

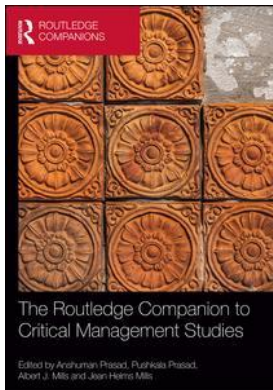
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 27 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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The Routledge Companion to Critical Management Studies

Anshuman Prasad, Pushkala Prasad, Albert J. Mills, Jean Helms Mills

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Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315889818.ch14>

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Published online on: 08 Sep 2015

How to cite :- J. Michael Cavanaugh. 08 Sep 2015, *The usual suspects? Putting plagiarism 2.0 in its place from: The Routledge Companion to Critical Management Studies* Routledge

Accessed on: 27 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315889818.ch14>

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The usual suspects? Putting plagiarism 2.0 in its place¹

J. Michael Cavanaugh

There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination, and engages the affections of mankind, as the right of property.

William Blackstone (Underkuffler, 1990: 127)

This essay constitutes an attempt to loosen the grip of the largely judgmental discourse framing student plagiarism by auditioning a self-checking discussion about the landscape of plagiarism and, not least, our connection to it.² Behind this effort lies a concern that in the rush to finger the ‘usual’ student suspects, academic faculty members risk undertheorizing student plagiarism *as a social practice*, alienating students in the process. In effect, emphatic and unreflexive efforts to shore up ratified notions of intellectual property (IP) may produce as much irony³ as desired results because we, faculty, may not fully appreciate what we are up against. Mindful of the reputational and example-setting implications of tight-lipped countermeasures and locating students as one link in a chain of contingent events, I hope to award faculty with a richer appreciation of the social and institutional coordinates of e-student plagiarism within the academic workplace.

Introduction: It’s complicated

Rather, copyright is an ongoing social negotiation, tenuously forged, endlessly revised, and imperfect in its every incarnation.

(Lethem, 2007: 63)

On YouTube, ‘you can get a whole story in six minutes,’ he [a 17-year-old high school student] explains. ‘A book takes so long. I prefer the immediate gratification.’

(Richtel, 2010a)

In his challenging August 9, 2010, *New York Times* blog post, ‘Plagiarism Is Not a Big Moral Deal,’ Stanley Fish (2010a) argues that it is better to view plagiarism as a professional transgression rather than a universal, moral one. He writes:

And if you're a student, plagiarism will seem to be an annoying guild imposition *without a persuasive rationale* [my italics] . . . knowledge of what is and is not plagiarism in this or that professional practice is not something that will be of very much use to you unless you end up becoming a member of the profession yourself. It follows that students who never quite get the concept right are by and large not committing a crime; they are just failing to become acclimated to the conventions of the little insular world they have, often through no choice of their own, wandered into. It's no big moral deal; which doesn't mean, I hasten to add, that plagiarism shouldn't be punished – if you're in our house, you've got to play by our rules – just that what you're punishing is a breach of disciplinary decorum, not a breach of the moral universe.

In the space of time it takes to text message 'crime and punishment,' Fish's words triggered 635 email posts, the vast majority deeply offended by his churlish breach of faith. Plagiarism, Fish was archly instructed, was theft, a character defect, a punishable crime, no middle ground, end of story. Surprised by this crescendo of indignity, Fish issued a defense appearing a week later (2010b), more soberly entitled, 'The Ontology of Plagiarism: Part Two.' In 'Part Two,' Fish patiently explains again that his intention was not to school students to cut corners, moral or otherwise. University students, like it or not, must play by house rules. But, Fish repeated, we live in many literary houses, each operating with its own, though not necessarily exclusive, rule set. What counts as original work depends on consensus anchored in particular times and places. Plagiarism, therefore, may result in an expulsion in the academy or launch a lawsuit in Hollywood. It may just as easily serve as a sign of deference in some non-Western cultures (Valentine, 2006) or be shrugged off as mere copying in oral religious sermonizing (Swearingen, 1987; Miller, 1991).

