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The Scarlet *P*: Plagiarism, Panopticism, and the Rhetoric of Academic Integrity

This article is a rhetorical analysis of the anxious and outraged discourse employed in response to the "rising tide" of cheating and plagiarism. This discourse invites actions that are antithetical to the goals of education and the roles of educators, as exemplified by the proliferation of plagiarism-detection technologies.

About ten years ago, I was marking an essay whose night-before prose suddenly transitioned into sophisticated literary analysis. I was pleased, then quickly suspicious. I typed some of the erudite sentences into an Internet search engine, and after three or four tries—success! I found the website that had supplied large chunks of the student's essay. Per university policy, I confronted the student with the evidence and with a failing grade on the assignment. When his next essay proved plagiarized, we repeated this scene, though with a different ending: I gave him an F for the course. This incident is commonplace, as is my use of it here as an introductory anecdote: Joe Kraus, for example, begins his essay "Rethinking Plagiarism: What Our Students Are Telling Us When They Cheat" with a similar story.[1]

Yet as I think back upon my teaching career, this successful apprehension of a plagiarist, this little victory in the war against academic dishonesty, is

among the incidents I most regret. Like a traffic cop on the moral high road, I was just doing my job. The rush of righteousness soon wore off and I began to think again, but by then the act was complete and it was too late for such questions as: What might have motivated the student to plagiarize? What was—or was not—at stake for him? Since my detective work was not motivated by virtue but by a desire to catch this cheater, what was at stake for me, personally and professionally? Why was I so determined to prove that no first-year writing student was going to outsmart me? And how could I have responded differently, so as to feel that I had honored rather than disregarded my role as a teacher?

In addition to being an ethical concern, academic dishonesty has the pragmatic consequences of threatening the imagined meritocracy within the academy, the reputation of a university's name, and the corresponding value of its diplomas in the job market. By analyzing the discourse of academic integrity and the roles performed by those involved, I wish to assert the ill effects of vigilance in curbing academic dishonesty and expose these pragmatic concerns as complicit in the problem. For there is indeed a serious problem involving academic integrity: by intensifying efforts at surveillance and punishment, the current crusade against academic dishonesty is a far greater threat than is cheating to the integrity and the ideals of academic communities.

The Rising Tide?

It would seem that schools are up to their necks in plagiarists. The announcement for a recent education conference states, "too many [students] seek success at any cost, as demonstrated in the rising tide of plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty" (In Search of Wisdom). Professor Matthew Woessner of Penn State, Harrisburg argues the need for "stringent policies if college faculty are to curtail the rising tide of plagiarism within academia" (Woessner 313). Meanwhile in Scotland, the Scottish Further Education Unit cautions that "universities face a rising tide of plagiarism among students who have easy access to vast amounts of information online" ("New Software").[2] Yet for all the fear and research devoted to the rising tide, it remains unclear how widespread academic dishonesty really is. One study indicates that 36 percent of 199 undergraduates surveyed admitted to plagiarism (Roig), while another concludes that "most of the students who participated in our survey, 68.4%, reported that they cheat" (Lester and Diekhoff 911). And according to *Plagiarism.org*, of 1,800 university students surveyed, 84 percent admit to cheating on written assignments. The numbers, whether 36 percent or more than

twice that, are alarming and seem to support Gregory Cizek's claim that "nearly every research report on cheating . . . has concluded that cheating is rampant" (13).

Furthermore, the problem seems to be getting worse: while 10 percent of undergraduates surveyed in 1999 admitted to "cut and paste" Internet plagiarism, the number had risen to 40 percent in 2001 (Sisti 216–17). In his book *Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It*, Cizek claims "a clear pattern of increasing frequency of cheating," whereby the number of cheaters seems to have risen in step with the passing decades: 60 percent of students cheated in a 1964 study, and "with the dawn of the 1970s, the admitted cheating percentage also reached the 70s" (21). Whether one accepts Cizek's theory of numeric coincidence, he is certainly correct in noting that "as the frequency in cheating has increased, so has the number of studies attempting to document the extent of the behavior" (21)—studies that conclude cheating is rampant. By this account, academic integrity committees and articles about the rising tide have proliferated in response to the increase in cheating and plagiarism.

But it is also possible, even likely, that task forces and essays arise in response to an increase in task forces and essays. If we reverse Cizek's causal claim, we get the perfectly reasonable suggestion that an increase in the number of studies investigating the extent of cheating has led to an increase in the amount of cheating uncovered. Larry McKill, associate dean of student programs at the University of Alberta—where cases of cheating "are up 'several hundred percent' over the past couple of years"—"attributes the rise more to the school's tough stance on reporting cheats rather than an increase in cheating itself" (Gold F1). So a rising tide of discourse on cheating does not necessarily indicate a rising tide of cheating.[3] In fact, a fascinating study conducted at the Rochester Institute of Technology compared responses to two questions: "How often do you plagiarize?" and "How often do you think other people plagiarize?" While 27.6 percent of students admitted plagiarizing "often," "very frequently," or "sometimes," 90 percent believed that other students were doing so "often," "very frequently," or "sometimes" (Kellogg). While plagiarism may or may not be rampant, the belief that it is rampant is certainly rampant.[4] Over time, as an atmosphere of mistrust settles in as normal and invisible, statistical justification for acts of vigilance becomes unnecessary; worse than an environment in which people are always thinking about plagiarism is one in which, to quote James Kincaid, "plagiarism is so important to us that we seldom think about it" (96).

Vengeance and Vigilance

But if we do think about it, if we pause to examine institutional roles rather than act out from within their confines, if we unpack the rhetoric of "academic integrity," what beliefs and values do we find, and how are they threatened by cheating and plagiarism? Though a number of educators have begun to consider these questions, their voices too seldom dictate policy, or even speak for the majority of faculty. I have been surprised by the level of anger aroused, even in informal conversations, when the subject turns to plagiarism. Arguments for the dynamic and systemic nature of academic dishonesty are sharply dismissed with assertions that such complexities are of no interest or concern—our goal is to apprehend and punish "plagiarists." John Workman, author of a survey of faculty attitudes toward cheating, says, "We are finding that there is a lot of pent-up frustration among faculty. It's a touchy subject" (Young A27). Voicing this frustration, Cheryl Ruggiero of Virginia Tech's First-Year Writing Program recalls the hours consumed pursuing dishonest students:

> Last semester, two students plagiarized papers in my class. They stole about 15 hours of my time from my other students—if I had not had to track down their sources, print and save evidence, consult with the Honor Court President, . . . [and] consult with other teachers, . . . I'd have had other students' papers back to them much sooner. . . . These plagiarists also stole freedom of topic choice from my future students. . . .
>   In the future, I'll go back to restricting topics much more. . . .
>   We need to be able to trust each other if we're going to keep on learning together. . . . I'll be more suspicious of my future students because of the dishonesty of these two. (Ruggiero 1)

Yet two students suspected of cheating do not *cause* a teacher to waste fifteen hours gathering evidence—or to adopt a suspicious attitude in the first place. Just as some students will choose to cheat, teachers choose how to respond. (A pause before responding might allow one to notice embarrassing juxtapositions, such as placing "we need to be able to trust each other" near "I'll be more suspicious of my future students.") Robert Briggs of Monash University suggests that "the moralising tone of such terms as 'stealing' and 'cheating' is not only heavy handed with respect to some cases of plagiarism but may actually frustrate attempts both to detect plagiarism and to prevent its occurrence" (19). Enacted as policy, words such as *stealing*, *tracking*, and *catching* fuel the self-fulfilling cycle of suspicion: if we put more energy into rooting out plagiarism we are likely to find more plagiarism, become further convinced of a rising tide, become increasingly alarmed and reactive, and thus continue to

put more energy into the solution—rooting out plagiarism. Kincaid writes, "The plagiarism proctor, after all, doesn't have it so good. He lives in a nightmare world filled with thieves or, worse, abductors. All his neighbors lie in wait to snatch and misuse, pollute and defile his words" (97). In fact, our word *plagiarism* is rooted in the Latin term for kidnapping, and this etymological association survives in the discourse of academic integrity: quoted on Virginia Tech's "Plagiarism and Honor" website, alumnus Josh Reid writes from this nightmare world of textual predators, cursing "plagiarists" and their acts of "intellectual kidnapping" (Ruggiero 1). And Ruggiero herself invokes the stirring symbol of the child—pure, innocent, and uncritical—when she asks, "Should we send [plagiarists] out into the world to construct bridges for my children to drive across or to develop medicines that my grandchildren will take?"[8] (1). Moralizing attitudes, slippery-slope arguments, and pathos appeals inhibit the closer, less reactive reading that the rich and complex text of pedagogy deserves.

