

GEMEINSCHAFT AND GESELLSCHAFT: THE GEOPOLITICS OF ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM*

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JUST HOW SERIOUS AN OFFENCE IS ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM?

Judging by the ominous warnings issued to students by universities in the Anglo-Saxon world¹ and the sense of moral outrage with which transgressors are pursued, the answer to that question would seem to be “very serious indeed”. In fact, Oxford University’s website is unequivocal on the matter:

It would be wrong to describe plagiarism as only a minor form of cheating, or as merely a matter of academic etiquette. On the contrary, it is important to understand that plagiarism is a breach of academic integrity.²

Consequently, those found guilty of “committing” plagiarism (the collocation is significant) face the most severe penalties that academia can muster: expulsion, disgrace, and in extreme cases, even prosecution under the Copyright Act.

Yet in many other countries of the world, plagiarism, like other forms of academic corruption, is not viewed with quite the same degree of opprobrium. Gadpaille³ reports that, in the unspecified Central European country where

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¹ A.E. Abasi and B.Graves, “Academic literacy and plagiarism: Conversations with international graduate students and disciplinary professors,” *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7 (2008): 229–230; A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 214; B. Martin, “Plagiarism: a misplaced emphasis,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 3(2) (1994) 37.

² <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism>, accessed 24/4/10.

³ M. Gadpaille, “Academic Integrity in a European Context,” *The English European Messenger* XIII/1 (2004) 57.

she worked, not only was cheating endemic in the culture, no shame seemed to accrue to the practice; instead, “information is widely viewed as common property; honour lies in sharing rather than monopolizing, and competition for grades is minimal”.⁴ Similarly, Sherman⁵ found that first-year students in an Italian university gave verbatim answers without any kind of analysis or sourcing, clearly viewing this as “not only legitimate but correct and proper”; while Deckert claimed that the Chinese students in his study routinely engaged in a form of “learned plagiarism”,⁶ which involved, amongst other things, rote memorizing and recycling.⁷

Clearly, then, there is a cultural dimension to plagiarism that urgently needs to be addressed in the increasingly globalized world of modern academia.

Of course, attitudes towards authorship, originality and intellectual property have not always been what they are today.⁸ In medieval Scholasticism, the term “author” (*auctor*) was reserved for those ancient authorities that had produced great truths in accordance with Christian doctrine, and contemporary writers, considered mere *scriptores, compilatores* or *commentatores*,⁹ were expected to copy them as faithfully as possible for the purpose of dissemination; in fact, decontextualised fragments of text from ancient sources (*sententiae*) circulated freely at this time with no reference to the original author at all. Similarly, in Humanism, imitation (*imitatio*) had an important part to play in the learning process, and students would copy tropes and phrases of the masters into commonplace books for incorporation into their own work.¹⁰ Indeed, the notion that words/ideas can be owned only really developed in the 16th/17th

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J. Sherman, “Your own thoughts in your own words,” *ELT Journal* 46(3) (1992) 191.

⁶ G.D. Deckert, “A pedagogical response to learned plagiarism among tertiary-level ESL students,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2 (1993) 95.

⁷ Ibid. 104.

⁸ M. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 33–35; P. Kewes, “Historicizing Plagiarism,” *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 7–8; H. Love, “Originality and the Puritan Sermon,” *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 150–153.

⁹ Even Chaucer considered himself to be no more than a compiler or ‘rehearser’ of others’ stories. M. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 35; 197–205.

¹⁰ M. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 37–38; P. Kewes, “Historicizing Plagiarism,” *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 8.

centuries, when the emergence of a market for print meant that people could now earn a living by publication.¹¹

In this article, therefore, I consider plagiarism not as a universal or unequivocal evil, but as one component of a particular ethical system that took hold within a specific historical and social context, roughly contemporary with the European Enlightenment.¹² Today, that ethical framework is so deeply entrenched in the power structures of the modern world that its values go largely unquestioned in countries at the centre of the world economic system. However, as we move away from the centre towards the semi-periphery and periphery, we find that those values become weaker, and may enter into conflict with another moral code, which is usually more traditional in nature, though no less coherent. Indeed, in some parts of the world, it is those traditional values that actually hold sway in local universities.¹³ This raises serious problems for academic mobility and the internationalization of knowledge.

