had read) to this Van Brugh play. Right away I knew that the student had “copied” his paper, though I could not find its source. I know he did something wrong, even if I’m not sure what name to give it.

I am pretty sure that Levine is doing something different than my student who downloads a paper except when I am not sure at all. In addition to my

collections of student plagiarisms, I've recently begun to work on another collection—texts that explore various contemporary plagiarisms. It would not be hard for me to delineate dozens, maybe more than dozens, of vexed examples of textual “borrowing.” Jonathan Lethem’s (2007) “The Ecstasy of Influence” is just such a catalog, meditation, collage, or plagiarism. Lethem’s essay confronts, even transforms, the conversation about plagiarism. In the essay, subtitled, “A Plagiarism,” Lethem appropriates and arranges, twists and transforms, the works of others to foreground the ways in which all writing is derived from, owes its origins, meanings, and significances to the ways in which it engages texts that belong *and* don’t belong to each and all of us. Lethem ends the essay:

Any text is woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony. The citations that go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*; they are quotations without inverted commas. The kernel, the soul—let us go further and say the substance, the bulk, the actual and valuable material of all human utterances—is plagiarism. For substantially all ideas are secondhand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources, and daily used by the garnerer with a pride and satisfaction born of the superstition that he originated them; whereas there is not a rag of originality about them anywhere except the little discoloration they get from his mental and moral caliber and his temperament, and which is revealed in characteristics of phrasing. Old and new make the warp and woof of every moment. There is no thread that is not a twist of these two strands. By necessity, by proclivity, and by delight, we all quote. (p. 68)

On his Web site, Lethem has provided groups of his own texts as the basis for the texts of others. In essence, he has renounced his copyright/write and offered what he calls the “promiscuous materials” project. On the Web site, he writes “I recently explored some of these ideas in an essay for *Harper’s Magazine*. As I researched that essay I came more and more to believe that artists should ideally find ways to make material free and available for reuse. This project is a (first) attempt to make my own art practice reflect that belief.”

Lethem’s promiscuous materials, Levine’s rephotographs, Robillard and Fortune’s (2007) examination of fraud and forgery, and Ritter’s (2006) focus on the rhetoric of the paper mill begin to suggest some ways in which we

might engage the question of plagiarism without simply viewing plagiarism as a crime with a catalog of possible punishments. Rather than simply submit to the impossibility or impermissibility of claiming some single, stable author of our students' papers and therefore abandoning the category of plagiarism as something against which, however tentatively we may choose to stand, we can choose rather to embrace a discourse which includes an awareness of plagiarism as a foundation or a beginning.

In conclusion, I'd like to suggest that as teachers we engage Lethem's promiscuity—that we highlight and foreground the extent to which all writing is "plagiarized." I confess that I do not know if we can do this and cope with students who refuse to engage the honor of this promiscuity. But I prefer that risk to the risk that we surrender our role as teachers to our role as policemen, gatekeepers, or keepers of the cultural heritage of the west or the United States. Perhaps all of our students will not be Lethem or Levine. But I suggest that if we engage the best of our students rather than using the Internet and plagiarism-detection programs to investigate our students in the mistaken belief that this somehow helps them, we will be far better able to impact the reality of our student's integrity than any honor code or plagiarism policy can make us.

REFERENCES

- Colbert, Courtney. (2005). *Appropriation and reprinting: Separated at birth?* <http://www.cfa.arizona.edu/are476/files/puzz05.htm>
- Derringer, Nancy N. (2008, March 3). *Gone in 60 seconds: How my blog started the avalanche that buried presidential aide Tim Goeglein.* *Slate.* <http://www.slate.com/id/2185657>
- Foucault, Michel. (1984). What is an author? *Foucault: A reader* (pp. 101-120). (Paul Rabinow, Trans.) New York: Pantheon.
- Gladwell, Malcolm. (2004, November 22). Something borrowed: Should a charge of plagiarism ruin your life? *New Yorker*, 80(36), 40-48.
- Keefer, Donald. (1991, March 16). The rebellion of art/the art of rebellion. <http://students.risd.edu/faculty/dkeefef/web/rebel.htm>
- Krauss, Rosalind. (1985). *The originality of the avant garde and other modernist myths.* Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Lethem, Jonathan. (2007, January 31). The ecstasy of influence: A plagiarism. *Harpers*, pp. 59-71.
- Lethem, Jonathan. The ego is remarkably quiet in the glove compartment. http://www.jonathanlethem.com/promiscuous_materials.html

- Malesic, Jonathan. (2006, December 11). How dumb do they think we are? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 53(17), C 3.
- Martin, Brian. (1994). Plagiarism: A misplaced emphasis. *Journal of Information Ethics*, 3(2), 36-47.
- Moore Howard, Rebecca. (2001, November 16). Forget about policing plagiarism: Just teach. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. B 24.
- Moore Howard, Rebecca. (1995). Plagiarisms, authorship, and the academic death penalty. *College English*, 57(7), 788-807.
- Moore Howard, Rebecca. (2000). Sexuality, textuality: The cultural work of plagiarism. *College English*, 62(4), 473-491.
- Plagiarism Stoppers. <http://plagiarismstoppers.com>
- Plagiarized.com. <http://www.plagiarized.com>
- Ritter, Kelly. (2006). Buying in, selling short: A pedagogy against the rhetoric of online paper mills. *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition, and Culture*, 6(1) 25-51.
- Robillard, Amy E., & Fortune, Ron. (2007). Toward a new content for writing courses: Literary forgery, plagiarism, and the production of belief. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 27(1-2) 183-206.
- Scanlon, Patrick & Neumann, David. (2002). Internet plagiarism among college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 43(3), 374-385.
- Whitaker, Elaine. (2001, January). A comment on "Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism." *College English*, 63(3) 373-375.