Teachers, Good Kids, and Plagiarists

In response to the question "What is at stake?" we might say simply that schools promote ethical thought and action and thus punish cheating because it is unethical. This is true, as far as it goes. But it does not go far enough to explain the urgency and intensity of the campaign, or people's willingness to employ methods that are themselves ethically suspect. In fact, the drama of academic integrity as typically performed is subverted by a glaring, ironic contrast between the rhetoric of ethical values and the actions taken in the name of those values. *Los Angeles Times* education writer Kenneth R. Weiss visited the University of California at Davis, where "the topic of academic integrity is everywhere" (A17). "As final exams approach each term, students give their peers free No. 2 pencils with the inscription: 'Fill in your own bubble or be in trouble'" (A17). Incoming students watch skits dramatizing the consequences of dishonesty, and the school newspaper features a cheater's police blotter, describing "all the embarrassing details—except for names"—of crimes against integrity (A17). The result? According to Weiss, "All this attention on cheating seems to be making a difference. 'I would never want to cheat here—it's just too scary,'" said one student (A17). Certainly, honesty and integrity are qualities of character in short supply, qualities worth tending in the university; thus one might uphold UC Davis as exemplary, of getting integrity by enforcing integrity. Yet the absurdity of enforcing ethical behavior with threats of public

humiliation should be obvious. Acting not merely *in loco parentis*, but as the sort of hypervigilant parent students go to college to escape, Davis nurtures a strain of honest behavior of which no university should feel particularly proud: the student quoted above is not expressing a mature commitment to integrity, but a childlike compliance to authority.

When enacted as policy, the word *integrity* tends to become its antonym: disintegration. For *integrity* is not synonymous with obedience or with individual honesty, but is rather the quality of unity within a body. And while academic integrity is promoted as a value that unites the academic community, the urgency of this promotion is impelled by belief in the rising tide—the conviction among faculty and administrators that students are increasingly untrustworthy. And as demonstrated in the following excerpt from the final report of Simon Fraser University's Task Force on Academic Honesty and Integrity, the rhetoric of integrity also disunites the student body, constructing two discrete groups, the obedient and the dishonest:

> Those [students] who follow the rules . . . want the discipline students receive for confirmed cases of academic dishonesty to . . . send a clear message that cheating is a risky business and those who engage in academic dishonesty should expect to be caught and punished. (2)

Or as Reid, the student from Virginia Tech, sees it, there are those who graduate "inexpressibly better for having survived the crucible" of hard work, and there are "plagiarists" (Ruggiero 1), a term that appears frequently in writings about the rising tide, on websites offering strategies to combat plagiarism, and in the sales pitches of plagiarism-detection software.[6] (It is fascinating, and ironic, that this student finds the rewards of choosing one's own words "inexpressible.") Kincaid suggests, "we might try to entertain the idea that plagiarism, and even originality, are relative concepts" (97). But the issue is often portrayed as simple and two-sided, as exemplified by this testimonial for Turnitin.com, a product for detecting plagiarism that I discuss shortly: "The best thing about Turnitin.com [is] not that it catches cheaters, but that it prevents good kids from taking the easy route" (Turnitin Testimonials). Similarly, a 2002 *New York Times* article about cheating in a small Kansas town divides the student body into "plagiarizers and non-plagiarizers" (Wilgoren A1). To brand persons with the scarlet P is to turn behavior into identity, creating a discrete, immoral subgroup that, as the personification of plagiarism, assures the rest of us that our own behaviors and identities embody honesty and integ-

rity. These identities—the good student and the plagiarist—are further discredited by the fact that they embody behaviors that to some extent are themselves a false binary: "doing your own work" vs. plagiarizing.[7]

Of course, while teachers are blaming "plagiarists," Sue Carter Simmons notes that "blaming the teacher is a popular trope in student discussions of cheating and plagiarism" (46). Arguing about which side to blame is counterproductive, since creating sides and placing blame have helped to undermine integrity and maintain disunity: setting professors against students and good students against bad creates subgroups that are not just antagonistic but, ironically, mutually dependent and reinforcing. Even the most vehement arguments for vigilance and punishment disclose an uneasy awareness of this vicious circle: "since classes are a repeated game between plagiarizers and faculty, visible and appropriate punishment of all types of plagiarism must be made continually" (Weinstein 1). The game cannot be played without opposing teams, within a context of shared rules and beliefs about the nature and the consequences of academic dishonesty—rules understood and acted upon by teachers, "good students," and "cheaters" alike. Certainly professors can disregard the complexity of these dynamics and simply punish the plagiarists; as the authorities of authentic authorship, professors are authorized to do so. But directing this professional interest in authorship and authentic writing toward a crusade against plagiarism distracts us from considering our own role in the dynamic and diverts us from developing a pedagogy that encourages students' authentic engagement with words and ideas. Rebecca Moore Howard states, "we want to revise pedagogy, which is not blaming anyone at all. Let's take plagiarism as a signal that pedagogy needs to be reevaluated" (Eodice). Furthermore, a university in which cooperation is fostered by trusting and respectful authorities is far more desirable than one in which order is enforced through fear of powerful authoritarians.

Nevertheless, "as the Internet makes cheating easier and more tempting, many professors are putting less faith in honor and more in fear" (Gilgoff 51). Here are two more "Turnitin Testimonials":

> I think the product is great. Just the threat of a plagiarism system has forced a change in my students' behavior.

> It has forced my students to create their own work and forced them to learn the real way.

No doubt threats and force can bring about change. But this changed behavior does not deserve to be called integrity, and the method does not qualify as education; rather, what we have is invigilated obedience, the unsurprising result of "replacing the student-teacher relationship with the criminal-police relationship" (Howard, "Plagiarism, Policing" 1). Simon Fraser's Task Force on Academic Honesty and Integrity includes among its final recommendations for improving academic integrity "supervised bathroom visits" during exams (v). If we are known by the company we keep, then it is worth noting the results of an Internet search for the phrase "supervised bathroom visits": an inpatient facility for bulimics, a juvenile detention center, several preschools, the task force report, and a Montreal clothing manufacturer accused of various human rights violations in its Honduran sweat shop—including supervised bathroom visits. Yet the task force justifies its recommendations on the grounds that "academic dishonesty threatens the reputation of the university" (2).

I have no doubt that most of the professors and administrators who discuss these matters and endorse vigilant and punitive measures are thoughtful people who would recognize the invasiveness of surveillance and the futility of punishment as the cure-all for social problems. So why not here? Vandalism, petty lawlessness, various addictions, and antisocial excesses—none are effectively addressed by putting more energy into catching and punishing perpetrators. Why then do so many educators act as if academic "crimes" and contexts are different?