There has been a certain amount of cross-cultural research into attitudes to plagiarism, with most of the early work¹⁴ stressing the influence of home culture norms upon foreign student production in English. Much of this is very culture-specific. For example, Gadpaille¹⁵ describes how communism is often blamed for the lack of respect for individual intellectual property in Eastern

¹¹ Other important influences will have been the advance of technology (particularly the printing press), capitalism, and of course the development of modern science, which discredited the emulation of textual authorities, laying the emphasis firmly upon observation and experimentation. A. Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (University of Chicago Press, 1998) 445–462.

¹² R. Scollon, “Plagiarism and ideology: Identity in intercultural discourse,” *Language in Society* 24 (1995) 1–28; A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 201–230.

¹³ A.S. Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press: 2002).

¹⁴ e.g. C. Matalene, “Contrastive Rhetoric: An American writing teacher in China,” *College English* 47 (8) (1985) 789–808; S. Myers, “Questioning author(ity): ESL/EFL, science and teaching about plagiarism,” *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* 3(2) (1998) 1–21; J. Sherman, “Your own thoughts in your own words,” *ELT Journal* 46(3) (1992) 190–198; J. Bloch and Chi, L. 1995. “A comparison of the use of citations in Chinese and English academic discourse,” *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy*, eds. D. Belcher and G. Braine (Norwood, NJ: Ablex: 1995); G.D. Deckert, “A pedagogical response to learned plagiarism among tertiary-level ESL students,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2 (1993) 94–104.

¹⁵ M. Gadpaille, “Academic Integrity in a European Context,” *The English European Messenger* XIII/1 (2004) 57–59.

European countries, while Harris¹⁶ suggests that Confucianism may have conditioned Chinese students' attitudes to textual authority. In this paper, however, I would like to put forward a more wide-ranging explanation based upon Tönnies' 1887 model of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, which, I believe, can account not only for present-day disparities in attitudes to plagiarism, but also for changes in those attitudes over time. What is more, this model also offers a much-needed critical perspective on the values that centre scholars take so much for granted, providing a more sympathetic view of the mechanisms generating plagiarism and other forms of academic "corruption" amongst non-centre scholars.

WHAT IS ACADEMIC PLAGIARISM?

Before launching into our geopolitical exploration of academic cultures, let us begin by establishing exactly what is meant by plagiarism today. Modern dictionaries tend to be laconic on the matter, often defining it as the "appropriation of the writings or ideas of another"¹⁷ or as "literary theft".¹⁸ However, in practice the word is used to cover a wide range of related offences. The Oxford University website, cited above, includes not only "the verbatim quotation of other people's work without acknowledgement", but also "paraphrasing with only minor alterations", "collusion", "inaccurate citation", "failure to acknowledge all assistance", recourse to "professional agencies" and "self-plagiarism".¹⁹

Moreover, the metadiscourse surrounding the subject of plagiarism is confusingly ambivalent. Despite the fact that it is not in itself a legal offence,²⁰ it is often presented as a form of "stealing" – that is to say, a crime against the inalienable property rights of the individual²¹ – though as Bjørnstad²² points out,

¹⁶ cit. A. Pennycook, "Borrowing Others' Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism," *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 221.

¹⁷ Collins Dictionary of the English Language; Cassell's English Dictionary.

¹⁸ Merriam-Webster online dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/plagiarize> [8/8/11].

¹⁹ All cf. <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/epsc/plagiarism>, accessed 24/4/10.

²⁰ P. Goldstein, *Copyright's Highway: from Gutenberg to the Celestial Jukebox* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003/1994) 8.

²¹ A. Pennycook, "Borrowing Others' Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism," *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 214.