To a scholar with the constructionist bona fides of Stanley Fish, intellectual property is an in-the-moment, 'tenuously forged' constellation of social relationships, a manifestly *human*, consequently debatable, endeavor to the core. Wiser all around, he feels, to approach the topic of plagiarism from the possibility latent in an epistemological perspective than a rock-bottom ontological one (Ashworth, Bannister & Thorne, 1997). Indeed, Fish avers, *whereas we faculty may venerate originality and property as sacraments doesn't mean that our students – the vast majority just passing through the 'little insular world' of the academy – necessarily do*. Taking a lesson from Dr. Fish, perhaps it's time to ask whether the moralizing remedy of choice deployed in universities across the land is up to corralling the broadband (cultural/institutional) changes in composition and literacy purportedly well underway (Woodmansee, 1994; Lessig, 2001; Vaidhyanathan, 2001; Posner, 2002). Are we inadvertently grounding plagiarism policies in a sectarian misrepresentation of our own making, straining student-faculty ties and our own credibility to boot? After all, the movie and book-retailing industries resorted to punishing underage consumers until preemptorily relegated to the dinosaur wing. Borrowing (stealing?) a page from Professor Fish's contrarian thesis, I think his plucky swim against the tide merits a second, more tempered look. What follows constitutes an attempt to pick up where he leaves off.

The state of the art

[A]ll my best ideas were stolen by the ancients.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (McLemee, 2004)

A cursory computer search of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *The New York Times* quickly reveals that plagiarism is no stranger to the Academy. In 2006, *The China Daily* found that nearly two-thirds of the 160 Chinese academics it surveyed admitted to lifting parts of their publications

(Pocha, 2006). More recently, the Faculty Senate at Simon Fraser University adopted a stigmatizing grade ‘worse than an F’ for magpie-like impiety – ‘FD,’ or ‘failed for academic dishonesty’, perhaps in an attempt to shame, Hester Prynne-like, the perpetrators (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2009). Following a lengthy investigation, 39 graduates of Ohio University’s School of Mechanical Engineering were summarily ordered to rewrite their master’s theses (some dating back 20 years) – or else (Bartlett, 2006). And by now we all know by heart the story of Kaavya Viswanathan, the precocious Harvard freshman who ‘internalized’ her favorite authors and then ‘unintentionally’ (albeit liberally) parvoined their words. After an anonymous caller tipped *The New York Times*, her publisher, Little, Brown, took less than a Manhattan heartbeat to cancel her six-digit book advance (Rich, 2006).

The academic rap sheet scrolls on. But these instances of skullduggery duly noted, apparently what rattles some academicians inner-*parens res* is the threat posed by ‘the digital challenge’ (Leeds & Lohr, 2005), that is, that legions of file-swapping students are mercenary masters of the cut-and-paste. Indeed, dating back to the 1960s, the perennial literature surveying undergraduate and graduate student cheating appears to confirm worst-case fears – that cheating of one form or another is near endemic with business and economic majors, with honors students, no less, headlining the way (Ashworth, Bannister, & Thorne, 1997; McCabe, Butterfield, & Trevino, 2006). Throw in the viral contaminatory power of the Web, and it only follows that before things completely unspool, the onus falls on faculty to raise the ante for digital natives who fail to accept academic proprietary manners on our terms (Coombe, 2006).

Nevertheless, would not a more measured reading of reported cases of plagiary suggest that a one-dimensional construct hardly fits all (McLemee, 2004)? Punishments, it appears, vary with the social rank of the accused and academic discipline (Demirjian, 2006). And akin to the floating concepts of privacy and traffic yield signs, plagiarism and intellectual property are variously defined, that is, housebroken, as Professor Fish might put it. Besides, the P2P (person-to-person) phenomenon – downloading, mixing, cutting and pasting – long predates the Power-Book and the Net. And, after nearly 50 years of data crunching, can we confidently assume that cheating surveys yield actionable data? If nothing else, fixes placing responsibility squarely on students alone come at a premium (Hoover, 2002). It is sufficient justification, I suggest, to inquire if the reigning crime and punishment (C&P, or ‘gotcha’) metaphor is epistemologically adequate for the analytic and corrective tasks at hand. Not least, stiff penalties notwithstanding, what are the odds that the multitasking Facebook demographic will bother to hew the C&P line (Richtel, 2010a)?

Point of order

[T]he way we diagnose our students’ condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer.