Academic Integrity and Academic Anxiety: A Context of Evaluation

One difference is that the closeness of the student/teacher relationship and the fondness most teachers have for their subject make an act of cheating feel like a personal betrayal—even though the student is not out to get me personally, just the grades I control. Then again, to convince myself in this way that it is not personal may not make me feel much better: I trade the experience of personal betrayal for the experience of being treated as an entirely impersonal obstacle between the student and the mark. But only by resisting the temptation to act upon feelings of personal betrayal and offense can we appreciate the extent to which our collective obsession with marks, inseparable from the fear of evaluation and the desire for control, motivates the various roles in the drama of academic integrity. In April 2004, the ABC news program *Primetime Thursday* aired a report entitled "A Cheating Crisis in America's Schools." When

host Charles Gibson asks, "Why do students cheat?" students' first response was competition for grades. One high school student, looking far too harried and serious for a sixteen-year-old, responded with one of the core beliefs underlying academic integrity discourse: "Grades can determine your future" ("Cheating Crisis"). This belief helps explain the actions of both students and teachers around the issue of academic dishonesty. If this student were to study successfully, he might get an A on the exam; but if he were to cheat successfully, he would have a *better* chance of getting an A because cheating mitigates the randomness of the outcome—it eliminates the personal factor and puts the student more firmly in control. When Gibson asks students which is more important to them, "honor or grades," he is confirming that there is a choice to be made: honor codes and integrity statements aside, honor is not necessarily the route to good grades. Or even if it is, the student at UC Davis who is too scared to cheat shows that there is nothing inherently honorable about obedience or hard work, nor about the high marks that may result. In fact, we can more accurately and usefully contextualize the problem of academic dishonesty by seeing the students' ethical dilemma not as honor versus grades but as two strategies—one appropriate, one not—toward attaining the same unquestioned goal: high marks.

How might the pressure of evaluation motivate the teacher's role in the war against academic dishonesty? What else might we be trying to control by controlling dishonesty? A conversation from a recent conference points toward a possible answer. Having caught a student plagiarizing early in the semester, a professor had lobbied successfully with the dean for authority to expel the student from the course with a failing grade, rather than allow the student to stay in the course with an F on just the one assignment. This professor feared that the student, if allowed to stay, would seek revenge by writing a negative course evaluation. This struck me as the perfect metonym for the academic context, within which anger, anxiety, and the personalizing of systemic, institutional behaviors converge to motivate students to cheat and professors to zealously pursue them: a context of pervasive evaluation and ranking.[8] And while we try to tell ourselves that these evaluations are meritocratic, are based upon clear grading rubrics and tenure criteria, we fear that evaluation may in fact be as unpredictable as praise and punishment from a volatile parent. Common in the oral culture of academia are stories of students given poor grades because teachers did not like them, and professors denied tenure for "political" reasons. These stories reflect our fear that success on evaluations and ex-

ams—and, more importantly, the currency of that success in the form of grades, diplomas, promotion, and tenure—is not in our control.

In his essay "Beating the House: How Inadequate Penalties for Cheating Make Plagiarism an Excellent Gamble," Matthew Woessner calculates that plagiarism is a strategy likely to pay off: "when expected value functions indicate that engaging in plagiarism will (in all probability) raise a student's grade and save her time, assuming the risk of misconduct must be described as rational" (314). Students' and instructors'—and later, employers'—fixation upon grades inhibits understanding and ameliorating the systemic, contextual nature of the problem. But once one acknowledges, as Woessner does, that a context of evaluation invites academic dishonesty, then it cannot follow that the solution is aggressive punishment of that dishonesty. Yet this is exactly what Woessner, and many others, recommend: "all but the most aggressive plagiarism sanctions inadvertently reward students who elect to engage in this type of misconduct" (313). The reality of the academic context endorses the opposite conclusion: aggressively punishing academic dishonesty, and monitoring students so vigilantly that we are always conscious of dishonesty's actual or potential presence, validate the significance and legitimacy of grades, intensify the obsession, and further the disintegration of the student/teacher relationship. If both parties believe that grades can determine a student's future, if students fear that these coupons for future success are not within their control, and if cheating is a risk worth taking, then academic honesty cannot result from those of us in positions of authority exerting greater control over grades. And since the subject is ethics in academia, we should consider the ethics of encouraging students to be grade junkies and then punishing those who cheat to get their fix.

An excerpt from the University of North Texas academic integrity site exemplifies the discourse analyzed thus far:

> Cheating also has a destructive impact on teachers. The real reward of good teaching is seeing students learn, but a cheater says, "I'm not interested in what you're trying to teach; all I care about is stealing a grade, regardless of the effect on others." The end result is a blatant and destructive attack on the quality of your education.

Here is the anger of teachers who personalize the act of cheating and the anger of students who believe that the "quality"—read "value"—of their education is threatened. But as the university environment becomes increasingly competi-

tive, professors cannot continue to read from the script that says "grades can determine your future" and expect to look out upon a classroom of joyful learners. To state it bluntly, teachers should put less—not more—energy into trying to catch cheaters and plagiarists. If cheating is a reasonable and often successful strategy, then ethical and effective change must come at the level of context: we need to reimagine the classroom as a context in which cheating is not just ethically but strategically undesirable. And we need to do this while interrogating rather than endorsing the determinism of grades. One often hears the rhetorical question, "Why don't cheaters put their energy into actually doing the work rather than finding new ways to cheat?" But as a genuine question, it exposes the core of the issue. Why cheat? Because it makes sense: cheating is a sensible strategy when the stakes are high and the dice may be loaded, whether the context is a game of chance or a final exam.

Putting the Mark in Marketing

That the claim "grades can determine your future" has come to be accepted as a given—and as justification for the war on plagiarism—corresponds with the changing character of the university. "Higher education," Briggs writes, "has been increasingly reconceived over the last few decades as involving the cultivation of professional skills rather than the provision of knowledge" (20). Of course, one must be somewhat practical: no one wants to be marginally employed or unemployed, and without a college degree one certainly has fewer and less desirable choices. Nevertheless, the close relationship between the academic and professional worlds must influence the character of each, and inevitably some of these influences are negative: the desire for the marks of academic excellence corresponds with some of the work world's less savory attitudes, such as competitiveness, obedience, extreme pragmatism, and the false equation of productivity with accomplishment.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault notes that a "discipline" is characterized by a commitment to both docility and utility, whereby "disciplinary coercion establishes in the body the constricting link between an increased aptitude and an increased domination" (138). In the university context, docility is the goal of surveillance and punishment, and utility is both the motive and the goal of careerism, of "the cultivation of professional skills." The work world cannot function productively without tractable workers. So while it may be an overstatement to speak of university-sponsored surveillance as "domination," it is not an overstatement to say that a university dedicated to "the cultivation of professional skills" will not likely encourage—risks, in fact, be-

coming ideologically disabled from encouraging—the critique of surveillance and careerism and their effects upon the university itself.

Furthermore, a symbiotic relationship between the university and the work world extols either implicitly or explicitly the economic evaluation of the college degree and constructs course work as primarily a means to improving one's chances of success at the next level. And if we suggest that the value of an education is cashed out as status and income, as we do if we tell students that grades will determine their future, then we are encouraging the sort of crude pragmatism that makes cheating a reasonable strategy. Plagiarism in particular has not only a pragmatic but an ideological relationship to the promise of future wealth, as Candace Spigelman points out:

> Because student work is academic "capital" traded for grades (which are themselves academic capital), ideas, words, and texts are forms of intellectual property with associated property rights for owners and elaborated punishments for "trespassers" and "thieves."

Within such a context, the relationship between cheating and school mirrors the relationship between school and career: what actions will improve my future standing? Referring to her required math course, a student on the *Primetime* documentary defended her cheating with the common objection, "When will I ever use this?" To punish this student for cheating would neither answer her question nor prompt her to critique the ideology behind it: the belief that course work that is not clearly pragmatic, not directly applicable to professional success, is a waste of time, a breach of the business transaction the student feels she is making by paying tuition. Even if grades do accurately signify ability—and that is questionable—their value as a sign of past effort or current knowledge has been diminished by their value as a currency of exchange for future status and wealth.[9] Though individual instructors may not endorse—may even openly oppose—the commodification of knowledge, they still perform alongside students in an evaluative context, and thus, as Janice R. Walker points out, "[o]ur own attitudes and ideologies may be adding to the concept of knowledge as commodity, as students trade finished products for grades in the classroom, and we barter intellectual property for academic rewards in the tenure-and-promotion review process" (249).