²² H. Bjørnstad, *Borrowed Feathers: Plagiarism and the Limits of Imitation in Early Modern Europe* (Oslo: Unipub, 2008) 10.

it is difficult to see just what has been stolen, since the author does not have fewer words after the theft. Others prefer to cast it as “fraud”,²³ thereby emphasising the dimension of deceit and illicit gain. Yet others adopt a quasi-religious moralistic tone, rather than a legalistic one, seeking to shame potential perpetrators into obeisance with references to “dishonesty” and “integrity”²⁴ or “sin”.²⁵ Hence, although there is a general consensus amongst centre institutions and commentators that it is wrongful, not everyone agrees as to why exactly it is, with plagiarized authors and educators tending to mobilise quite different arguments in their own defence.

What all of these discursive strands have in common, however, is that they are all tightly enmeshed in the network of Enlightenment values and beliefs that underpins modern society. This ideology not only conceives the individual author as sovereign, rational and autonomous, and in full conscious possession of his words,²⁶ but has also elevated the pursuit of material gain into a fundamental principle, holding private property sacrosanct and fostering competition as an incentive to productivity and excellence. Hence, all practices that undermine these basic market principles are viewed with great distrust, not only because they are unfair on “honest” competitors, but also because they threaten the very infrastructure of the whole economic game.

Modern academic transactions, like other marketplace operations, are governed by relationships of *contract*, which presuppose a need for transparency and respect for certain fundamental rights (such as the right to property, the fruits of one’s labour, etc). Hence, whether plagiarism is framed as theft, fraud or simple dishonesty, it constitutes a breach of contract, which inevitably injures other parties – authors, teachers, examiners, fellow students, the academic institution (whose name may be tarnished), future employers or, in some high-profile cases, the public at large. A British study into students’ percep-

²³ For example, St Onge describes it as “verbal fraud”, involving “illicit gains by illicit methods”. K.R. St Onge, *The Melancholy Anatomy of Plagiarism* (Lanham MD: University Press of America, 1988) 62.

²⁴ Abasi, A.E. & B.Graves, “Academic literacy and plagiarism: Conversations with international graduate students and disciplinary professors,” *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7 (2008) 228–229.

²⁵ B. Martin, “Plagiarism: a misplaced emphasis,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 3(2) (1994) 36; W. Sutherland-Smith, “Pandora’s Box: academic perceptions of student plagiarism in writing,” *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 4 (2005) 90.

²⁶ R. Scollon, “Plagiarism and ideology: Identity in intercultural discourse,” *Language in Society* 24 (1995) 3–5.

tions of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment²⁷ showed that students that had been raised in that culture clearly shared these basic principles. For example, one student commented about cheating “It’s not fair on other students, because I think we are all in competition with each other for the 1st, 2i’s and 2ii’s”²⁸ while another believed that “pressing tutors for help with assignments is a bit wrong because that information should be shared to the whole class”.²⁹ Similarly, the respondents that actually justified cheating and plagiarism did so on the grounds that the university assessment systems and teaching methods were flawed, thereby drawing on the same fundamental argument of “fair play”.

However, we cannot take it for granted that members of non-centre countries have all internalised these principles quite so fully. As has already been mentioned, early studies into attitudes to plagiarism amongst EFL students³⁰ suggested that they were operating according to norms imported from their own cultures and were often shocked to find that these were incompatible with the requirements stipulated by universities in the host country. Consequently, authors such as Scollon³¹ and Pennycook³² have called for a more relativistic view of such practices:

²⁷ P. Ashworth, P. Bannister and P. Thorne, “Guilty in whose eyes? University students’ perceptions of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment,” *Studies in Higher Education*, 22(2) (1997) 187–203.

²⁸ Ibid. 190.

²⁹ Ibid. 191.