Parker J. Palmer (1998: 41)

Which is to propose that the *Judge Judy*⁴ – or juridical predilection of the academy’s quick-draw, lay-down-the-law – reaction to the ‘rising tide’ of student plagiarism be revisited (Cohen, 2005). Of course, the hyperaggressive, ‘red meat’ construct to whack the P-beast should come as no surprise given plagiarism’s alleged power to upend the academy’s ‘stable rhetorical universe,’ not to mention its tribal governing authority and identity (Bizzell, 1982; Kolich, 1983). On the other hand, putting students in their place appears at odds with academia’s hallowed humanistic ideals and self-sustaining institutional goal of conscripting star students into academic discourse communities (Gordon & Palmon, 2010). Nor, come to think of it, does it reflect very kindly on who we think our students are and are about, or our sense of identity with them. Perhaps – just perhaps – an absolutist remedy may be called for on qualified occasion, but professional prudence

and some sobering hindsight caution that we not fall into the habit of morphing students into litigants vis-à-vis the media industry.

Besides, I suspect that such raw exertions of social control as embodied every afternoon in the unctuous Judge Judy's courtroom or instances of student 'perps'⁵ summoned before university review boards not only beg critical contextual factors but, in the rush for closure, understate the self-defeating pitfalls that tough loving is likely to engender. Arguably, the stark, vestigial "bad apples versus good" moral narrative is polemically cathartic and restorative of a sense of nominal control. A reassuring rhetorical device wherein faculty remain the unquestioned 'schoolmasters' and the root of the crisis is ascribed to an 'easily problematized' target population, that is, shifting the burden of proof to the rogue, low-hanging caricature of the malingering student (Campbell, 1999). But default hermeneutics of this sort, Terry Eagleton (1983) cautions, tend to set in motion a moony consolation that events can be dialed back to an unproblematic, sepia-toned, 'before.' In sentimental thrall of a preferred social reality, he adds, we effectively defuse hermeneutic forms of 'suspicion' *keen to think through* how social and individual agency are mutually produced.

So, pause to (re)consider. If seeing flashing red results in consigning heuristic academic conventions of analytic ambivalence to the sidelines, we risk transposing the problems of social structures onto the very people (here a student demographic of unprecedented diversity [Perfetto, 2010]) who embody them. Policies of containment are predicated on the commonplace denominator that a generation of preschool-admission-tested, 'teach-to-the-test,' 'early admission,' 'patch-writing' (Howard, Rodrigue & Serviss, 2010), grade-obsessed American students, armed with petabyte-sized laptops, BlackBerrys and Ritalin⁶ prescriptions, preordains plagiary (Hafner, 2001). *No need to look further.* Oriented by this 'necessary abstraction' (McGrath, 2011), the disciplinary remedy is localized and privatized to upgrading individual behavior *without changing anything else.* Note, however, the reductive price tag for what amounts to taking sides. Specifically, the dueling either/or (virtue/vice) construction of convenient targets entails the wholesale erasure of the extenuating life contexts and institutional positioning arguably organizing plagiarism. In effect, the defective rhetorical leap of naming and blaming brackets the issue so as to *insulate ourselves* from both the problem and our students.

Also keep in mind that ethical binaries⁷ ask us to endorse a credulous baseline cultural homogeneity. The overwhelming prosecutorial slant of the Judge Judy brand of plagiarism discourse, that is, presupposes that students and faculty work from the same enduring characterizations of authorship and ownership. And that this dubious body of 'lived understandings' embodies and originates in an inevitable and universalized system of intellectual property enshrined by none other than the Founders in Article I, Section 8 of the United States Constitution (Schultz, 1993). That same Delphic, 27-word Copyright Clause, by the way, launched a down-to-the-present game of Prisoner's Dilemma over the nature of a robust intellectual commons. Anyone willing to bet the house that most of today's students find this vision compelling?

Conventional wisdom holds that the Academy in the ideal constitutes a knowledge arena prizing the strategic, eyes-wide-open notion of the examined life (*auctoritas*)—domain where unimpeachable absolutes are by definition dismissed as 'epistemologically provincial' (i.e., intellectually complacent). Where might we turn, then, if, upon careful examination, the C&P school of plagiary is found to operate with too many absences showing? Found too simple, paradoxically resembling its nemesis by spreading credit too thin? Is there more to student plagiarism than meets the normalizing eye? If so, a squinty-eyed, 'make my day' fixation on propping up ratified notions of academic intellectual property (along with our own credibility to exercise authority), arguably binds us to a counterproductive underestimation of student plagiarism as a *social* phenomenon and *our role* in this ongoing construction.

Second thoughts

I began to have second thoughts. The truth was that, although I said I'd been robbed, I didn't feel that way.