By feeding rather than challenging the market's appropriation of the meaning of a college degree while, at the same time, espousing and guarding the intrinsic integrity of grades, a university's message is contradictory at best. Consider this example from the University of Washington: "The reputation of

the University and the worth of a UW degree suffer if employers find graduates lacking the abilities their degrees should guarantee." By so directly associating integrity with a school's reputation among employers, UW grants employers the authority to determine the value of a degree, and *value* in the business world is understood to mean "monetary value." Even when it looks as if UW is about to endorse ethical behavior as inherently valuable, the voice of the job market butts in to remind us of the bottom line: "Cheaters also cheat themselves of a real education. They rob themselves not only of general knowledge, but also of the experience of learning how to learn, the very experience that makes a university degree so valuable to employers." Within the ideology of monetary evaluation, it is disingenuous to decry cheating and plagiarism as threatening the "integrity" of grades and degrees, as if they, like currency, have any intrinsic value outside the marketplace, either in some abstract sense— indicating "intelligence" or "promise"—or within their immediate university context—"mastery of the material."

Yet paradoxically, at the same time that the exchange value of the mark is anxiously protected, the mark itself is invested with just such intrinsic value and validity, by way of romantic beliefs about genius, originality, and authorship. Though broadly discredited by contemporary theories of language, writing, cognition, and uptake, these beliefs continue to exert their authority whenever writing is treated as emergent, as the product of a student's innate genius, and the mark is held in turn as the measure of that genius.[10] But we are right to question this ideology, along with its apparent commitment to individualism and self-actualization. For "the power of writing," Foucault observes, may often serve "the 'formalization' of the individual within power relations" (189–90). So it is in the academic context, where the evaluation of student writing as emergent expression ranks and fixes not the individual's temporal performance in the role of student but the individual himself or herself. Successful plagiarism, meanwhile, allows a student to leap ahead through the ranks by speaking with the stolen voice of authority, subverting the student-teacher power relation and its metonym, the grade. Plagiarism and cheating thus render suspect that which to some extent deserves to be rendered suspect: the significance of the mark as a measure of a student's "aptitudes or abilities, under the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge" (190). Even in the complete absence of cheating and plagiarism, the validity and integrity of the mark, the imaginary gold standard of rigor and excellence that the A is supposed to signify, would be indefensible. Nevertheless, the official transcript continues to invest grades—and now, on some institutions' transcripts, the scarlet P of aca-

demic dishonesty—with a near-scriptural authority and permanence. There-fore, "because it threatens the validity of grading" is not a persuasive justifica-tion for increased policing and punishing of academic dishonesty.

The consequences of the "regulatory fiction of the autonomous author" (Howard "Plagiarisms, Authorships" 791) find faculty once again in the same boat as our students, even while our plagiarism policies keep us at odds. For the valorization of original *author*ity within a context of evaluation creates anxiety for both students and faculty. Rebecca Moore Howard states, "if there is no originality, there is no basis for literary property. If there is no originality and no literary property, there is no basis for the notion of plagiarism" (791). And, I would add, if there is no originality and no literary property, there is little or no basis for the existence of literature professors. This is not an argu-ment for cheating (or against professors), but a call to resist oversimplifying the problem, the solution, the rhetoric, and the multiple contexts: social, ethi-cal, economic, and psychological.

Panoptic Technologies and Their Consequences

As H. L. Mencken observed, "There is always a well-known solution to every human problem—neat, plausible, and wrong."[11] After two high school students show *Primetime* host Charles Gibson how to send exam answers across a lec-ture hall by email, Gibson calls their handheld computers "a one-stop cheating machine." A common undercurrent in discussions of academic dishonesty is that technology is part of the problem: students, Gibson marveled, "are so so-phisticated, professors can't keep up. . . . The Internet makes [plagiarism] so easy." "The era of cut-and-paste," says Scott Siddall of Denison University, "re-quires our vigilance" (Young A26). It may be simpler today for students to cheat, but it is also simpler to catch them—provided we disregard Mencken's warn-ing about neat solutions. Many schools are investing in online plagiarism de-tection services such as PlagiServe, Glatt Plagiarism Services, Wordcheck, and Turnitin.com. In 2002, iParadigms—the company behind Turnitin, iThenticate (a corporate version of Turnitin for law firms and publishers), and the plagiarism.org website—won a contract to provide its service to 700 schools in Britain (Foster A37). In 2003, the California State University system provided Turnitin to all 23 CSU campuses, paying iParadigms $90,001.54 (a savings of $57,969 off the list price) for a one-year subscription (Trustees 3). As of 2005, over 4,000 schools worldwide use the product ("N.S. Students"). In angry fac-ulty and nervous administrators, Turnitin has found its market:

> I caught a plagiarist within 24 hours. Using this website made the whole ordeal
> less infuriating (although no less insulting) since I had to spend much less time
> tracking the sources I had suspected the student had used than I would have w/o
> using Turnitin.com. ("Turnitin Testimonials")

UC Davis invested in Turnitin after a doubling in the incidence of cheating, from 70 cases in 1994 to 142 cases in 2000 (Young A27). But given a student population of 26,000, the percentage of students caught cheating increased from .27 percent to .55 percent. Thus a cheating rate of one-half of one percent compelled a respected university to create a context in which all students, 99.45 percent of whom have done nothing to arouse suspicion, must be willing to submit to the campus equivalent of a lie-detector test. Using rhetoric that I hope I have rendered suspect, Jeanne M. Wilson, director of student judicial affairs at Davis, says of Turnitin, "There needed to be some ways for a faculty member to help keep an even playing field for students who are honest. We try to provide the tools and resources so that, working together, we can provide a climate of integrity" (A27).

To use Turnitin, an instructor submits an online enrollment list of students' names and email addresses. Students then send their papers electronically directly to Turnitin.com, which compares "submitted papers to billions of pages of content located on the Internet and our proprietary databases. The results of our comparisons are compiled, one for each paper submitted, in custom 'Originality Reports,'" sent electronically to the instructor ("New to Turnitin?"). Included in Turnitin's "proprietary database" are all the student essays previously submitted to Turnitin. Although these products raise obvious ethical concerns, most of the objections to plagiarism-detection software in general, and iParadigms's "proprietary database" in particular, have been legal, not ethical. In response, iParadigms has hired law firms in the United States, Canada, and Australia to assert the legality of its use of student writing in terms of copyright and privacy issues. iParadigms founder and software developer John Barrie "calls the privacy allegation 'petty criticism'" and believes that the "fair-use" exception to copyright law applies to Turnitin's use of student writing (Foster A37; "Turnitin Legal Document" 7–8). Dan L. Burk, an expert in intellectual property law at the University of Minnesota Law School, calls Barrie's fair-use argument "baloney," since the students' essays are copied in their entirety and are submitted to a commercial enterprise (Foster A38). Though schools have been quick to sign up, a notable exception is UC Berkeley—where Barrie developed the software while a graduate student—which has declined to use Turnitin because of intellectual property concerns (A37).

Others have questioned the effectiveness of plagiarism-detection pro-grams (see Royce). Based on reports from my colleagues who use Turnitin and on experiments using my own writings, it seems to work well: it correctly iden-tified quoted material and left "my own" words alone. But the question of ef-fectiveness is a red herring—what such programs do is of far more concern than how well they do it. These tools are the inevitable end point of the integ-rity scare: an efficient, perhaps even foolproof, technology of surveillance, a "panoptic schema" (Foucault 206). The technology of plagiarism detection exemplifies Foucault's panoptic schema in at least three respects. First, this technology offers a power of surveillance at once vast and minute, global and personal: a library consisting of "billions of pages" allows the program to evalu-ate the originality of each individual student ("New to Turnitin?"). These "Origi-nality Reports" invoke the power of writing by claiming to situate, contain, and rank the individual within a hierarchical and meticulously documented order. The very name "originality report" invokes the panoptic logic that a struc-ture of examination and documentation does not preclude individuality but rather accounts for it and renders it intelligible. Second, this technology's true power lies in its ability to command obedience, as much by the fear of as by the actual presence or deployment of vigilance: "the constant pressure acts even before the offenses, mistakes or crimes have been committed" (Foucault 206). One "Turnitin Testimonial" reads, "The 'threat factor' seems to keep would-be cheaters in check. Before we started our research unit I explained the technol-ogy of this site and let each student know that I would be using it." The *Turnitin Instructor User Guide* specifically mentions the unique authority of potential scrutiny:

> Although Originality Reports can be very effective at helping to identify suspected individual cases of plagiarism, Turnitin plagiarism prevention works even more powerfully when used as a deterrent. Students who know that their work *could* come under effective scrutiny are much more likely to produce original work. (15; emphasis added)

And third, plagiarism-detection tools achieve, in panoptic fashion, effi-ciency through self-subjection: their "efficiency of power" comes from the fact that "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; ... he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (Foucault 202–3). Thus, suggests the *User Guide*, "We highly recommend you have students submit papers themselves. This will save

you time and enable you to use other products like GradeMark and Peer Review" (8). According to Andrea Foster, Turnitin makes this recommendation for another reason, so that "students cannot later argue that their papers were submitted to Turnitin.com without their knowledge" (A37). By submitting their own papers for inspection and verification, students support "a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers" (Foucault 201).