³⁰ C. Matalene, “Contrastive Rhetoric: An American writing teacher in China,” *College English* 47 (8) (1985) 789–808; S. Myers, “Questioning author(ity): ESL/EFL, science and teaching about plagiarism,” *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language* 3(2) (1998) 1–21; J. Sherman, “Your own thoughts in your own words,” *ELT Journal* 46(3) (1992) 190–198; J. Bloch and Chi, L. 1995. “A comparison of the use of citations in Chinese and English academic discourse,” *Academic Writing in a Second Language: Essays on Research and Pedagogy*, eds. D. Belcher and G. Braine (Norwood, NJ: Ablex: 1995); G.D. Deckert, “A pedagogical response to learned plagiarism among tertiary-level ESL students,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 2 (1993) 94–104.

³¹ R. Scollon, “Plagiarism and ideology: Identity in intercultural discourse,” *Language in Society* 24 (1995) 1–28.

³² A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996).

[...] whereas we can see how the notion of plagiarism needs to be understood within the particular cultural and historical context of its development, it also needs to be understood relative to alternative cultural practices.³³

It is in this light that Tönnies' model of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* seems particularly relevant, as it offers an explanation not only of the dynamics operating in different cultural situations today, but also of the way in which these change over time.

Gemeinschaft AND *Gesellschaft*

Ferdinand Tönnies' influential work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* was first published in 1887 at a time when the traditional peasant lifestyle in Germany was being irrevocably transformed by the rationalistic forces of mechanization and commercialization. Having been brought up in an affluent peasant family, he naturally viewed these changes with some alarm,³⁴ a personal perspective which undoubtedly coloured his judgement about the relative merits of the two social systems in question. Despite this bias, however, his model has proved to be very influential, offering, amongst other things, a useful counterpoint to Spencer's evolutionary model that was dominant at the time.

In Tönnies' work, the everyday German words "Gemeinschaft" and "Gesellschaft" (literally "community" and "society") acquire the force of technical terms within a coherent sociological theory. The former is understood as an organic community, bound by a common *Geist*, whose members share bonds of kinship and land, with common ownership and a strong sense of intra-group cooperation. The latter, in contrast, is an artificial aggregate of individuals linked only by the rational ties of contract, and where notions of individual ownership prevail over the communal.³⁵ In this context, competition is strongly encouraged as a way of generating wealth and expertise; hence, failure to abide by the rules is perceived as an affront to the whole notion of citizenship and fair play.

³³ Ibid. 218.

³⁴ C. Loomis and J.C. McKinney, "Introduction," F. Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Dover Publications, 2002/1957) 1.

³⁵ There have of course been other designations for the same phenomena. Marxist discourse speaks of feudal vs. capitalist economies, while contemporary sociologists such as Giddens (1990) and Bauman (2000) refer to "premodern" versus "modern" societies.

Crucial for our understanding of plagiarism and other forms of “corruption” in premodern societies is the fact that, in the *Gemeinschaft*, members of the group cooperate with each other against the “Other”, whether this be a foreign tribe or the organisms and representatives of the modern State. What the *Gesellschaft* views as despicable cheating is a normal, even honourable, mode of being in the *Gemeinschaft*, to the extent that, if a “friend” requests help in drafting a text, passing an examination or acquiring a position or privilege, it would be extremely impolite to refuse. That is to say, loyalty to the immediate group is given priority over and above abstract notions of state or citizenship.

Similarly this notion of “commonality” that pervades human relations in the *Gemeinschaft*³⁶ also extends to property, with obvious repercussions upon the issue of plagiarism. Canagarajah, in his seminal work *The Geopolitics of Academic Writing*, explains that, in peripheral academic cultures, such as his own home country of Sri Lanka, “the idea of intellectual property is less clear-cut”³⁷ than in centre universities:

Borrowing from other texts, like borrowing freely from others’ words in the communal stock of oral knowledge, is unrestricted. The ownership of knowledge is fluid, just as copyright laws are hardly in operation. Local scholars see themselves as freely borrowing from and contributing to the pool of available knowledge.³⁸

This implies that plagiarism is scarcely recognised as an issue in such environments, much less a reason for expulsion or disgrace.