(Gladwell, 2004: 41)

For the record, while I have issues with recent extensions of copyright authority (Darnton, 2009),⁸ I don't harbor a soft spot for source amnesia, whether crass, unintended, self-plagiaristic, kleptomaniac or otherwise. And I don't teach in a monastery, my institutional affiliation notwithstanding. From firsthand experience, I readily acknowledge that some students appear determined to do whatever it takes. Many probably succeed, but, of course, not everyone. Each year, at my institution anyway, a handful of miscreants are caught red-handed, if not always abashedly red-faced, and disciplined to varying degree as each faculty member and school handles run-ins with plagiarism in their own *ad hoc* way. This informal situation may soon go the way of big city newspapers (Rodriquez, 2009), as faculty grow more adept at deploying antiplagiarism software and adjudication and as punishments are applied more evenhandedly, that is, formalized across the university. Meanwhile, until that day dawns, the likelihood of apprehending and disciplining offenders remains more the exception than the rule.

Before we wedge ourselves into a tighter epistemic corner, therefore, might we better use the 'crisis' as a ripe heuristic moment to pilot the self-checking question: are we, indeed, asking the appropriate questions? In straightforward Geertzian terms (Geertz, 1973), is the vice and disqualification discourse thick enough? Is C&P, in brief, *up to the explanatory task, or has it lost its spell?* For example, rather than take the crime metaphor at its un-nuanced face, might it also prove beneficial to reframe the 'crisis' as reflecting not only instances of narcissistic trespass (MEism.com) but as a possible indicator and portent, if you will, *of a larger cultural struggle over who governs the definition, production and certification of legitimate knowledge* – a (passing in the night) storytelling contest of divergent orders of knowing in which students, as incongruous as that may sound, actually play an oversized role?⁹ Assigning students a less passive role in defining IP *in our house*, no less, holds promise to reward members of the academy with a complementary understanding (one closer to our own professed breadth and depth ideals) of the defining issues/authority at hand (Graff, 1995; Bizzell, 1998). At the same time, this inclusive step injects a sensitivity of the effects that varying responses on our part are likely to produce *and to teach* regarding the scope of faculty–student connection.

As a probationary departure, why not embark on easing the tight-fisted hold of the us/fallen angels binary validating the C&P prism by recasting plagiarism as 'plagiary,' as a *community*-achieved 'speech-event' (Smith, 1998; Musson, Cohen & Tietze, 2007)? And then use this reversal of perspective as rationale for mirroring our own working assumptions? This exit strategy may well free up retrospective space to begin transforming the plagiary cat-and-mouse into a real-time mutual teaching moment for students *and* faculty alike to fashion a *collective* understanding of ourselves. Making it thinkable, where it wasn't before, to view the academy's prosecutor's mode with the same curiosity as the purported problem to be rectified. The research site for the construction of plagiary is effectively scaled up to include not just isolated cases of student (mis-)behavior but the academic *cultural* landscape writ large.

Coming to terms

Unlike academic knowledge, . . . new media literacy is structured by the day-to-day practices of youth participation and status in diverse networked publics. This diversity of youth

values means that kids will not fall in line behind a single set of literacy standards that we might come up with, even if those standards are based on the observations of their own practices.

(Ito et al., 2010: 344)

From a constructivist optic, Paul de Man (1919–1983) pretty much says it all:

Far from there being nothing outside of the text, everything was out there, waiting to be called back into reality by the power of words.

(Kernan, 1990: 187)

This was de Man's succinct warrant, as I read it, to cut the Stockholm syndrome of orthodox (timeless, irreversible, closed-book) belief systems down to (human) size. The reenvisioning of established truth as a language form (Cunliffe, 2001; Boje, Oswick & Ford, 2004) – half full, contingent, all too human achievement – opened the door to demystifying scrutiny, including what a particular truth says about the world, how it goes about saying it and whose values it expresses (Bazerman, 1989; Coombe, 1989). No longer beyond question, gospel demoted to human artifact invited testing, debate, heresy and innovation. Unveiled as perishable, historical constructions, hardcore truths – whether of the political, social, economic or scientific variety – all yield to T. Kuhn's (1977) provisional prevailing wisdom thesis. In common with the transitory nature of retreating glaciers, the 'natural' rate of unemployment, accounting standards, straightforward meanings, papal primacy, home ownership and even house rules, sacred cows' days are likewise numbered. To paraphrase Kuhn, an axiomatic mentality arrives to red carpet fanfare, eventually overstays its welcome (i.e., lame duck status – reaches a tipping point where questions outnumber and outweigh answers placing the 'common sense' itself in question) and, over the course of time, falls out of fashion (loses its grip, its incontrovertible status). With the regularity of semesters, definitive narrative bell curves come and go.