Granted, cultural critiques invoking Foucault run the risk of overstatement: universities are not prisons or infirmaries, and students are not convicts or plague victims. At least not literally: Foucault contends that "[u]nderlying disciplinary projects the image of the plague stands for all forms of confusion and disorder" (199), and thus the "disciplinary project" of panopticism is "destined to spread throughout the social body" (207). Academia's anxious embrace of panoptic technologies should lead us to expect descriptions of plagiarism as an infection of the student body; and sure enough, in moralistic discourse on academic integrity, the language of disease is as common as the language of the rising tide.[12] For example, here again is Reid's contribution to Virginia Tech's "Plagiarism and Honor Module":

> Plagiarism is the basest form of parasitism. A leech may make a living from other organisms, but even a leech doesn't take credit where credit is not due. Thievery of words, scourge of the intellectual arena, plagiarism festers most prominently on college campuses worldwide. The Internet has ensured the profusion and accessibility of this germ, this disease that debilitates creativity and scholastic equality.—Josh Reid, Virginia Tech Class of 2000. (Ruggiero 1)

And according to an article in *ReadMe*, a webzine produced by journalism students at New York University, "Student plagiarism is epidemic in universities nationwide" (Lee). The article cites the epidemic as the catalyst for the spread of plagiarism-detection programs.

Within a critical pedagogy, writing is a process through which students, with the assistance of a trusted teacher, can explore and critique dominant social processes, particularly those in which students—and perhaps teachers, too—would otherwise participate unawares. Conversely, plagiarism detection treats writing as a product, grounds the student-teacher relationship in mistrust, and requires students to actively comply with a system that marks them as untrustworthy. Though teachers and students cannot pretend to interact as equals in the classroom, this power dynamic is not inherently problematic or malevolent. In fact, awareness of, and dialogue about, the construction of power in the classroom is key to creating a critical, trusting, and liberatory context, within which these power dynamics can be the object of critical scru-

tiny. Surveillance technology, on the other hand, reinforces rather than interrogates social roles and power differentials, as if they are natural and immune to scrutiny. Such technology is thus incompatible with—is, in fact, hostile toward—critical thinking.

The better this technology works, the more likely it is to become natural, invisible, and permanent. If we find ourselves catching plagiarists quickly and effortlessly, then we are more likely to feel that the ends justify the means, which makes the technology ripe for abuse. "One hundred percent of our clients buy Turnitin as a deterrent," Barrie claims. "None of them care to catch their students cheating" (Lee). Yet numerous testimonials suggest otherwise. Here are three examples, the last of which exemplifies as well the self-fulfilling nature of the rising tide:

> I had a student who had plagiarized 96% of his paper. . . . Your service allowed me to catch this student and let him learn his lesson young.

> It saved me hours of time, [and] caught more students than I would have been able to.

> So far, each paper submitted has proven what the teacher thought. It is an invaluable source for catching students plagiarizing, and saves teachers hours of personal research trying to prove what they already know. ("Turnitin Testimonials")

A high school history teacher featured in the *Primetime* exposé complains that students "think they can outsmart the teacher" ("Cheating Crisis"). Not to be outsmarted by teenagers, she submits their essays to Turnitin. And determined to "get a more honest result," she does not tell the students beforehand. The irony of using the word *honest* in connection with such a betrayal went unremarked by teacher or host. Neither seemed to recognize the ideology common to both the righteous teacher and the student who cheats because "grades can determine your future:" the ends justify the means. Might some of the parents, who had to sign their children's Originality Reports, question the history teacher's act of entrapment? Sadly, those interviewed were ashamed of their children, not of the teacher. In addition to claiming that plagiarism-detection programs "improve the higher-education system by helping to attach more meaning to students' grades," Louis Bloomfield of the University of Virginia believes "they make dishonest students realize that it doesn't pay to use any means necessary to get ahead" (Foster A38). Here again, the irony of making such a claim while endorsing surveillance technology would be comical if the consequences were not so detrimental to education.

Call surveillance technology what we will—deterring dishonesty, promoting originality, leveling the playing field—there is no way to honestly call it anything other than forcing students, most of whom we have no reason to suspect, to prove their innocence. Requiring students to submit their writing to an outside vendor for analysis, before teachers even see it, tells students that the first thing we look for in their work is evidence of cheating. I cannot imagine an argument that would convince me this is acceptable. And what if a student were to object? Barrie suggests telling the student, "'Write as much creative stuff as you want— just don't do it at this institution'" (Foster A37); I doubt that any of the universities using Turnitin would be eager to adopt this motto as their official school slogan. Says Nicholas S. Aguilar, director of student policies and judicial affairs at UC San Diego, "We leave it up to the instructor to determine how to treat [students who object]" (Foster 4). In other words, the instructor who is suspicious enough to make students verify their work is expected to deal fairly with those who resist being treated with suspicion. The injustice in this arrangement speaks for itself.

Welcoming the expansion of surveillance technologies into the classroom in order to combat plagiarism is a Faustian bargain, especially in the current political climate. In 2003, the American Civil Liberties Union published "Bigger Monster, Weaker Chains: The Growth of an American Surveillance Society." The essay argues as follows:

> In the public debates over every new surveillance technology, the forest too often gets lost for the trees, and we lose sight of the larger trend: the seemingly inexorable movement toward a surveillance society. . . . But unless each new development is also understood as just one piece of the larger surveillance mosaic that is rapidly being constructed around us, Americans are not likely to get excited about a given incremental loss of privacy. (Stanley and Steinhardt 14)

Our purchases, our television and Internet viewing, even our daily travels are monitored by increasingly sophisticated and pervasive surveillance technologies, which are themselves monitored by lax or nonexistent laws. The Turnitin "Privacy Pledge" promises that "access to personal information by third parties will only occur via signed or electronic consent by registered users." But such assurances are not very comforting in the era of the Patriot Act, which empowers the Federal Bureau of Investigation to

> force anyone to turn over records on their customers or clients. . . . Some of the most invasive and disturbing uses permitted by the Act involve government access to citizens' reading habits from libraries and bookstores. The FBI does not

have to show suspicion of a crime, can gag the recipient of a search order from disclosing the search to anyone, and is subject to no meaningful judicial oversight. (Stanley and Steinhardt 9).

Therefore the question is not, "Do I trust this company to keep its privacy pledge?" but rather, "Do I trust it to do so even in defiance of federal law?"

Lest such worries be dismissed as far-fetched, consider the following news story from April 2004:

> The drawings by a 15-year-old boy in Prosser, Washington, were enough to prompt some questions from the Secret Service. One drawing showed President Bush's head on a stick. Another depicted Bush as a devil launching a missile. Agents questioned the teen after being called by police. The boy's art teacher told school officials about the drawings, and they called police. The boy was not arrested but the school district has taken disciplinary action. ("Student's Anti-Bush Sketches")

If the Secret Service has time to interrogate a teenager about his art project, we can imagine their interest in a vast database of students' writings.[13] Such concerns are not lost on the more thoughtful and cautious proponents of plagiarism-detection programs. The following is from the report of the Simon Fraser University Task Force on Academic Honesty and Integrity:

> That Turnitin.com maintains a database of all papers submitted to the service raises concerns with privacy protection. For some, these concerns have been strengthened by the U.S. Patriot Act. Given that Turnitin.com is a U.S. company [Simon Fraser is a Canadian university], it appears possible that an intelligence agency could conduct a word search of the data base, find, for example, a paper on Middle East politics that expressed opinions deemed a threat to U.S. national security, and gain access to the identity of the writer. . . .
> Despite the above concerns, the Task Force is not recommending that SFU stop supporting Turnitin.com. (21–22, 24)

But once we acknowledge the possibility that universities could be complicit— even indirectly or unwittingly—in the monitoring of dissent, the debate about the ethics of plagiarism-detection products is over: there can be no ethically valid argument beginning with "Despite the above concerns."