The question of authority is also of interest here, as it reflects directly upon the notion of “originality”, so highly prized by the modern university.³⁹ Tönnies distinguishes three forms of authority in the *Gemeinschaft* – “the authority of age, authority of force, and authority of wisdom or spirit”, all of which are united in the figure of the father, “who is engaged in protecting, assisting, and guiding his family”.⁴⁰ This paternalistic prototype is reproduced in the mas-

³⁶ “Common goods – common evils; common friends – common enemies”. F. Tönnies, *Community and Society*, Übersetzung C. Loomis (New York: Dover Publications, 2002/1887) 50.

³⁷ A.S. Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press: 2002) 131.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 131.

³⁹ A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 204–211.

⁴⁰ F. Tönnies, *Community and Society*, Übersetzung C. Loomis (New York: Dover Publications, 2002/1887) 41.

ter/disciple relationship⁴¹ found in institutions such as craft guilds, professional corporations and, by extension, the university. It is significant that originality, in the modern sense, has little role to play in the disciple's training. Instead, the dominant attitude is one of acquiescence, passive reproduction of authoritative models, and absorption of the master's skills and knowledge, in exchange for protection and promotion.

The master/disciple unit is also the building block of the whole system of patronage that is central to social relations in the *Gemeinschaft*. Unlike the modern university, where there is stringent competition at all stages of the academic career, the *Gemeinschaft* university is viewed more as a traditional Alma Mater that nurtures its offspring and encourages their trajectory through the system. Hence, in such cultures, mobility tends to be *vertical* rather than *horizontal*,⁴² as teachers are typically recruited from the student body and propelled through the various stages of the academic career fairly automatically.⁴³ Thus, there may be no real competition for jobs; instead junior staff enjoy the support of more senior professors, who operate "minifiefdoms",⁴⁴ promoting their protégés, and cultivating extensive circles of influence in the process. Moreover, as career progression depends more upon interpersonal connections than upon academic production, the "publish or perish" ethos that dominates in the *Gesellschaft* also tends to be absent from the *Gemeinschaft*,⁴⁵ and publications, where they occur, are not usually peer-reviewed. Once more, originality is not at a premium. Instead what counts, in editorial decisions, is ensuring that local authorities are properly represented and that due respect is paid.

Given the *magister dixit* ethos that prevails in the *Gemeinschaft*, students are not encouraged to challenge or dispute authority. In lectures, they are expected to take down the professor's words and to reproduce them verbatim in examinations. Consequently, their intervention in class will be minimal, couched, when it occurs, in highly respectful language. It is hardly surprising, then, that students from *Gemeinschaft* cultures have difficulty coping with the demands for originality that are made of them in *Gesellschaft* universities.

⁴¹ Ibid. 192.

⁴² A.S. Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press: 2002) 197.

⁴³ Ibid. 190.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 195.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 14/190.

Indeed, the very concept of student originality must appear to them as deeply at odds with their whole notion of what education entails.

THE LIMITATIONS OF THE MODEL

Despite its usefulness for explaining some of the discrepancies between different academic cultures, the *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* model does, however, have limitations, as pointed out by Loomis & McKinney in their introduction to the English edition of Tönnies' work.⁴⁶ In particular, it should be remembered that the two categories are ideal types that are rarely found in a pure form today. So, although Canagarajah's description of the "peripheral" academic community has much in common with Tönnies' notion of the *Gemeinschaft*, such cultures are nevertheless subject to a centripetal force that puts pressure upon them to adapt to centre values.⁴⁷ Thus, in such environments, we find modern science existing alongside indigenous forms of scholarship,⁴⁸ and old-style professors whose social status is "ascribed" by the traditional hierarchy⁴⁹ sharing departments with young socially-mobile researchers that have been trained abroad. This conflict of values is particularly evident amongst countries of the "semi-periphery",⁵⁰ which, for geographical and economic reasons, have strong incentives to assimilate to the centre, in some cases becoming more precocious about centre values than the centre countries themselves.⁵¹

Conversely, within the most "developed" *Gesellschaft*-societies, there are inevitably pockets of *Gemeinschaft*-culture that prove resistant to modern mar-

⁴⁶ C. Loomis and J.C. McKinney, "Introduction," F. Tönnies, *Community and Society* (New York: Dover Publications, 2002/1957) 7.