This portrayal of entropic decay, mind you, seldom occurs overnight or without intense struggle (Durkheim, 1965; Hannah & Freeman, 1984). But even stone tablets, market fundamentals (Frank, 2000), handwriting, and the book (Bell, 2005) are, in theory, not exempt.¹⁰ Cases in point: due to broad cultural/technological transformations, the self-evident plausibility consecrating modernist conceptions of the self-sufficient author, the sanctity of intellectual property, and received notions of plagiary (Jones, 1991) are similarly under review, i.e., topical – in question and jeopardy (showing their age) (Sebberson, 1993; Rorty, 1998; Posner, 2002; Lethem, 2007; Hefferman, 2009; Lessig, 2010). The extended reach of property over the last three decades has split legal scholars over the seesawing balance between intellectual property rights and the public domain (Boyle, 1997; Lessig, 2002; Rose, 2005; Goodman, 2009). Academics in Literary and Composition Studies whittle away at rusty 18th-century Romantic notions of authorship and originality propping up copyright extension (S. Miller, 1990; C. R. Miller, 1996; Woodmansee, 1994; Coombe, 2006). Likewise, historians and sociologists of knowledge sift through the genealogical pedigrees of contemporary definitions of intellectual property (Belknap, 1982; Buranen & Roys, 1999). Adding another chorus to this (de-)composing process, champions of open sourceware and 'sharing economies' vociferously declaim that dated notions of property in use today actually impede finding solutions to the intermeshed ecology of 21st-century challenges (Lessig, 2001; Vaidhyathan, 2001; Baca, 2006, Schmidt, 2007).

And while we sleep, the Internet nation, our students, likely more than less oblivious of the *Sturm und Drang*, collectively test our patience, our envelopes, and possibly even our relevance (Fitzpatrick, 2002), right before our very eyes. Is giving due credit only 'academic' to many

students (Heffernan, 2008; N. Cohen, 2009; P. Cohen, 2009; Lewin, 2009)?¹¹ As much as some may wish otherwise, in the case of IP, no one-truth, compositional ground zero apparently exists today, if it ever did (Schultz, 1993; Coomb, 1998). Everything considered, perhaps we all might be better off redirecting the relentlessly tactical energy expended building better mousetraps to mapping richer and more negotiable models of the cultural topography of plagiarism.

In house

I think the gulf between academic and student culture can be closed only by starting respectfully from where students already are.

(Graff, 1995: 276–277)

We faculty face a host of lingering questions. Take enforcement, for example. Can it be safely assumed that colleagues carry a secret wish to be law enforcement constabulary (Porter & DeVoss, 2006)? Or would most prefer to avoid head-butting, student/parent versus instructor melodramas? Moreover, as of this writing no statistical consensus yet exists regarding the scope of (or even definition of) plagiarism (Foucault, 1987; Buranen & Roys, 1999). If we looked hard enough, would we find that some curricular designs proffer perverse incentive to plagiarize?¹² Is punishment meted out evenly across disciplines and schools? Plus, the common sense regarding plagiarism's ubiquity is based nearly exclusively on student self-reporting polls which must, statistically speaking, always be taken with a confirmationally biased grain of salt (Bakalar, 2010). At this point, the 'evidence' collected to date appears circumstantial at best, while normalizing the adversarial trope. What *is* certain is that the *anti*plagiarism *business* is a growth industry. Specifically, a mushrooming paper mill sector (bad) and its purported foil, plagiarism-detecting software systems (good), hint at a symbiotic market for both services (Bartlett, 2009; Dante, 2010; Truong, 2010). While hard 'evidence' of turpitude may be anecdotally soft, that has not prevented the construction of plagiarism into a crisis of epic proportion and a scalable, entrepreneurial market for deception and detection (Altheide, 2002).