Beating the System

In the story of Turnitin and the high school history teacher, Charles Gibson mentioned in passing the teacher's writing assignment: students were to write about their "favorite American explorer." I feel it is important to point out that sixteen-year-olds don't have favorite American explorers. Most adults don't

have favorite American explorers. I don't have a favorite American explorer, and to be honest, I think I would have plagiarized that assignment and spent the time saved doing something I actually cared about.

Why don't students put their creative energy into actually doing the work rather than finding new ways to cheat? One answer is that the work does not invite or deserve creative energy, especially if assigned by a teacher who has already created an atmosphere of vigilance and mistrust. In describing writing requirements at Harvard in the 1890s, Sue Carter Simmons says that constraints on the forms and topics of student themes "created a climate where students were required to write, but not really allowed to author their texts. In such a climate, I believe, students may have felt plagiarism to be a viable option" (43). The homogeneity of topics, the viability of plagiarism: Simmons could be discussing academic writing today. Regarding "assignments that get used over and over and also the assignments that are written before the class has even met," Howard argues:

> In these assignments there's no context that involves the students themselves. It's not just that those assignments invite plagiarism; it's that those kinds of assignments are not actually connecting with the human beings in the class and involving them in the building of meaning. (Eodice)

The student who asks, "When will I ever use this?" is not just being pragmatic but is also expressing disengagement. It is often said that cheaters are lazy, but I think lazy students are rare; disengaged students, however, are far too common.

What does invite creative energy in an atmosphere of surveillance and punishment is stealthy defiance. And if the justification for surveillance is academic honesty, then dishonesty—the very behavior surveillance targets—becomes the defiant act of choice. "I don't think cheaters have ever been smart," claims McKill (Gold 2). I disagree. I believe Janice Walker is correct that "students can demonstrate exceptional research skills and ingenuity in finding ways to cheat the system, with or without technology, if sufficiently motivated to do so" (Walker 244). The "how to" section of Cizek's *Cheating on Tests: How to Do It, Detect It, and Prevent It* is an awe-inspiring compendium of methods and a dramatic counterstatement to McKill's opinion:

> In the "Flying V" or "Power Wedge" formation, the student with all the answers sits front row center, two beneficiaries sit one row behind and immediately to her left and right, and so on toward the back of the room, creating a V-shaped collaborative effort. (40)

> A student removes the label from a water bottle, writes test information on the back of the label, and reapplies it, the information clearly visible through the bottle. (47)

> The act which inspired supervised bathroom visits: a student places a cheat sheet "in a roll of toilet paper for use during an excused trip to the restroom," a method apparently known as "taking a number three." (44)

> On a final exam, a university student confronts two essay questions, the first of which he knows absolutely nothing about. He marks his blue book "Book II," "begins it with what appears to be the last sentence or two of the answer to the first question," and then proceeds to answer question 2. The student "received a passing grade for the course, in addition to an apology from the instructor for losing the student's first blue book." (49–50)

And we are going to subvert this global network of youthful brain power with supervised bathroom visits? Not only is this recommendation invasive and infantilizing, but it keeps us from appreciating the real problem (and the sad irony) of students congregating in the bathroom to compare test answers. What sort of pedagogy puts collaboration in the same category as smoking, as something students do on the sly in the bathroom? One contextual approach to reducing cheating is to reappropriate it by including group work in lessons and exams. Certainly employers would benefit from students practiced in collaborative problem solving. But as Foucault observes, one component of discipline is "partitioning": in order to "supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits," one must "avoid distributions in groups; break up collective dispositions;" "eliminate the effects of . . . dangerous coagulation" (143). Not surprising, then, is the following recommendation regarding group work, from a report entitled "Managing Student Plagiarism in Large Academic Departments":

> Weaker students can hide behind the collective and fail to contribute, or share the blame with unwitting colleagues when their contribution is found to be stolen. . . . [B]oth from the point of view of students' development and with regard to the issue of identifying plagiarism, group work should be limited to subjects such as software engineering where it has a clearly identified benefit and operates in managed structures. (Zobel and Hamilton 27)

While this recommendation may eliminate some opportunities for some students to cheat, it places all students in a conflicted context that praises individuality yet acts to contain the individual within "managed structures" to facilitate examination and evaluation.

Note too the assumption in the excerpt above that those caught cheating are the "weaker students," an oversimplification that leads to an oversimplified response to plagiarism: "track it down and punish it" (Zobel and Hamilton 23). As with any argument that uses the promise of a better society to sell vigilance and punishment, the claim that enforced honesty creates a better school is weakened by the unequal distribution of punishment. Introducing the "how to" section of his book, Cizek states:

> A few of the methods are simplistic; a few are brilliant; most are remarkably ordinary. I suspect that only those who choose the rather simplistic methods are likely to get caught. . . . Users of mundane methods probably slog through the educational system little noticed. This is not particularly a good thing, but it is the reality of the situation. (38)

In other words, it is not the weaker students who get caught but the weaker cheaters. The truly brilliant cheaters will avoid getting caught, graduate with honors, and become captains of industry. "The ethical paradox that we must acknowledge is that the more serious forms of plagiary are those that are most difficult to detect and for which the intent to plagiarize would be hardest to prove" ("Plagiary"). This dilemma further undermines the strong student/weak student distinction, along with the means of assessment used to sort students into those categories.

Like adolescent defiance in general, academic dishonesty is often self-destructive: Cizek's history of cheating is also a history of students working hard to subvert their education. In this way, too, do authoritative, punitive responses undermine their own values and goals, solidifying a system in which no one wins. In *Critical Teaching and Everyday Life*, Ira Shor observes that "one of the most energetic and paradoxical things people do is the game called 'beating the system'" (58). The search for "bargains, short cuts, deals," or beating the system,

> is a means to outsmart capitalism by playing within the rules of the business world. In the end, you wind up devoting huge amounts of time learning the ropes of the system, and none to rejecting the social model. . . . In this contradictory way, "beating the system" is a very active way to stay frozen in the system. (59)

The game is played by those who feel powerless against those they imagine hold all the power, be it political, economic, or institutional. Cheating on income taxes, copying CDs, stealing satellite television signals, using slugs in vending machines—through these small acts of defiance, we gain fleeting vic-

tories of dubious value. Beating the system requires "a mental agility, a shrewd watchfulness in people. It forces thought to be narrow, immediate, and practical, thus crowding out critical thinking, but it doesn't destroy the capacity for critical thought" (59). This description applies well to acts of academic dishonesty, acts that, like the institutional forces that disrupt or monopolize thought, "must be conceived as social and pervasive, not as personal problems or as isolated pedagogical ones" (48). Shor's analysis supports an understanding of academic dishonesty not as a "personal" or "isolated" act but as the campus version of "beating the system." And as long as teachers accept the assumptions entailed and the actions justified in such slogans as "track plagiarism down and punish it," we perform and confirm our role as the system's authority figures, a role that allows the game of beating the system to continue. Submitting student writing for plagiarism analysis or escorting students to the toilet during exams will yield the same result as the IRS performing more audits, or the recording industry suing teenagers for stealing music: a possible decrease in the targeted behavior, but a guaranteed reinforcement of the antagonistic roles that motivate that behavior. It is thus disingenuous to claim that the war on plagiarism is for the students'—or the teachers'—own good.

