

# REVIEW: Theorizing Plagiarism in the University

**Kay Halasek**

*Academic Writing and Plagiarism: A Linguistic Analysis.* Diane Pecorari. New York: Continuum, 2008. 213 pp. Print.

*My Word! Plagiarism and College Culture.* Susan D. Blum. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2009. 229 pp. Print.

*Pluralizing Plagiarism: Identities, Contexts, Pedagogies.* Ed. Rebecca Moore Howard and Amy E. Robillard. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2008. 181 pp. Print.

Over the course of eight days in August, as I was drafting this review essay, I received Facebook newsfeeds from my friend and colleague Nancy Mack at Wright State University that alerted me to two *New York Times* pieces—one by Trip Gabriel titled “Plagiarism Lines Blur for Students in Digital Age” and a second “Opinionator” piece by Stanley Fish, “Plagiarism Is Not a Big Moral Deal.” The two reinforced for me some of the issues regarding cultural assumptions about plagiarism taken up in all three of the books reviewed here, namely changing notions of authorship within the “remix” culture, and plagiarism as a breach of disciplinary practice. Both *Times* pieces suggest that at least *some* public debate about plagiarism may be shifting ever so slightly in the directions endorsed by Diane Pecorari, Rebecca Moore Howard and Amy E. Robillard, and Susan D. Blum.

Taken together, *Academic Writing and Plagiarism*, *My Word!*, and *Pluralizing Plagiarism* represent three critical perspectives from which academics might productively take up questions related to plagiarism: research into students’ textual practice

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in the academy (Pecorari); scholarly interventions into pedagogical and disciplinary practice (Howard and Robillard); and research into the cultural, social, philosophical, and institutional contexts in which that writing and teaching take place (Blum). All three types of research are necessary if scholars are to change perceptions of plagiarism held by colleagues, students, administrators, and the general public. To enhance theoretical inquiry, the first order of work (Pecorari) is integral; to demonstrate pedagogical commitment to creating sound, innovative curricula, the second order (Howard and Robillard) is required; to effect change in public opinion, the third (Blum) is imperative.

#### RESEARCH ON WRITING: STUDENT TEXTUAL PRACTICES (RE)DEFINED

Pecorari's *Academic Writing and Plagiarism* examines plagiarism in source-based academic writing among non-native speakers of English (NNSEs). It investigates writing practices of seventeen students from British universities enrolled in a variety of disciplinary programs in the sciences and humanities at the master's and PhD levels. Pecorari conducted interviews with the master's students and their advisors, and undertook discourse analyses of sections from drafts of the students' theses. She conducted analyses of the PhD students' dissertations, selecting samples from completed dissertations in disciplines similar to those in the master's cohort. Working extensively from her own data and previous scholarship on plagiarism, Pecorari proposes that "language proficiency" among her research subjects and their relatively limited practice in academic writing in their native educational systems—*not* differing cultural assumptions about ownership of words or ideas—are more likely reasons for higher incidences of repeated text<sup>1</sup> among NNSE writers when compared with native English speakers (NESs) (15, 18, 19). Working from contrastive analysis and second-language scholarship, Pecorari points out that the lines defining plagiarism for all students, but especially for NNSE students, are blurred at best.

The study includes seven chapters and an appendix that details specific elements of Pecorari's research methodology, including selection of participants and writing samples, content of recruitment scripts and interviews, textual analyses protocols, and ethical considerations. The first three chapters take up questions of general significance to Pecorari's study of NNSE writers and their use of source texts. Chapters 4 through 6 present data from the research study, focusing on the texts as well as on the students' and their advisors' observations and assumptions about writing from sources. The seventh and final chapter synthesizes the research described in previous chapters and presents Pecorari's conclusions and recommendations. Specifically, she concludes that plagiarism (especially among NNSEs) is a complex issue requiring

further study and discussion within the academy and across disciplines, with careful attention paid to ascertaining and explaining the differences between the texts that writers produce and readers' expectations of what constitutes appropriately signaled and documented use of source materials. Like the contributors to Howard and Robillard's collection, Pecorari does not emphasize devising mechanisms for detecting plagiarism or providing additional overt instruction in citation systems.

Chapter 1 addresses a question that is logical, given Pecorari's research focus: "Why the Need for a Linguistic Analysis?" She answers it definitively: engaging plagiarism from a linguistic perspective productively shifts the focus of attention away from its (un)ethical nature (as theft of property) and toward its specific characteristics as a language act. She argues that this prompts a different engagement with plagiarism, as a discursive practice to be studied in context rather than as an act that requires punitive response or even civil action. Chapter 2 discusses in greater detail the historical, cultural, and linguistic contexts surrounding plagiarism and focuses on two notable examples: Joe Biden's 1987 uses, both attributed and unattributed, of portions of British labor party leader Neil Kinnock's "Thousand Generations" speech, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s questionable use of material in his doctoral dissertation. From these and other examples, Pecorari concludes that, at best, definitions of plagiarism are "fuzzy," because numerous and various motives explain it (for example, speakers or writers are following accepted discursive or oratorical practices) (35).

Given the contextual nature of plagiarism, and given that all writing—especially writing from sources—is by definition intertextual, Pecorari turns her attention in chapter 3 to a question of more immediate pedagogical concern: what do students need to learn about plagiarism? "Rather a lot" is her reply—a point that demonstrates her claim that avoiding plagiarism is a much more complex undertaking than simply mastering parenthetical notation or the nuances of summary and paraphrase. Students must "know [. . .] what plagiarism is" and "how to avoid it," employ skillfully the particular documentation forms used in various disciplinary communities (themselves not particularly forthcoming about those very practices), and understand the "rhetorical effects" of those forms (49). In short, students must know, use, and cite sources as if they were native speakers of each of those disciplinary discourses. Although Pecorari acknowledges that explicit instruction is of some value in teaching students about and developing strategies for avoiding plagiarism, she identifies modeling sound academic writing, apprenticeships, and "learning by doing" as more effective instructional approaches. A graduate student and advisor working collaboratively and with a clear understanding of their "respective spheres of responsibility," for example, are well positioned to create a working relationship in which the student learns through "*legitimate peripheral participation*." Engaging in "activities which are authentically part of the repertoire of an expert practitioner

[but . . .] which do not require the full range of skills” allows the student to observe the expert and allows the expert to observe and monitor (and, presumably correct) the student’s practices (51). Because academic writing in the university is always situated as disciplinary practice and entails engaging in discursive and other scholarly practices, apprenticeship is critical to students’ success.