Which brings us to the two proverbial elephants in our house (Bell & King, 2010): (1) how much longer will the canonical *MLA Handbook* own the privilege of the last word? Suppose for a moment that a meaningful fraction of our computer-literate students – our protégés, no less – are, in fact, not on the same (timeless) page. Are not, in fact, apprentices to our master model of slow, sustained, focused literacy (Kapitzke, 2011), but, as it were, distractedly trooping (and streaming) through (Connelly, 2011; Parker-Pope, 2010; Richtel, 2010b). And that perhaps, unwittingly, but nonetheless quite literally, students in general are busy writing their own pragmatic digital style guide beneath our out-of-joint noses. For argument's sake, might the plagiarism 'crisis' extend canonically beyond interpersonal misunderstanding or indiscretions or outright villainy? Is it conceivable that the point-and-click generation blithely operates from an alternative literacy (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro & Cammack, 2004, Gee, 2006; Valentine, 2006, Carr 2010) regarding the baroque fine print interpretations of intellectual property, originality and/or authorship? That, in short, the academy's organizing centrality and vision of solidarity and continuity may not be shared, *nor even comprehended*, by more students than we might care to consider? Making it thinkable, even feasible, then, that students, disconcerting though it may sound, are well along on a *de facto* 'restatement' of the rules of composition (Berlinski, 2008). If that registers, then waging jihad on student piracy may potentiate as much Whack-a-Mole (Sisario, 2010) as law and order, particularly in light of the avowed borderless zeitgeist of cyberspace. In the very least this twist also puts the efficacy of stopgap 'mechanisms of discipline' (Campbell, 1999) from off-the-rack honor codes, preemptive doses of education,

obligatory readings of style guides, to the castor oil of example-setting punishments (failing grades, suspensions, expulsions) in interpretive play.

Given our investment in the algorithm of proprietary grievance, dare we entertain the thought that our firewall of declaratory inoculations – warnings, prophylactic seminars and, most recently, oath taking (Arnold, 2010) – fail to scarecrow? That is, carry little street cred with ‘generation download’? We, in effect, declare a grudge match on student plagiarism, but only the home team shows. Taking threat assessments at their word or possibly worried that our bluff might be called, many academic authorities are scrambling to erect a foolproof infrastructure of integrity relying heavily on electronic spyware (or, more politely, verification software) to amass proof beyond a reasonable doubt. In this capacity the personal computer functions as a paradoxical, interactive medium, one capable of giving as well as profiling. Regarding the latter, in light of its inherent panoptic potential to expose (Foucault, 1979; Ryan, 1987; Boyle, 1997; Kovacs, 2001) – spyware’s unparalleled normative sweep, if you will; literally hiding in plain sight, why would anyone dare indulge in stolen pleasures? Factor in Foucault’s program to unearth the genesis of hearts and minds, *self-policing subjectivity*, and *why even contemplate cheating?* Quote:

[H]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, *and who knows it*, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; *he becomes the principle of his own subjection*.

(Foucault, 1979; in Hall & duGay, 1996; *my italics*).

Under the naked circumstances (Purdy, 2005) – ever fearful of leaving a digital trail, ‘subjects’ instinctively conform, i.e., work from the same dog-eared MLA page. No more lame alibis. No more plea bargaining. No more get-out-of-jail-free cards.

Yet, it’s a little early for end zone dancing. As with ethical binaries, the ‘internalization of control’ (Foucault, 1993) comes with a catch, i.e., it fails to satisfy Geertz’s litmus test of thickness. The backdrop mosaic of social factors, not to mention the ‘governing mentalities’ embedded in such push-button technology and those it targets, are once again shunted to the sidelines. And while these tools of ‘the gaze’ make it easier to uncover, if not situate, incidents of rule breaking, including those of delinquent scholars (Carlson, 2005), *we still lack the analytical wherewithal to explain why anyone in this totally transparent landscape would – as apparently countless digital Millennials swimmingly do 24/7 – stake their reputations against such casino-like house odds in the first place?*

A predicament, unless, *unless* the panoptic inmates turn out *not* to be the undeviating, self-interested Benthamite actors that the internalization edifice revolves around. What does this portend for self-disciplining if students live worlds apart, conscience-free in another cultural literacy (Hall & duGay, 1996)? Don’t appreciate our house rules about paying down intellectual debts? Punch in primarily to make the grades necessary to win a fast-track ticket to the mother of all shows – the marketplace? If the student ‘body’ escapes ‘docility’ (cut their puppet strings), are we, bluff called, out of moral ammo?