Unfortunately, we may have reached the point where the suppression of academic dishonesty is deemed more important than anything that might be sacrificed in the effort—including education. As reported in the *Calgary Herald*, some at the University of Toronto are combating plagiarism by simply eliminating take-home writing assignments—to the *admitted* detriment of learning:

> [Professor Bernd Baldus] admits in-class assignments are not the optimal way to assess university students, but the veteran sociology professor says rampant plagiarism has left him little choice. "The only way to protect yourself against that as an instructor, unfortunately, is to shift toward those in-class exams and essays. It's a pity because the whole range of the educational experience is no longer available." (Schmidt)

This approach sacrifices in-depth, written engagement with ideas "in favor of in-class tests filled with short essay questions, multiple choice and true-and-false questions" (Schmidt). Such a pedagogy asks students to prove that they read what they were told to read and took notes during lecture—it brings into the classroom context the parental question "Are you listening to me?!" We should not be surprised, then, to find the following among the "Turnitin Testimonials": "Now I simply threaten them with (like—'You just wait till your fa-

ther gets home'), 'I'm going to submit this to Turnitin.com!'" And we can ex-
pect this role to prompt the standard adolescent response: defiance and/or
disengagement.

Engaging the System

The pragmatic goal of challenging the rhetoric of academic integrity is the
rethinking of academic practice; in "Beyond 'Gotcha!': Situating Plagiarism in
Policy and Pedagogy," Margaret Price offers a useful framework:

> My overall goal is that we indicate to students the two key points they need to
> know about plagiarism: (1) that the conventions governing text ownership and
> attribution are constructed and dynamic; and (2) that all members of an aca-
> demic community, students and teachers alike, can work both *within* and *on* these
> conventions. (110)

In calling for an end to moralistic attitudes, Robert Briggs reframes plagiarism
as an indication not of immorality but of inability, and hence of the need to
learn to write within the conventions:

> [T]he moralistic condemnation of plagiarism views ideas and arguments as owned
> by completely self-sufficient, sovereign subjects ("my own ideas," "someone else's
> ideas") rather than as the result of a whole set of disciplinary procedures and
> investigations as put into operation by a specific, but by no means homogeneous,
> disciplinary community. . . . [W]hat's wrong with plagiarism is not simply that
> one has stolen "someone else's" work but rather that such an act demonstrates
> that one has yet to master the skills of the discipline. (21)

Though this approach is more enlightened than a policy of surveillance and
punishment, Candace Spigelman argues against simply taking the other side
in the debate between punishment and rehabilitation: "instructional strate-
gies and institutional policies addressing plagiarism assume either that stu-
dents willfully intend to cheat or that they are ignorant of the 'rules' for
attribution. In either case, the student, and not the system, is culpable." And
even if we "indicate to students that learning to avoid plagiarism is a process
of learning conventions and customs" (Price 104)—the "within" part of Price's
framework—we are not necessarily interrogating the history and legitimacy
of those conventions and customs.

The path to a more reasonable approach to plagiarism is through a more
critical approach to plagiarism, through collaborative work *on*—and against—
the conventions. Rebecca Moore Howard recommends abandoning the term

plagiarism altogether, replacing it with "less culturally burdened terms: fraud, insufficient citation, and excessive repetition" ("Sexuality, Textuality" 475). (Howard's recommendation is sound, though I believe we can debate whether *fraud*, *insufficient*, and *excessive* are less culturally burdened—or even less gendered—terms than "plagiarism.") Of course, universities should continue to treat fraud as unethical and unacceptable. But the inclusive term *plagiarism*, as enacted in policy, "asserts a moral basis for textual phenomena that are a function of reading comprehension and community membership" (475). If changes must occur at the systemic, contextual level, then working on textual conventions must involve not only, or even primarily, getting them right, but also making them the focus of the community's critical analysis—and not just in academic journals but in the classroom.

Such a perspective corresponds with the practices of critical pedagogy: since the classroom is the scene for acts of academic dishonesty—"the scene of the crime as it were" (Kitalong 260)—the classroom becomes the object of inquiry and imaginative reconstruction: What do the conventions of academic discourse preserve? What is at stake? Why do we care? Price writes, "[O]nce we have acknowledged to students and ourselves that plagiarism is part of an ongoing, evolving academic conversation, we can invite students to add their own voices to that conversation" (Price 90). As these in-class discussions spiral out from the immediate context toward larger scenes, acts, motivations, and ideologies, we might consider, for example, a report in *U.S. News and World Report* that states, "almost 85% of college students say cheating is necessary to get ahead" (Plagiarism.org). Statistics like this might motivate investment in plagiarism-detecting software: the above citation was found on the Plagiarism.org website. Or we might instead confront the implicit ideology: what do we mean by "get ahead?" What choices and alternatives are deflected by this competitive, goal-oriented vision of success? The "working *on*" of critical discussion collaborates with a social-rhetorical approach to working on writing, as described by Linda Shamoon and Deborah H. Burns:

> When a student authors a "good" paper . . . she may feel she is, indeed, being original. Rhetorically, however, her text probably imitates, elaborates, and applies ideas and forms from the various sources that are hers to use legitimately. . . . The social-rhetorical perspective would make interpellation more conscious because it articulates the constructed nature of subject matter, of disciplinary thinking and questioning, of the related features of the discourse (including paper features), and of the values and expectations of a specific reader or audience. (191)

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Similarly does Marilyn Cooper advocate a writing pedagogy through which students "understand how and the extent to which they are *not* owners of their texts and *not* responsible for the shape of their texts." To see plagiarism, like all acts of writing, as a historical, contextual, social phenomenon—as well as an educational opportunity—directs our response and frees us to respond in the roles we are best equipped to play: as thinkers and educators, not moral enforcers.

Note that the argument in favor of engaging the process rather than punishing the product does not require one to embrace the complete deconstruction of the concept of plagiarism. For example, in "Plagiarism, Process, Property, and the Law," Laurie Stearns describes plagiarism as an "abhorrent" act that "people despise" (7), and seeks (in the context of law and publishing) to codify rather than complicate the definition of plagiarism. But Stearns, in noting that some "borrowing" is deemed "acceptable imitation" and that plagiarism may well result in excellent published work, concludes that plagiarism is "a failure of the creative process, not a flaw in its result" (7). If students' plagiarism is likewise a failure of process, then the process seems the logical point of intervention. Though Edward M. White believes the problem of willful plagiarism "requires a moral stand by an outraged community," he, too, asserts, "When a writing assignment attends to the writing process, instead of only the end product, plagiarism becomes almost impossible" (207–8). Further, Briggs makes the critical observation that "the ethical competencies that apparently animate the desire to produce 'one's own' work may actually arise as an effect of the process of mastering relevant research and writing techniques" (Briggs 21). In other words, if we put less energy into catching cheaters and more into teaching writing and critical thinking, we should achieve the very objective of academic integrity: students more invested in their learning *and therefore* less inclined to cheat and plagiarize. The reduction of plagiarism surrenders its leading role in the teacher's engagement with students and their writing, and instead takes its proper place as the desirable byproduct of a collaborative, trusting relationship.

For trust is among the first casualties of heavy-handed reactions to academic dishonesty.[14] Even those most concerned about the rising tide warn that mistrust undermines learning: Donald McCabe, founder of the Center for Academic Integrity and an oft-cited authority on the issue,

> expressed his concern that requiring students to use plagiarism-detecting software promotes a lack of trust, and resentment on the part of students toward

their instructors. McCabe points out that feeling respected and trusted is a major deterrent to academic dishonesty. (Simon Fraser University 23)

Cizek cautions against the "tendency to see cheating everywhere:" "as regards the trust and mentoring relationship between student and teacher that is deemed facilitative to learning, such a predilection would be highly undesirable" (38). Trust is an essential nutrient for academic vitality; neither students nor professors can thrive without it. An atmosphere of trust encourages students to take risks, to try on new roles in the form of courses, majors, and—most importantly—ideas, opinions, beliefs, and ideologies: how does it feel to think like this, or to write like that?[15] What new possibilities emerge? Fraud is a form of trying things on that schools rightly discourage; but to confront academic dishonesty with inflammatory rhetoric and panoptic policies cannot but distort and diminish intellectual play, creativity, and risk taking, activities that continually reinvigorate the roles of student and teacher.