⁴⁷ A.S. Canagarajah, *A Geopolitics of Academic Writing* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press: 2002) 41.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 50–54.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 226.

⁵⁰ The term "semi-periphery" was coined by Wallerstein and refers to those countries that are positioned, geographically and economically, between the core and the periphery of the world system and have characteristics of each; cf. I. Wallerstein, *The Politics of the World-Economy: the States, the Movements and the Civilizations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984).

⁵¹ This centripetal pressure may explain why Abasi & Graves' more recent survey of foreign students' attitudes to plagiarism in a Canadian university presented different results to the earlier studies described above. Rather than expressing bewilderment at the whole notion that copying might be wrong, these students now seemed to share the same basic moral framework as the host culture, but claimed that, in their home countries, the offence was treated as less serious and not subject to the same harsh sanctions (2008: 228).

ket values. For example, Oxford and Cambridge Universities have often been accused of non-meritocratic practices, such as favouring students from certain independent schools (with which they have traditional ties) above brighter students from state institutions, and of awarding degrees to undeserving candidates on the basis of social status or family connections. And even the more progressive universities are not always single-minded about the role ascribed to them by neoliberal governments (which usually involves training highly-specialised personnel to supply the organs of industry and capitalism) or about the fact that they are now expected to function almost as bureaucratic corporations committed to the pursuit of “excellence”. These uncertainties generate tensions that may filter down and affect university practices in the most unexpected ways.

Despite the fact that most people brought up in centre countries tend to subscribe unequivocally to the Enlightenment values of fair play and transparency, the whole issue of plagiarism is rife with contradictions. Take the question of originality. As Pennycook⁵² has pointed out, at undergraduate level, students are usually engaged in acquiring a fixed canon of knowledge and terminology (not so different, in fact, from *Gemeinschaft* apprentices learning the tools of the trade), and are often encouraged to imitate published models in order to acquire agility in the disciplinary discourse.⁵³ In the light of this, exhortations to be original seem rather misplaced; for until one has firmly mastered the discourse norms, reformulation is a risky business. As one Taiwanese student pointed out, if she didn’t stick closely to the terms used in the book, she would never learn to use them effectively.⁵⁴

Then there is the question of authority. The very fact that this is a more fluid notion in the *Gesellschaft* than in the *Gemeinschaft* brings its own problems. Students learn that they are expected to quote authorities in the field to demonstrate their breadth of reading and knowledge of the state of the art. But just who or what should be quoted? Is the professor that provides a potted overview in a lecture a worthy source? Is the introductory textbook? And

⁵² A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 213.

⁵³ Indeed, many of the books used for the teaching of Academic English today employ techniques of *imitatio* not so different from those used in the Early Modern period within the humanist rhetorical tradition.

⁵⁴ P. Currie, “Staying out of trouble: Apparent plagiarism and academic survival,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 7(1) (1998) 11.

just how much basic knowledge is required before one is even in a position to approach those authorities critically?

There is also a hierarchical dimension to plagiarism that is at odds with the *Gesellschaft's* view of itself as eminently meritocratic. That is to say, students that fail to acknowledge their sources are open to charges of plagiarism, while established academics are rarely considered to be committing the same offence when they “borrow” ideas from their students or juniors. Indeed, in the sciences, where teams of researchers habitually collaborate on papers, it is often a junior that writes up the article while the senior researcher (who may have played a minimal role in practice) receives the credit. As Pennycook⁵⁵ points out, “much of what gets claimed as the result of original academic work actually draws heavily on the work of silent others – women, graduate students, research assistants and so on.”⁵⁶ Ironically, the justification given is that the junior in question is a “novice” or “trainee” who is operating under the supervision of someone more experienced – which suggests that the power balance involved is remarkably similar to that operating in the traditional *Gemeinschaft* relationship of master/ disciple.