In examining in chapter 4 the texts that her research subjects produced, Pecorari determines that students who wrote with a strong, defined sense of their own scholarly purpose and ethos were less likely than other writers to use a “large proportion of repeated language [. . .] whether properly attributed quotation or textual plagiarism” (93). The finding is significant, for it demonstrates the critical importance of the relationship between a student’s *sense* of authority and his or her perceived *right* to speak within a given conversation.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, when employing “repeated language,” the writers with greater sense of their own purpose were more likely to reaccentuate, reconceptualize, and adapt the passages than merely rephrase them. In other words, avoiding plagiarism is not simply a matter of understanding and employing grammatical or formal conventions used within a discipline; it also has to do with understanding the subject of the discourse and with one’s sense of purpose in writing. That tendencies to plagiarize appear in the writing of advanced NNSE students suggests that similar tendencies likely inform the writing composed by undergraduate and graduate NNSE and NES students—and that writing teachers should consider the relationship between purpose and discursive maturity.

Pecorari’s conclusions, drawn from her analysis of the students’ texts, are corroborated in her interviews with them and recorded in chapter 5. To a person, those students whose texts included passages that were most likely to be described as plagiarized were those who expressed greatest doubts about their own abilities as writers, positioning themselves as subordinate to the authors whose texts they were citing or repeating. They were, in other words, more likely to “patchwrite” (Howard, “Sexuality” and *Standing*) than paraphrase, which Pecorari describes as “a new way of expressing ideas which are attributable to a source, an independent rewording” (104). Even here, however, Pecorari opines that students turned to patchwriting to limit their risk of misinterpreting or oversimplifying the source (104) and that such a practice was a result of several factors, including past writing instruction, their own writing practices and processes, and the limitations of their declarative knowledge (122).<sup>3</sup> Like Howard, Pecorari concludes that patchwriting is more often simply one stage in the process of coming into an academic discourse (108) rather than an overt attempt to deceive or cheat.

The students’ thesis directors revealed to Pecorari the power of disciplinary ambivalence about plagiarism—and the difficulty of identifying it. The faculty members she interviewed, whose observations she records in chapter 6, were largely unaware

that their students' use of source texts was problematic. Although occasionally ambivalent about some students' writing abilities, none of the faculty had suspected that any of the students had plagiarized or used in inappropriate fashion the works they cited. Upon closer review of the students' texts, however, the faculty's assumptions and impressions changed. When asked to comment on "extracts from the writing samples together with the sources the students had used," they expressed surprise and even frustration—noting that the students' practices *were* problematic and often did not, in retrospect, meet their expectations (125–26). The faculty refrained from labeling the practices as plagiarism, and instead contextualized them, searched for explanations for them, or characterized them as "minor" or "small" infractions (127). In other words, the advisors understood and interpreted the students' practices within the context of the students' scholarly development, recognizing that their texts reflected "lack of knowledge or understanding" of the disciplinary and formal conventions rather than premeditated deception (131). The faculty were also chagrined about their own inability to identify the questionable passages during the students' process of writing.

In concluding her study in chapter 7, Pecorari reiterates three issues centrally related to students' textual performances using source materials: (1) plagiarism is "widespread but underdiagnosed;" (2) it is "often conflated with 'patchwriting'"; and (3) "little agreement [exists . . .] about what is and is not plagiarism" (142). She then describes a pedagogical approach to source writing (similar to Chris Anson's approach as included in *Pluralizing Plagiarism*) that emphasizes explicit alignment among instruction, objectives, and assessment. This model shifts attention from student practices and intentions, toward a more contextual understanding of source writing as an exchange of information between writer and reader.

Pecorari's most critical suggestions form a call taken up by the contributors to *Pluralizing Plagiarism*: Do not "treat deceptive plagiarism as the default assumption" (Pecorari 149); understand instead that "textual plagiarism is not a mark of moral failure"; and construct institutional practices that recognize academic writing as discipline specific, requiring instruction in appropriate uses of source materials across the curriculum (146–47). In other words, the responsibility for addressing the matter of academic, source-based writing rests with the faculty (145). In this call, Pecorari anticipates Michele Eodice's position in her contribution to *Pluralizing Plagiarism*: faculty (and institutions more generally) need to engage students in the work of demystifying how research-based source writing is produced and received in the academy, rather than "foist" responsibility for addressing plagiarism onto students, other departments or programs, or detection programs. In short, Pecorari's book (like the other two in this review) argues for a necessary turn in the nature of discussions about and instruction in plagiarism.

**DISCIPLINARY INTERVENTIONS:  
PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AS ETHICAL RESPONSE**

*Pluralizing Plagiarism* is a collection motivated by some of the same factors that inform Pecorari's study. These include the academy's characterization of plagiarism as an act best addressed by one set of institutional policies and one process of punishment. This view, editors Howard and Robillard note, lags significantly behind decades of research that conceptualizes discourse practices as situated within communities of practice and informed by the conventions, purposes, and expectations of those communities. In other words, discourses—and the rules and policies that govern them—are *plural*. It follows that responses to plagiarism must themselves be plural and contextualized—pedagogically, administratively, culturally, politically. The contributors to *Pluralizing Plagiarism* cover a range of institutions and instructional sites: community colleges; religiously affiliated schools; institutions abroad; first-year writing and writing across the curriculum (WAC) programs; the writing center; and the graduate classroom. Together, they seek to answer two questions: “What’s at stake in (re)defining plagiarism?” and “How can we best approach the topic *with* students rather than *for* or *about* students?” (3).