For teachers, too, benefit from an atmosphere of trust. Teaching is a vulnerable act. One must balance planning and lecturing with spontaneity and dialogue, even though embracing spontaneity means accepting the risk of looking uncertain, unprofessorial, even foolish. A critical curriculum renders visible and malleable the socially constructed nature of contexts, acts, genres, and roles, including those closest to hand: the classroom, the essay, the student, and the teacher. Within such a pedagogy, writes Ira Shor, "[t]he teacher surrenders the mystique of power and expertise, while using his or her critical understanding of reality to provoke critical consciousness in the students" (84). Though surrender is humbling, the role of the invulnerable expert has its problems, too, such as "alienation from students, a need to appear formidable, a fear of failing to meet the expectations of colleagues and students, the constant pressure to put on a good show, the defensiveness that accompanies the exercise of power over others" (84). To honor the value of collateral learning is likewise humbling: I have to admit that my lessons may be less valuable as vehicles for transmitting wisdom than as catalysts for student-generated curiosity and dialogue. This sense of perspective about the importance of one's own ideas (not to mention the extent to which I can call any idea my own) also helps depersonalize cheating and plagiarism. For although a foundation of trust fosters academic freedom, it does leave open the possibility—in fact, the certainty—that some will betray that trust and freedom. But given that some amount of cheating is inevitable, regardless of a teacher's attitude or a school's policies, the benefits of assuming that most students are honest outweigh the

costs, while the opposite is true for assuming that all are suspect. The academic calendar guarantees renewal: every fifteen weeks we get to try again, with a new group of collaborators. If every new group is just a new lineup of suspects, why bother coming back? Here in closing is an excerpt from the "Academic Integrity" website of the University of North Texas Center for Students Rights and Responsibilities:

> In sum, we all have a common stake in our school, our community, and our society. Our actions do matter. It is essential that we act with integrity in order to build the kind of world in which we want to live.

The value of our participation in this challenging course is measured by the extent to which the actions we take in the name of integrity are themselves deserving of the name.

Notes

1. Discovering Kraus's essay during the final drafting of this essay compelled me, in the interest of academic integrity, to mention it and, in the anxiety of academic integrity, to consider writing a new, more "original" introduction. But more reading would no doubt expose the lack of originality of the new introduction. To write about plagiarism—or perhaps to write at all—is to obsess about one's intellectual and creative debts, even when, as in the present instance, I am indebted not to Kraus but *with* him to a common introductory formula. As it turns out, even this anxious footnote is generic: see Laurie Stearns's "Plagiarism, Process, Property, and the Law."

2. Russell Hunt, whose position on these matters is largely in line with my own, writes, "I believe the challenge of easier and more convenient plagiarism is to be welcomed. This rising tide threatens to change things—for, I predict and hope, the better" (2). Hunt welcomes Internet plagiarism's assault on artificial forms and contexts of student writing, overemphasis on grades and certification, and reactionary notions of intellectual property.

3. Note too that many of these studies depend on self-reporting, and we cannot overlook differences across the decades in people's willingness to confess their misdeeds. Our current cultural moment features not only an insatiable appetite for the misdeeds of others, but a willingness, even an eagerness, to expose one's own flaws in public in exchange for a little attention. We should also consider a possible change in people's respect—or lack thereof—for surveys and the authorities who administer them. My high school classmates and I took great pleasure in sabotaging a state drug use survey by admitting to the abuse of numerous mind-

altering substances, particularly those—nutmeg?!—which seemed the most absurd or improbable. I know for certain that at least 50 percent of the students in my American history class identified themselves as irrecoverable nutmeg addicts.

4. Sue Carter Simmons's research shows that the belief that cheating is out of control, like cheating itself, has a long history. See "Competing Notions of Authorship."

5. In a curious coincidence, the University of North Texas "Academic Integrity" website says, "We must rely on the honesty and good faith of others every day. If not, we couldn't put money in the bank, buy food, clothing, or *medicine* from others, *drive across a bridge*, get on a plane, go to the dentist—the list is endless" (emphasis added).

6. In addition to sources cited in the text, see references to "plagiarists" in Bugeja, Kolich, Lang, and throughout the Plagiarism.org website.

7. Though a more thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this essay, it is important to note here that contemporary—and indeed much historical—work in philosophy, psychology, rhetoric, composition, education, and critical studies renders suspect any clear definition of *authorship, authenticity, originality, meaning, text*, and, consequently, *plagiarism*.

8. To appreciate faculty anxiety regarding course evaluations in general, and those written by vengeful plagiarists in particular, consider the course evaluation as the one instance in which the pyramid of evaluation is inverted: it is the one sanctioned opportunity for the pupils to administer the examination, to write an evaluation rather than write to be evaluated. Once reduced to a graded product, student writing serves "the calculation of the gaps between individuals, their distribution in a given 'population'" (Foucault 190). The course evaluation does the same to teachers, becoming part of "the mass of documents that capture and fix them" (189).

9. Karla Saari Kitalong writes, "When the written word is a culture's primary form of capital, those who appropriate that capital . . . may also garner social capital by falsely demonstrating membership in a valued community, and cultural capital by seeming to possess valued credentials" (257). The absurd but inevitable end of this mathematics of capital is Rochville University, also known as Affordable Degrees:

> Does This Sound Like You?
>
> · You have more experience yet your colleague gets promoted?
>
> · Many companies you apply at, don't give you a call as you lack the basic education they require?
>
> · Struggling in relationships, as 'she' thinks you don't have a promising future?

Here's your way out . . . (Affordable Degrees)

For as little as $199, you get "an Accredited Degree in just 15 days, without taking admission, studying books, and appearing in any examination!" The Degree Package includes an "Original Accredited Degree," an "Award of Excellence" *and* a "Certificate of Distinction," plus "Original Transcripts" with actual scores for each subject. A GPA of 3.0 is standard, though higher GPAs are available at additional cost. Courses and degrees are awarded based upon "Life Experiences" (Rochville emphasizes capitalization), such as "personal goals, lifestyle, hobbies and travelling," and "independent reading, viewing, listening, or writing." This "school" offers degrees "in virtually ANY major you can think of." Here is the diploma distilled to its economic essence and purified of the drudgery of actually learning anything.

10. See Works Cited for essays by Briggs, Howard, Kincaid, and Price.

11. Attributed quotations inhabit the fuzzy margin of plagiarism. Searching the Internet for Mencken's exact words, I also found the following, all attributed to him: "To every complex problem, there's always a simple solution. And it's always wrong." "The simple solution to a complex problem only has one problem . . . it's wrong." "For every human problem there is a neat, simple solution; and it is always wrong." When the quote is incorrect to begin with, does it matter whether one attributes it to Mencken or pretends it's original? Which course better serves the ideal of authentic authorship?

12. For an in-depth analysis of the vocabulary of plagiarism, bodies, kidnapping, and disease—"the whole set of gendered, sexualized metaphors that construct our emotions about plagiarism" (484) —see Rebecca Moore Howard's "Sexuality, Textuality: The Cultural Work of Plagiarism."

13. In June 2005, the U.S. Defense Department began working with BeNow Inc., a marketing and data management firm, "to create a database of high school students ages 16 to 18 and all college students to help the military identify potential recruits in a time of dwindling enlistment." The personal information gathered will include "grade point averages, ethnicity, and what subjects the students are studying." According to a notice published in the *Federal Register*, this information will be available only to "those who require the records in the performance of their official duties." Yet the Defense Department is empowered, "without notifying citizens, to share the data for numerous uses outside the military, including with law enforcement, state tax authorities, and Congress" (Krim).

14. In March 2006, students at Mount Saint Vincent University in Bedford, Nova Scotia, succeeded in convincing the university to ban all plagiarism-detection software, ending the school's relationship with Turnitin as of May 2006. "'Students go to university for a higher education. They don't go to be involved in a culture of mistrust, a culture of guilt,' said Chantal Brushett, president of the students' union" (Canadian Association).

15. See Howard's provocative treatment of "patchwriting" as "a pedagogical opportunity, not a juridical problem" (788), in "Plagiarisms, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty."

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