Then there’s the companion elephant: what, precisely, does the disciplinary option *teach* students, i.e., the take-away life lessons? Are they ones we have closely examined, ratified and want students to emulate? After all, from Maslow’s fusty Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) to more contemporary versions of Expectancy Theory, I know of no work in the vast terrain of Motivational Theory that sanctions low-trust leadership models (Steel & Konig, 2007). After the dust has settled, how do we calibrate the *disconnective* cost of catechetical suspicion to the fabled ‘conversation’ and ‘hospitality’ underwriting the fecundity of university life (Sen, 2006; Haughey, 2009)? Over and over again Lawrence Lessig pleads that the vital diversity and creative health of

democracy hinges upon how we decide ‘how far free access should reach’ (2001, 2002, 2010). Might the same be said of the large spirited heterogeneity of the academic house? Hence, the need to pay special attention to what the endorsement of exclusion may mean for the culture of intellectual ferment that is the university *and* the legitimacy of academic authority.

Taken together, these inward-looking questions are of vital importance for the cultural ecology of the university, particularly if the forensic metaphor represents a sputtering narrative form low on expressive power. Narrative theorists stress that we live in and out of ‘storied’ cultural spaces woven together with language (Bizzell, 1987; Miller, 1989; Law, 1991; Golinski, 1993; Fish, 1998; Rodden, 2008; Herman & Vervaeck, 2009). Is it really going out on a limb to propose that the socio-political constraints that configure the manufacture of knowledge apply equally to plagiarism? By acknowledging the contingency of the subject – devising more flexible ways to think about plagiarism *and its layered backstory complexity*, we, alongside other constituencies in this ongoing interpretive process, are better positioned to hash out property and plagiary narratives that a listening (connected), dialogic consensus can live with (Gergen, 1999; Coombe & Herman, 2001). Smooth sailing? Unlikely. For if the hissy response to Stanley Fish’s bedeviling foray is any indication, finding some sort of middle ground may be asking too much for those steeped in the venerable (and now vulnerable?) Gutenberg organizing principle of immersion (Kapitzke, 2001). Nevertheless, the fate of the deep reading agenda, I believe, ultimately hinges on our self-overcoming readiness to hot potato the C&P filibuster to better size up the impact of the meandering, ‘task-saturated’ literacy(-ies) of the plugged-in on student engagement (Carr, 2010, Kinzer, 2010).

Afterword: It takes a village¹³

As social practices, all literacies – including information literacy – are situated responses to specific political economies of educational contexts and classrooms (453).

(Cushla Kapitzke, 2001)

Bear in mind first that, like IP, or constructionism, or the ‘intent’ of the framers of national constitutions, or mathematics, universities are open-ended works-in-progress, something we all habitually do together. And, second, my hunch is that university students absorb as much outside of the classroom (‘extracurricular’ learning – life lessoning) as inside the classroom (exposure to official curriculum).¹⁴ Where might these suppositions lead? For one, school is never out. Learning goes on around the clock, in *and* out of class, whether we direct it or not. (Perhaps extracurricular learning derives its power from the underappreciated cultural fact that we are always and everywhere ‘in class.’) It also follows that every member (and event, object) of the university inclusive of faculty, students, administrators, the board of directors, the night-shift of janitors, anguished decisions to thin the ranks of the university’s support services, choice of commencement speakers, grading rubrics, campus racial realities, the content and configuration (specialisms) of the core curriculum, sports programs, where we invest (vote) our endowment dollars, overwhelmingly female secretarial staff, antiplagiarism campaigns – you name it – is, willy-nilly, a teacher in her or his (or its) own right. And what each of us teaches the other through word and deed permeates the quotidian social fabric of the university, ultimately affecting our communal ability to connect and act creatively. Why walk the plank of self-examination? Simply because it is an honored academic tradition, one accommodating a devout curmudgeon and an offbeat perspective or two. Moreover, if self-engagement is not enfranchised at the university, then where?

It is perhaps difficult for many of us to acknowledge this tacit agenda given our investment in the classroom and the off-radar nature of extracurricular learning. But *this* off-screen education,

I'll venture, is what constitutes the university's deep core curriculum: the university's unquestioned common sense. It is not a curriculum casually forgotten at the close of each term. It's so ingrained that we embody it, are disciplined to *feel* it. Indeed, the deep curriculum derives its staying power because we are up to our necks in it. It's the radioactive (osmotic) house we make together. Yet, since it is customary to situate industrial-strength learning in the classroom, we tend not to give the informal curriculum its due.