Undaunted by the limited prospects of change (or perhaps motivated by the *possibility* of change, however remote), the book's contributors proceed with vigorous resolve. Here, rhetoric and composition scholars speak to colleagues, rallying themselves and calling one another into action. That rallying call is emphatically made in the opening essay by Eodice, who demands that academics “take back” “ownership of the issue of plagiarism” in the public sphere (11). Eodice argues convincingly that the academy and popular press create, maintain, and distribute representations of plagiarism that confirm the very notions of authorship, ownership, and originality that must be overturned to make possible more productive teaching of source-based writing. She also leaves no irony unexplored, noting that at the same time the academy decries students’ “‘commodification’ of education,” it joins with corporate America in purchasing detection programs that “find” plagiarism (15). Not to leave unacknowledged our own practices, Eodice points out that faculty themselves are complicit in perpetuating oversimplified representations of plagiarism every time they choose to “join the plagiarism police force” or “demonize the World Wide Web” rather than “problematizing and theorizing plagiarism or overtly teaching students the conventions of documentation” (13). Anticipating the findings of Blum's study, Eodice recognizes that students are situated in complex relationships with texts, literacies, and technologies that necessitate our making instruction in matters of plagiarism more complex. Students are sophisticated consumers who “have begun to set up new types of *relationships* with information” (14) that our pedagogies must productively engage rather than dismiss.

Although not intended as a direct response to Eodice's call for a more nuanced pedagogical response, the first-year writing course Robillard describes in chapter 2 is one possible approach. Robillard engaged students in a semester-long investigation of the politics of authorship and writing in U.S. culture that situated plagiarism as one of a number of textual practices. Equally concerned with avoiding assumptions about *why* students plagiarize and the belief that we can *prevent* plagiarism, the course examined various ways that writing is constructed in and through American mass media. It investigated cultural distinctions between low and high literatures in units focused on the *New York Times Book Review*, the Book-of-the-Month Club, and Oprah's Book Club; representations of and plagiarism accusations leveled at controversial published authors; the academic debate surrounding plagiarism; and Simon Worrall's book *The Poet and the Murderer*, whose subject Mark Hofmann forged literary and religious texts that were widely accepted as authentic despite their imperfections. Robillard encouraged students to exchange a regulatory orientation toward plagiarism for a "rhetorical approach" to the subject, "one that emphasizes the cultural work of plagiarism in a capitalist society that glorifies the work of the individual creator" and privileges (even obsesses over) authenticity and originality (31). Throughout the course, Robillard strived to have students understand plagiarism as a discursive, authorial practice circumscribed by sets of textual, cultural, and even political expectations.

Taking a different yet equally compelling approach to curriculum development, Anson's chapter articulates many of the same assumptions that inform Pecorari's, Eodice's, and Robillard's arguments. He criticizes policies and instructional practices aimed at eliminating plagiarism and punishing it, for they focus on preventing a behavior rather than on developing instructional practices that will help students become sophisticated consumers of sources. Anson advocates adopting the Level 3 pedagogical response articulated by John Biggs in *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, an approach that aligns learning objectives, instructional materials, and course outcomes. Rather than work from a deficit model of student performance or a perspective that focuses on "what the *teacher does*" (143), Anson notes, a Level 3 response constructs a "goal-directed writing" pedagogy, an integrated approach to learning, support, outcomes, and assessment that engages teachers and students in the complex work of incorporating multiple voices into student texts (145, 146). With respect to plagiarism, a Level 3 pedagogical focus is on "student learning," *not* on a "desire to keep plagiarism at bay" (147). Anson closes by reiterating his appeal for "artfully designed, engaging, goal-directed assignments," arguing that such an approach will "do much to lessen our apprehension about plagiarism and restore our role as educators" (154).

T. Kenny Fountain and Lauren Fitzgerald take up plagiarism in the context of a religiously affiliated university, Yeshiva, to determine how or whether the issue

presents itself in a manner different from its appearance in secular colleges. On the face of it, they acknowledge, faculty at religiously affiliated institutions might appear to have an advantage over faculty at secular ones: a sort of “built-in” morality. They grant that issues of ethics are perhaps more present in daily life at Yeshiva. But they also argue that the traditions of religious writing and textual authority informing Christianity, Judaism, and Islam complicate notions of plagiarism. Moreover, though these traditions prohibit theft and admonish people to “do unto others,” they do not teach *how* to use source material appropriately. Their moral injunctions are just that: injunctions. They may provide a means of policing students, but such use of religious teachings, Fountain and Fitzgerald note, is “naively inappropriate” and certainly not in “good faith” (102). In fact, like others in this volume, the authors actively oppose instruction based on the moral imperative “Thou Shalt Not.” Pedagogical approaches to discussing plagiarism instead “must seek to encourage communally appropriate text-usage in particular communal contexts” (120).

Fountain and Fitzgerald propose an approach that takes as its center two religious values that can also inform instruction at secular universities: “textual authority and communitarian notions of belonging” (102). Like Robillard in her contribution, Fountain and Fitzgerald demonstrate how these values inform and are made manifest through a series of course assignments in a first-year writing course that engaged students in case study research, reading activities, commentaries, and analyses, all of which addressed various elements of plagiarism with careful attention to determining the documents’ expressions of shared values and issues of textual authority. Documents included Yeshiva’s academic integrity policy and public media pieces (news stories and editorials) from the college newspaper and national print publications. In this respect, Fountain and Fitzgerald employed a pedagogy similar to Robillard’s, asking students to engage plagiarism as a subject of study.