Finally, the question of plagiarism is also underpinned by the gritty philosophical problem of the relationship between words and things. Modern science is predicated upon a philosophy of linguistic realism, which posits the ultimate separability of form and content; hence, enjoinders to reformulate, paraphrase and summarise presuppose that “reality” is prior to language and has an objective existence independent of perception or the forms that are used to encode it. Yet this philosophical viewpoint is by no means shared by all intellectual cultures, nor is it internally coherent.⁵⁷ For if science does indeed lift the veil on some pre-existing objective reality, then where does authorship come in? How can such “truth” be referenced?

Of course, the answer to this is that the “facts” that science purports to reveal are merely claims that have been sanctioned by the discourse community.

The construction of academic facts is a social process, with the cachet of acceptance

⁵⁵ A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 213.

⁵⁶ Martin has dubbed the socially-acceptable practice of plagiarising the work of subordinates “institutionalised plagiarism”. B. Martin, “Plagiarism: a misplaced emphasis,” *Journal of Information Ethics* 3(2) (1994) 39–43.

⁵⁷ A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others’ Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 222.

only bestowed on a claim after negotiation with editors, expert reviewers and journal readers, the final ratification granted, of course, with the citation of the claim by others and, eventually, the disappearance of all acknowledgment as it is incorporated into the literature of the discipline.⁵⁸

However, there is clearly a discrepancy between the constructed nature of scientific knowledge and its metadiscourse of transcendent truth, and it is this that possibly raises the most complex challenge to the whole issue of plagiarism. Traditional science textbooks, at undergraduate as well as high-school level, tend to present accepted knowledge as incontrovertible fact, using grammatical structures such as nominalizations, impersonal verb forms and cause-and-effect linkers to build a picture of an objectively-existing world from which all human agency is removed.⁵⁹ It is therefore not surprising if students are perplexed when they are faced with all the messiness and uncertainties of “science in the making”.⁶⁰ As Scollon⁶¹ has pointed out, it takes considerable expertise to know just when a claim has achieved the sort of consensual recognition that allows referencing to be dispensed with – that is to say, when it is no longer considered to be merely some scientist’s theory and has passed into the exalted realm of “fact”.

The issue of plagiarism is therefore something of a minefield that one has to be very adept to negotiate. No wonder, then, that so many students, foreign and domestic, take the “safe path” of constructing their texts as “patchworks” or “mosaics” of referenced citations from different sources, in which their own

⁵⁸ K. Hyland, “Academic Attribution: Citation and the Construction of Disciplinary Knowledge,” *Applied Linguistics* 20/3 (1999) 342.

⁵⁹ R. Veal, “The greening of school science: Ecogenesis in school classrooms,” *Reading Science: Critical and Functional Perspectives on Discourses of Science*, eds. J.R. Martin and R. Veal (London & New York: Routledge, 1998) 115–116; M.A.K. Halliday and J. Martin, *Writing Science: Literacy and Discursive Power* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1993) 134–135.

⁶⁰ B. Latour and S. Woolgar, *Laboratory Life: the Social Construction of Scientific Facts* (Los Angeles: Sage, 1979); K. Knorr-Cetina, *The Manufacture of Knowledge* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1981).

⁶¹ R. Scollon, “As a matter of fact: The changing ideology of authorship and responsibility in discourse,” *World Englishes* (1994) 13: 33–46.

input is limited to linking those sources together.⁶² In the current climate of persecution, this is at least one way of “staying out of trouble”.⁶³

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have argued that the concept of plagiarism is deeply embedded in the web of values and beliefs that sustains modern society, and as such, may be a source of (understandable) confusion for students and scholars raised in *Gemeinschaft* cultures, where a whole different ethos may prevail with regard to property, knowledge and authorship. What is more, the concept itself is also full of inherent contradictions, caused, at least in part, by historical tensions generated by the passage from one kind of society to the other. Vestiges of the *Gemeinschaft* continue to penetrate all aspects of modern university culture, ranging from teaching practices (the persistence of *imitatio* in academic writing courses) and hierarchical relations (the power balance inherent in the tutor/student dynamic) to the very philosophy of knowledge underlying modern science (where the rhetorical implications of the citation procedure sit uncomfortably alongside a metadiscourse of transcendental truth).