If we are concerned with the content and quality of the university's teaching mission, as I am convinced we are, it follows that house rules must be regularly engaged. And, when warranted, we must be open to the reworking of the life lessons contained therein. *We in the university are not in the business of leaving well enough alone.* Our relevance, remember, rests on our ability to extend the theoretical base along with student horizons, by composing more adequate portraits of how we go about everyday living – together. Doing our level best, that is, to navigate the divide between formal classroom (the talk) and campus life lessons (the walk) (Grabtree & Sapp, 2003). After all, it's complicated. Meaning that how we deal with plagiarism – as a lack of morality or a pedagogic moment, say – is both telling and representative – a finger on the pulse of student/faculty relations, but also a vehicle by which to better gauge what students and faculty are teaching one another. And, as such, it is a double-check opportunity for building the kinds of university learning we want to happen and be known for (Biggs, 2001).

Notes

- 1 For Pat and Dan.
- 2 This essay draws upon my U.S.-based experiences and may have special resonance for academics who are familiar with the idiosyncracies of the 'American' (i.e., U.S.) system and culture. It is my hope, however, that the ideas being discussed in this chapter might trigger useful debates on intellectual property rights (IPR) in other academic circles as well.
- 3 Irony by way of unwanted consequences: digital push-back and potential lawsuits. When file swapping, officially authorized or otherwise, appears to have evolved into a rite of digital passage, don't expect members of the *Wired* generation to simply roll over. Many are returning fire in court and/or busy configuring adroit, one-step-ahead-of-the-law file-sharing software without end (Pareles, 2005). I suspect that if the Academy blindly emulates the take-no-prisoners model of the Recording Industry Association of America, it chances mutating answers into problems.
- 4 A popular commercial television show in the United States.
- 5 'Perps' is a term commonly used by police departments in the United States to refer to 'perpetrators' of crimes.
- 6 A drug for attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), prescribed to extremely large numbers of students in the United States.
- 7 Binaries paradoxically depend on codependent association. Per Binde reminds us that 'separation and unification, and contrast and similarity, are not modes of conceptually organising the world that exclude each other, but rather that *imply* (the original) each other . . . [T]he distinction between them can be maintained only by constant monitoring, discussion, negotiation, and affirmation of their relationships, since each of the domains is defined in relation to the others' (p. 25).
- 8 When first drafted in 1790, the first copyright act set the length of copyrights and patents for 'limited times' (i.e., 28 years). Reflecting different motivations, the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act of 1998 extended copyright authority to the lifetime of the author plus 70 years.
- 9 Cushla Kapitzke (2001) details what academic literacy is up against: 'The nonlinearity of hypertext sequencing is fast obliterating the conventional categories of knowledge and its hierarchical organization in, for example, the DDC. Furthermore, the ephemeral and hybrid nature of digital environments tends to elide differences between the real and virtual worlds, and therefore between factual and fictional ones. Information literacy derives from a print-based culture, and its logic as it currently stands maintains distinctions between, for instance, fiction and nonfiction, and between reading for pleasure and reading for information. These distinctions and their associated practices, such as the reading of novels in time reserved for silent, sustained reading (SSR), are becoming increasingly obsolete and discriminatory. For many youth today,

- particularly in advanced capitalist countries, reading is no longer performed alone with a book, but is a shared activity undertaken with and around a computer screen while engaged in conversation with others who are in the room, in cyberspace, or in both.' See Kapitzke (2001: 452–453). See also Alison Gopnik's (2010) review of Stanislas Dehaene's *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (Viking, 2010), *New York Times*, January 3, 2010.
- 10 Before going out of business in March 2015, Rapid-Share, a leading file-hosting company based in Switzerland, reputedly used to offer a rich buffet of pirated music and e-books free to subscribers. When a reporter once prodded a company spokesperson about the content stored on Rapid-Share's servers, her (fore?)telling response was 'for us, everything is just a file, no matter what' (Stross, 2009).
 - 11 The average student is largely socialized (pixilated?) in language use via television and the computer, so it's plausible that they function with little, if any, appreciation of the antecedent foundation of academic intellectual discourse. The makings for a cultural divide? See Bizzell (1978).
 - 12 Consider, for example, the potential moral squeeze points built into the last, crunch time, projects–fall–due week closing every semester for, say, honors students, or lackluster students, for that matter. Different, but perhaps only by a matter of degrees from the ethics–testing pressure points scientists and business practitioners are often compelled to negotiate in the gray space of professional life.
 - 13 Adapted from the Executive Summary for the November 22, 2005, Workshop on Shareholder Engagement and Jesuit University Endowment Management prepared by J. Michael Cavanaugh.
 - 14 Time for some Math 101. Full-time students at my place of employ are required to take a minimum of 15 hours of class a week. That leaves 153 hours or 91% of each academic week, give or take, free for extra-curricular 'class time.'

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