At any instructional site, this task is never seamless or uncomplicated. When the location or its staff are marginalized, the matter can take on even greater complexity, as Tracy Hamler Carrick and Kami Day show in their essays on writing center tutors and on community college faculty. Certainly, the matters of engagement are different for these two groups. The tutors Carrick describes—themselves undergraduates—questioned the advisability of employing directive tutoring techniques that might be considered violations of academic integrity policy. The tutors found great value in providing clients with productive “coauthoring” opportunities that simulated the kinds of writing practices undertaken by professional writers. These opportunities could improve the students’ abilities to construct meaning and discourses within a larger community of readers and writers. At what point, the tutors asked, does coauthoring—suggesting new phrasing or a new way to organize a paragraph—turn from collaborative learning to collaborative writing (to use Muriel Harris’s distinctions) or from an appropriate to inappropriate level of assistance? Moreover, is it

fair to withhold from one client (whom a tutor fears will simply employ a suggestion wholesale) a practice she or he uses with another (who the tutor trusts will consider and possibly even reject the suggestion)? In other words, under what circumstances might an identical practice be deemed plagiarism? The questions are weighty ones for undergraduate tutors.

Day, of Johnson Community College (JCC), engages the question “What are we to do?” by situating it within and alongside the equally vexing question of academic labor practices. Taking up the call for faculty to complicate notions of plagiarism, Day (working from data collected in a faculty survey she conducted) identifies student “intent,” the restricted amount of time available to faculty to address matters of plagiarism, an increasingly diverse student population, and a wide range of levels of student preparation as features that complicate instructors’ ability to deal with plagiarism at sites like JCC. Her recommendations to some extent gloss over the issues of academic labor: despite the demands on their time, community college faculty need to be more aware of recent scholarship on plagiarism *and* on the complicating factors in students’ lives that might lead them to patchwrite or plagiarize. However, Day also acknowledges that community college faculty are uniquely positioned to address these matters, to “lead the call for changes in pedagogical approaches to ethical use of sources” (55). I agree that community college faculty *can* take a leading role in the call for change, especially, as Day suggests, in advocating for change in textbook representations of plagiarism and strategies for producing appropriately documented research writing.<sup>4</sup>

Although not themselves marginalized by institutional affiliation or status, faculty teaching writing across the disciplines face their own set of complicating factors with respect to plagiarism, as Sandra Jamieson relates. Reflecting on conversations with colleagues on the matter of conventions and assumptions about plagiarism across disciplinary boundaries, Jamieson describes what is likely true at most institutions: faculty can agree that certain practices are problematic and should be attended to with fervor (for example, buying or downloading papers from the Internet or other sources, representing and submitting as one’s own a piece authored by another person, and outright cheating on examinations). Beyond that, Jamieson reports that in her experience, “it was impossible to generalize or universalize pretty much anything else—from what to cite to how one should indicate the work of others or even why one cites at all” (77). At the same time, faculty staunchly supported the right and responsibility of the English department to establish universal “guidelines and conventions” and of students to adhere to those same guidelines and conventions in their lower division and general education courses (77–78).

Citing longstanding research on writing across the curriculum, Jamieson argues that many faculty still subscribe to a single model of “good writing” that applies across disciplines, and they assume a transparency in the citation systems in their

own disciplines, because (as she notes, citing Russell) “the [disciplinary] community’s genres and conventions appear to be unproblematic renderings of the fruits of research” (qtd. in Howard and Robillard 78). In addressing these assumptions, Jamieson advocates for instruction (and university policies, textbooks, and other instructional materials) that focuses on “*use* of sources rather than *misuse* of sources” (80). Such a shift will bring with it a focus on the discursive practices (“know how” and the “why”) rather than the conventions of citation form (“how” and “how to”) (82). Like Day, Jamieson clearly articulates a role for faculty in creating the academic culture necessary for students to develop “know how” in various disciplines. WAC programs in particular, she argues, can serve a valuable function in defining for faculty a new role, namely as disseminators of information about how writing functions in their disciplines.

In examining plagiarism, most scholars have focused their attention on the undergraduate student, usually in the first-year or general education classroom. Howard’s chapter, “Plagiarizing (from) Graduate Students,” turns attention to a group of students that—more than any other—is assumed to have “gotten it” when it comes to plagiarism. Howard contests this assumption. That this group from time to time plagiarizes, on the contrary, should test our assumptions about the concept. That is, if even graduate students (and not only the NNSE students in Pecorari’s study) commit plagiarism, then something is amiss. Howard also challenges faculty to look to their own or their colleagues’ misuse (plagiarizing) of their graduate students’ work. Graduate students, she notes, are often victims themselves of plagiarism committed by their advisors, research leaders, and professors—with little if any recourse available to them. The exploitation, Howard argues, is facilitated by the lack of ethics codes for faculty using student research and by the students’ own precarious positions as junior to their professors, who often hold great control over them even after they have graduated and earned positions elsewhere. With respect to the first matter, Howard exhorts faculty to understand graduate students as scholars-in-process, for whom we need to create formal opportunities to learn about their intellectual property rights—as writers and researchers of their own work and as collaborators with their advisors. With respect to the second, she charges faculty to discuss and reach a consensus about our responsibility for acknowledging students’ rights to their own research and writing; she charges institutions to develop systems that reward faculty for collaborating with graduate students.

Although she does not focus entirely on the state of graduate education and matters of plagiarism, Kathleen Blake Yancey, like Howard, takes the graduate classroom as a point of departure for examining the academy’s obsession with form, which distracts students at all levels from engaging in meaningful inquiry. As an antidote to pedagogies that motivate or compel students to focus on replicating forms of citation and avoiding outlawed practices rather than on joining conversations of

inquiry, Yancey proposes that faculty begin their teaching of research-based writing to both undergraduate and graduate students “with the *idea* of research, with [its social and material] practices and assumptions” (159). As scholars, we understand research as “‘joining the conversation’ or entering the Burkean parlor, [metaphors] which [. . .] suggest [. . .] that research will be an informal if not intimate practice” (159). Generally speaking, teaching practices and course assignments (even in the graduate classroom) do not depict research in this manner. In reflecting on these differences and their consequences, Yancey argues that students are rather forced into distanced, disengaged, and therefore distracted relationships with their research—which, in turn, can lead to plagiarism. She proposes in response that scholars adopt an approach to research that “requires the researcher to identify the possible contexts within which the research might appear and use that multiplicity as a means of exigence and interpretation both” (160). The nature of the approach Yancey advocates is somewhat ambiguous, as it seems less a positioning of ethos or orientation toward the subject and more an attitude or perspective, a discursive “interlayering” and “overlayering” (166).