Of course, I have not even mentioned here the wide-ranging critiques of modernity brought by the poststructuralists in the 1960s and '70s, despite their profound implications for the subject of plagiarism, as they have been amply treated elsewhere.⁶⁴ However, what links Barthes' “Death of the author”, Foucault's “What is an author?”, Derrida's “différance”, Bakhtin's “dialogism”

⁶² Abasi, A.E. & B.Graves, “Academic literacy and plagiarism: Conversations with international graduate students and disciplinary professors,” *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7 (2008): 226–229; P. Currie, “Staying out of trouble: Apparent plagiarism and academic survival,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 7(1) (1998): 8–11; P. Ashworth, P. Bannister and P. Thorne, “Guilty in whose eyes? University students' perceptions of cheating and plagiarism in academic work and assessment,” *Studies in Higher Education*, 22(2) (1997) 201.

⁶³ P. Currie, “Staying out of trouble: Apparent plagiarism and academic survival,” *Journal of Second Language Writing* 7(1) (1998) 1–18.

⁶⁴ M. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 23–33; A. Pennycook, “Borrowing Others' Words: Text, Ownership, Memory, and Plagiarism,” *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 30/2 (1996) 209–211; C. Thompson and A. Pennycook, “Intertextuality in the Transcultural Contact Zone,” *Pluralizing Plagiarism: Identities, Contexts, Pedagogies*, eds. R.M. Howard and A. E. Robillard (Portsmouth NH: Boynton/Cook, 2008) 124–139; R. Scollon, “Plagiarism and ideology: Identity in intercultural discourse,” *Language in Society* 24 (1995) 21–22.

and Kristeva's "intertextuality" is the belief that all knowledge is mediated by language, which is culturally-constructed, and therefore partial and value-ridden. Not only does this make a mockery of the whole notion of originality (since we learn about the world through the categories set up by our discourses), it also undermines any attempt to claim ownership of words, which are common property and resist appropriation.

At the end of the last century, when poststructuralism was at its height, it seemed as if we might be returning to a *Gemeinschaft* notion of intellectual property; indeed a number of alternative academic discourses sprouted up at that time,⁶⁵ some of which self-consciously employed (unacknowledged) fragments of other discourses, creating deliberate echoes and patchwork effects. However, this tide seems to have receded. Instead, the forces of capitalism, industry and technology which govern our world have tightened the rules of the game, pushing universities into ever-closer partnerships with business, as public sector funding recedes. In a world dominated by patents and copyrights, the plagiarism police are, if anything, becoming even more relentless.

It is curious that the first person to use the term *plagium* in its present-day sense, the Roman poet Martial,⁶⁶ did not deem it very serious at all. In fact, he rated it on a par with "old women wearing dentures, or unattractive women wearing makeup or bald men wearing wigs!"⁶⁷ Today, however, the rewards for youth and beauty are so high that many are turning to drastic forms of plastic surgery to achieve that goal. Instead of persecuting these imposters, perhaps we should first question the social pressures operating upon them and the dominance of a value system that prompts them to act in this particular way.

⁶⁵ These include the various experimental discourses of qualitative research; the emancipatory 'écritures' of feminism and postcolonialism and the dense interventionist prose of Critical Theory.

⁶⁶ In his Epigram I.72, Martial applied the Latin word *plagium* (literally 'kidnapping', usually of a slave or child) to the practice of passing off someone else's literary work as one's own (S. Orgel, "Plagiarism and Original Sin," *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 63–54.; M. Randall, *Pragmatic Plagiarism: Authorship, Profit and Power* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001) 62–63; P. Goldstein, *Copyright's Highway: from Gutenberg to the Celestial Jukebox* (California: Stanford University Press, 2003/1994) 30).

⁶⁷ S. Orgel, "Plagiarism and Original Sin," *Plagiarism in Early Modern England*, ed. P. Kewes (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 63–54.

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Lehre und Plagiat