Yancey closes her essay with three appeals to colleagues to engage in research that “look[s] beyond divisions toward a common end or outcome” and “put[s] contrasting ideas not in conflict with each other but in connection” (167). As reviewers of others’ scholarship, we are encouraged by Yancey to allow for—and facilitate—“a more capacious view of research space” (168). As scholars ourselves, we are encouraged to conceive of our scholarly acknowledgements as gestures of helpfulness and to be generous in naming and acknowledging our intellectual debts. She entreats us as teachers of the next generation of scholars to consider our own teaching and mentoring practices and “creat[e] a capacious space [. . .] for the free flow and creation of intertextuality” (169).

One additional essay in the collection extends the locations of plagiarism yet again—to Australia. Celia Thompson and Alastair Pennycook present and analyze the writing and reflections of three international students studying at Australian universities. Driven in part by a fear of punishment for committing plagiarism when composing research-based assignments, these international students (like the NNSE students in Pecorari’s study) created texts from which they felt alienated and that they described as void of their own voice and authority. Thompson and Pennycook work from these cases to demonstrate both the deleterious effects of the academy’s own “near obsessive fear of plagiarism” (126)—what Anson describes as “institutional paranoia” (140)—and the consequences for student writers of employing a term that Thompson and Pennycook say “obfuscates more than it clarifies” (126).

The coauthors turn to a number of cultural studies scholars to argue for a greater sensitivity to and understanding of the effects of cultural differences on discourses, concepts of authorship, intellectual property, and attribution. At the same

time, they turn to language and critical theorists (for example, Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva) to demonstrate that “if all texts are filled with the ideas and words of innumerable others [. . .] the quest for genealogy and authorship needs to be recognized as a highly complex and problematic undertaking” (126). As a Bakhtin scholar, I am persuaded by this claim. At the same time, I recognize that despite the complexity of assigning attribution, it is not futile—at least not with respect to the most apparent voices in a text. Particularly helpful from Bakhtin are the notions (to which Thompson and Pennycook allude) of (re)accentuation and interanimation. As writers construct texts, they always reaccentuate and reanimate previous utterances for their own purposes (136). The utterances are tinged with new meaning simply by virtue of their reuse. We can’t, in other words, reasonably argue from a position of infinite articulations that acknowledgement doesn’t matter. Of course, this is not Thompson and Pennycook’s argument. They want, it seems to me, to call attention to that complexity, that *sense* of futility that students may *feel* when they’re faced with conventions they don’t understand. In the end, Thompson and Pennycook call for understanding and teaching textual borrowing as “one aspect of textual construction that is deeply embedded in a wide variety of cultural, textual, and academic practices” (128).

Of particular interest in light of Blum’s study, to which I turn next, is Thompson and Pennycook’s discussion of Georgia and her orientation toward language and ownership. In her previous writing experiences as a student in Hong Kong, Georgia had completed assignments designed to solicit a demonstration of her understanding of principles, ideas, concepts, and information delivered in the class. In those assignments, Georgia reported that she, like other students, copied verbatim from sources. Because the purpose of the writing exercise was to demonstrate knowledge (not generate it), neither the students nor the teachers assumed that students were claiming the words or ideas as their own. This past experience helped frame in Georgia a sense of words as “autonomous” from individual users, as “shared commodities” freely and openly available for all writers, not as owned property, as a “privatization of natural resources” (134). Georgia’s perspective on discourse and language is not unlike the orientation expressed by the students in Blum’s study, who distribute, share, and remix discourses freely and openly. The origins of their perspectives differ, but the practices do not.

As a means of articulating the possible positions that students like Georgia might take toward learning and practicing the standards of academic prose in English-speaking universities, Thompson and Pennycook turn to Robert Holton’s “hybridizing” paradigm, which he describes as a “dynamic process of cultural mixing and borrowing” that can “create a transformational learning environment in which new cultural forms and practices can emerge” (qtd. in Howard and Robillard 135–36). This notion of hybridization is at the heart of the matter for Bruce Horner

in his afterword. Horner, too, seeks an “interaction among different practices” that will bring “nonprivileged practices” “in contact with and informing and changing” dominant discourses. In the end, however, Horner is not optimistic that we can achieve such a hybridized state. It’s simply not possible when the “perceived plagiarism crisis” is not named for what it is—a response to the possibility of change, of losing control, of diminishing power, that “perceived threat to the dominance of a particular group” (173).

Horner proposes two “anxieties” that fuel the plagiarism crisis—the first of which is a “displac[ing of] anxieties about [. . .] [for example, immigrant] groups onto anxieties about language” (174). The second, which I believe obtains in the present context, is an anxiety about the status of and threats to intellectual property rights. Increasingly interested in maintaining control over intellectual property and its distribution, individuals seek to “reify knowledge in texts—to ‘textualize’ knowledge by claiming that it inheres in a specific form and sequence of notations” (175). Horner moves without apology to demonstrate that research on plagiarism has historically done nothing to dismantle dominant discourses and little to promote the hybridity for which Thompson and Pennycook advocate. That research generally falls into one of two kinds of responses: developmental (problematic practices are temporary and will abate) or archipelago (problematic practices are matters of difference between or among languages). Drawing an analogy to other critical sea changes in composition studies (theories of error and the advent of the open admissions era), Horner takes issue with both responses, for they leave the hierarchy and its privileged discourses unscathed.

In a final comparison, Horner suggests (working from Joseph Williams’s “The Phenomenology of Error”) that we subject our reading of students’ perceived plagiarism to the same “test” that Williams asked us to consider with error. That is, we step away from our current orientation toward the text and construct a different “contract” with the author, one that aligns more with the contracts we make with published authors. Doing so will allow us to move away from developmental or archipelago response and toward an understanding of students’ practices “as engagements in [. . .] negotiations with readers over what different people find necessary, useful, or acceptable in who, what, and how much to cite, as well as why and how to do so” (175). In short, we should “not only [. . .] teach students the different practices [. . .] but [also] to challenge these practices” (176).

*Pluralizing Plagiarism* makes good on its promise, pluralizing the sites of and perspectives on plagiarism throughout the collection. Making a simple yet salient observation, Horner summarizes the impact of the collection, noting that “there is a politics to how plagiarism is defined” (171). Those politics—those underlying assumptions or principles—define perceptions about plagiarism in U.S. culture and Anglophone education. With notable consensus, the contributors condemn the

problematic cultural representations of plagiarism as habits of weak, deviant, or lazy minds, characterizing those representations as little more than attempts to sanction and confirm existing behaviors and conventions and limit access to the intellectual elite, thereby maintaining the power, status, and authority of the academy.

#### CAMPUS CULTURE: PLAGIARISM AS REMIX

Blum's *My Word!* is already generating commentary in the popular media (as evidenced in part by Gabriel's *Times* piece that I mentioned earlier), raising the hope that with its publication might come some greater understanding of the contextuality and complexity of plagiarism. Like Eodice, Blum fully recognizes the power of the sensationalized headlines about plagiarism that dominate public media. She also fully realizes a simple fact of which we're all aware: our students are different from us, textually speaking. They listen to different music, they surf different Internet sites, they watch different movies, they hold different values and have different priorities. What Blum argues from her observations, however, is that their differences from us contribute significantly to the disjunction between how they and we understand the appropriate use of source materials, the accompanying rules of academic citation, plagiarism, and cheating. Specifically, she concludes that "[s]tudent engagement in intertextual activity is of a different nature and [. . .] purpose from the intertextuality demanded by academia," reflecting "different values concerning boundaries and originality and individuality" (5). Academia—within its walls, in its discourses, and in its research—demands careful and even slavish adherence to rules of discursive conduct. Students' cultures are driven by more informal principles and values informed by sharing and remixing. However, despite differences in the scope, focus, methodology, and context of her research, Blum reaches precisely the same conclusions as Pecorari and the contributors to Howard and Robillard's collection: "we cannot treat all student plagiarism solely as a matter of individual morality, independent of all the supporting messages from the educational and social contexts in which they find themselves" (6).

Blum's book consists of an introduction, conclusion, and five chapters, and is informed by an ethnographic methodology. The introduction sets out the central questions that guided the ethnographic research—which itself was motivated in part by those sensationalized headlines about and research that claimed an epidemic in student cheating and plagiarism. Chapter 1 sets out the institutional and cultural contexts into which definitions of and assumptions about plagiarism are situated, and ends with an appeal for institutions to adopt more nuanced responses to plagiarism and patchwriting (26–27). Chapters 2 and 3 examine the various points of difference between students' conceptual understandings of authorship (chapter 2), self, and authenticity (chapter 3). Chapter 4, the longest in the book, investigates the

conditions, assumptions, and practices that constitute college life—from drinking and socializing to campus involvement and volunteerism—and their relationship to students' perceptions about plagiarism and cheating. Chapter 5 returns, in the light of the observations and findings related in chapters 2 through 4, to restate Blum's opening appeal for institutional and cultural re-understanding of plagiarism. The concluding chapter outlines Blum's recommendations for addressing plagiarism—pedagogically, administratively, and culturally.

Blum set out to investigate students' attitudes toward a host of factors that contribute to their attitudes toward cheating and plagiarism. Writing from a broader cultural context and from a disciplinary perspective different from that of compositionists, Blum is able to pose questions regarding plagiarism in a way not specifically defined by textual (Pecorari) or pedagogical (Howard and Robillard) practices. Instead, her broader ethnographic scope allows her to engage plagiarism in the manner suggested by Eodice, Horner, and Robillard: as a form of authorship informed by larger social, cultural, digital, and intellectual understandings of ownership, originality, and authenticity. Over the course of roughly two years, four undergraduate research assistants working with Blum gathered interview data from nearly 250 student participants. Blum's goal was to identify, analyze, and "explain *patterns*" in the students' collective assumptions and opinions about cheating, plagiarism, and intellectual property. Recognizing that she could not argue that this group of participants—students at a highly selective, private, religiously affiliated, four-year college—was "representative" of all college students, Blum nonetheless suggests that the data are instructive *because* institutions like "Saint U" and the students enrolled in them (about 10% of the 1.4 million students attending postsecondary institutions) are those to which much of our cultural attention is drawn with respect to matters of academic integrity and success (9). The focus on patterns or "waves" is fundamental to Blum's study—and to its significance to English studies and our understanding of plagiarism in college culture—as it offers a means of gaining a general sense of the beliefs, values, practices, and aspirations of students. Although her participants may not stand as representative of the whole, her methodologies provide a model for investigating student attitudes at other sites. In short, Blum argues that her data suggest that students' beliefs, values, practices, and aspirations vary dramatically from those held by colleges and universities (as represented in their definitions of and policies and procedures for handling plagiarism). For students, Blum asserts, institutional definitions simply don't apply because those definitions don't take into account the students' changing understanding of the role of higher education, the notion of "text," and the concept of "self" (10). It is into these three contexts that Blum and her undergraduate researchers delved as they interviewed Saint U students.

"A Question of Judgment: Plagiarism Is Not One Thing, Once and for All" (chapter 1) encapsulates Blum's position: plagiarism cannot be captured by a single

definition, addressed with a single set of guidelines, or punished by a single set of procedures. This fully aligns her on the issue with Pecorari and the contributors to *Pluralizing Plagiarism*. Moreover, plagiarism of the most egregious kinds has been around us for centuries—and is still all around us—from the desperate civil servants in imperial China cheating on written examinations (a crime punishable by death) in hopes of acquiring higher administrative positions, to the now familiar cases of Dr. King, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Stephen Ambrose, to the more recently reported cases of Jason Blair (the *New York Times* reporter who falsified nearly every element of his research in constructing stories about alleged sniper Lee Malvo), and Kaavya Viswanathan (the Harvard student whose novel was found to have included whole passages from novels by Megan McCafferty).

In examining students' positions on "Intertextuality, Authorship, and Plagiarism" in chapter 2, Blum concludes that students are not so much "ignorant of the principles of citation"; rather, they "do not entirely accept them" (29). Here, Blum claims a more active resistance among students of academic citation conventions than her data suggest. Her conclusion that they "do not entirely accept them" seems to follow from her *own* observation that students reject the notion of the independent author, one who creates and therefore has rights over the product of that thought as intellectual property. Blum extrapolates from the data that the students at Saint U hold a postmodern understanding of the self that rules governing intellectual property and attribution don't reflect. Students find originality and authenticity, she argues, in "selection and consumption rather than production"—as in music mixes, quotations on wall posts, and "away" messages (46). Blum perhaps overstates her conclusion that the "official rules governing citation [. . .] are simply not accepted by today's students" *because* they reject the "Enlightenment notions of authorship, ownership, and originality" that inform them (58). Students in her study *do* express a desire for less formalistic and (from their perspective) formulaic conventions, but they are more nuanced in their comments, expressing greater preference for and comfort with informal conversational forms and frustration with academic forms. The relationship, in other words, is not necessarily causal, as Blum suggests. Students don't commit acts of perceived plagiarism *because* they adhere to particular notions of authorship or the self (59). These notions, rather, *inform* their perceptions and orientations toward plagiarism. Nonetheless, Blum is absolutely correct in noting that "the ideal—or myth—of originality does not drive this generation of students. They [report that they] are more interested in sharing, belonging, resembling, converging. Thus plagiarism—the violation of originality—does not horrify them, does not cause revulsion or despair" (59).

Blum turns in chapter 3 from a discussion of intertextuality to a discussion of the "Performance Self," arguing, essentially, that students recognize not a "*genuine*," "*integral*," and "*undivided*" self, but multiple performed selves informed and

determined by “*efficacy, nimbleness, comfort, circumstance, ends, goals*” (61). Many of the interview excerpts support Blum’s claim that students’ sense of self is shifting toward the “performative.” However, Blum overstates her claim that students reject the Enlightenment self. One respondent, Diana, when asked by an interviewer whether “it’s okay to act differently in different contexts,” answered “generally, no, I would say it’s important to keep whoever you are. You shouldn’t be afraid to be that person in whatever context you’re in” (74). Overstating that the performative self guides students leads Blum, problematically, to argue such points as the following: “This [postmodern] self, made out of various readily available components, is as unconcerned about strict attribution of authorship as it is about strictly tracing an unchanging identity” (79). From the notions of malleability and flux, students can justify articulating beliefs they don’t necessarily hold, or even “cheating” “out of need” (81). Students may well be unconcerned or willing to cheat, but Blum doesn’t sufficiently make the case that their lack of concern or unwillingness is a *result of* an adherence to the postmodern.

Blum’s data *do* demonstrate among students an intense sense of community, sharing, and solidarity that they themselves acknowledge influences their sense of fair play and honesty. In discussing integrity, for example, students focus on how others are treated (83)—an extension of their valuing of friendship and community. Against this notion of integrity, they weigh the relative outcomes and consequences in making decisions. In the end, “exigencies of a situation and the actor’s [student’s] desires” outweigh any universal mandate against plagiarism or cheating (88). Ultimately, Blum concludes that the “performance self is more prone to cheat and plagiarize” (89) and proposes that “the academy can more effectively uphold its beleaguered standards of originality and attribution” if it understands the values held by its students (90).

Blum argues in chapter 4, “Growing Up in the College Bubble: The Tasks and Temptations of Adolescence,” that institutional, cultural, and social practices inside and outside the academy (for example, admissions criteria and processes, and students’ social lives, which compete with academic demands) lead students to be “pushed to plagiarize” (147). In characterizing students in this manner, Blum paints them as unwitting victims of a “plagiarism tsunami” they cannot resist (147) because “they have absorbed the cultural messages about competition, success, multitasking, and the bottom line” (140).

Why cheat? Blum provides numerous reasons: students do it to “make their lives easier,” because they “disrespect [. . .] institutional guidelines,” “haven’t mastered the conventions of citation” (141), or are not “confident enough that they’d get an A on their own” (143). They’ve been conditioned to believe that to succeed, they must overextend themselves, which in turn leads them to “cut corners” (104). Moreover, their social lives exert such pressure on their time that students are all but forced to cheat (137–38). The picture Blum paints is not a flattering one. Students

don't read, they don't study, they have a "disdain of hard work" and see "homework [as a] burden" (122). They're partiers, but partiers accustomed to success (which they've generally achieved with minimal effort). They expect to succeed, and when they don't, they become anxious, stressed, even clinically depressed. They "want to be handed the formula for success" (139). And, if they don't get it, they turn to plagiarism "as a logical option" (140). We can, she concludes, therefore, only "partly blame them" (140).

This might be news to faculty at larger colleges like Saint U—whose lives intersect with their students only in the classroom—yet Blum's study doesn't reveal a seedy underbelly of college culture about which college administrators and student services staff people are unaware. But it does situate students' habits and priorities as part of the campus climate, and it gives faculty some insight into the "hidden transcript" rather than just the "public transcript" of students' discourses on plagiarism and cheating. Students as a whole don't pay as much attention to their course work as professors think they do (or would like them to); excessive and binge drinking is a regular part of the lives of nearly half of undergraduates. At the same time, students, Blum acknowledges, are also young people of a certain age (as most at Saint U are traditionally aged students), dedicated to the movements and issues that matter to them, and are also "desperately trying to figure out their paths in life" (3). Among the factors that Blum explores in studying the Saint U students' attitudes toward texts, authorship, and plagiarism are the effects of "social conditioning prior to college"—including exceedingly high expectations for academic achievement and success, and community engagement—the demands of work, and the presence of electronic communication that simultaneously "has *changed* how they think of texts" and makes this generation "the *wordiest* and most *writerly* [. . .] in a long while" (4).

Those in writing studies who have even passing familiarity with research on plagiarism will find Blum's discussion generally sufficient and accurate with its insights in the implications of current practices. But the strength of her study is not in any larger insights about plagiarism itself. Late in the study, Blum essentially reiterates Howard's 1999 position (*Standing*), citing the need, in particular, of a finer-grained understanding of plagiarism as patchwriting. She also advocates for pedagogical approaches that recognize the "artificiality and cultural specificity" of the conventions of citation and documentation, and that then provide instruction in employing those conventions (175–76). Yet, she misses the larger conclusion that Pecorari and the contributors to Howard and Robillard's collection reach: teaching students to navigate successfully source-based writing is more than a matter of teaching students "genre requirements" and "how to cite, how to refer, how to use quotation marks for direct as opposed to indirect quotation" (169).

Blum's most compelling insights come, instead, in engaging plagiarism from the perspective of and through the sociological methodology she employs. She articu-

lates, for example, a variation on the pedagogical theme by arguing that we “must recognize the ways students incorporate texts in their daily lives and show them how the same practices can be channeled for the purposes of the academy” (177). In effect, Blum’s study and her findings situate her perfectly for arguing for just the kind of approach proposed by Horner in *Pluralizing Plagiarism* and described by Thompson and Pennycook in the same volume as hybridity, yet Blum falls just short of (or begins to make and then backs off from) an argument for such a pedagogy, instead proposing “*really* teaching” students “what academic integrity involves, why professors value it, and how exactly to carry it out” (170).

The strength of the study is in what it uncovers about students, student life, and campus culture. Blum’s study, in fact, might serve as a kind of corrective to an assumption expressed by some in English studies (for example, Jamieson) that we can’t know the reasons that students plagiarize or what their motives are. Blum’s study gives us insight into both of these matters. On the one hand, students name a number of factors as contributing to their own (or their classmates’) cheating: “pressure, stress, and competition; lack of meaningfulness of a task; ease and temptation of the transgression” (157). And although she may not uncover the motives for plagiarizing per se, Blum recognizes in the students’ responses a “hierarchy of values” in which “friendliness and solidarity are moral imperatives that command a student’s attention far more than loyalty to abstract principles of academic integrity” (156). Viewed from the sociological perspective, plagiarism stands alongside a *host* of other prohibitions—many of which, Blum rightly notes, students regularly, even casually, disregard: prohibitions against underage drinking and downloading music being the two most notable examples (161).

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Generally speaking, I’m an optimist and have for some time had faith that we can, collectively, effect change in cultural and institutional perspectives on plagiarism. Reading these three texts, however, reminded me of just how difficult a task effecting change will be. In fact, I wonder whether it’s even possible, given the powerful hold that (as Eodice tells us) “corporatized media” have on a “largely anti-intellectual consumer-oriented public” (8). (I even began questioning my own optimism. We’ve not succeeded in dispelling the myth that a student who doesn’t distinguish correctly between *it’s* and *its* is illiterate, and that discussion began, in its most recent incarnation, over thirty years ago.) In the case of plagiarism, Howard made the first salvo over ten years ago, and the effects in our high schools, colleges, and culture at large are negligible.

I’m really of two minds, then, as I reflect on these three texts. On the one hand, as a whole (excepting, perhaps, Horner and Thompson and Pennycook), they do little to advance the *theoretical* discussion of plagiarism beyond Howard (“Sexuality” and

*Standing*). On the other, they contribute significantly to the *pedagogical* discussion *because* they do not move dramatically beyond—but rather *reiterate and confirm*—Howard’s and others’ (for example, Price; Valentine) positions and findings. These texts provide research to support Howard’s foundational claims about patchwriting (Pecorari), additional pedagogical models for curricular innovation (Howard and Robillard), and an extensive ethnographic grounding for further investigating campus culture (Blum).

Collectively, *Academic Writing and Plagiarism, My Word!*, and *Pluralizing Plagiarism* illustrate our continuing cultural, intellectual, and pedagogical obsession with plagiarism—detecting it, preventing it, defining it, and teaching students how to avoid it. From the larger cultural scenes and media that facilitate it to the academic scenes that eschew it yet in which it thrives, plagiarism defines a good share of the very nature of academic work. It remains the *one* act that (as it was described in a recent informational video produced by The Ohio State University’s Committee on Academic Misconduct) threatens the very fabric of the academy. Frankly, if the academy is so weak that student plagiarism threatens its very existence, we’re in a good deal more trouble than we’d thought.

In the end, and after reading these three texts and rereading Howard’s *Standing in the Shadow of Giants*, I conclude for myself that the best we can do is speak out at every possible moment, teach differently, advocate for change in our departments and colleges, offer to lead workshops and colloquia, and create and deliver to our colleagues model lessons for teaching *and responding to* source-based writing in ways that benefit students. We have to work one student, one class at a time. The approach must be proactive, not reactive. That seems to be the central position of all of these scholars. We need to take proactive *instructional* action—not preventive punitive action—that engages our students as sophisticated consumers of discourses whose assumptions about text, identity, self, and authenticity may differ dramatically from ours—but may yet productively inform our classrooms.

## NOTES

1. Authors across these studies employ various terms to distinguish particular textual and discursive practices from plagiarism. Pecorari uses *repeated text*; Carrick, *co-authoring*; Thompson and Pennycook, *textual borrowing*.

2. I have found Mikhail Bakhtin’s notions of internally persuasive and authoritative discourses particularly instructive on this topic. My commentary in *A Pedagogy of Possibility* on active engagement and passive reception aligns well with Pecorari’s findings.

3. Thompson and Pennycook and Blum relate similar concerns expressed among students in their studies.

4. In 2008 and again in 2009, community colleges enrolled roughly 43 percent of all undergraduates (Bradley; “Answers”). All indications are that this percentage will continue to increase, as it did in 2010. Community colleges also got a boost in October 2010 with the White House Summit on Community Colleges.

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