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Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism

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Published by University of Michigan Press

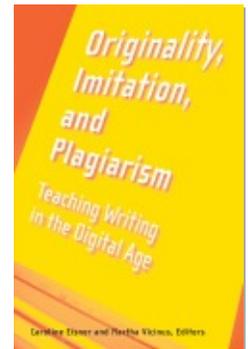
Vicinus, Martha and Caroline Eisner.

Originality, Imitation, and Plagiarism: Teaching Writing in the Digital Age.

University of Michigan Press, 2008.

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Economies of Plagiarism

The i-Map and Issues of Ownership in Information Gathering

Kim Walden and Alan Peacock

I-map is our term for a structured process that requires students to keep track of their research activities, to record their thinking processes and activities while engaged in the gathering, evaluating, selecting, and presenting of information drawn from diverse sources. It encourages reflective practice and a self-critical examination of information-handling strategies and skills, and it results in an assessable outcome that rewards process rather than product. Among its many uses, the *i-map* has proved valuable in addressing those many issues of ownership and citation that cluster under the portmanteau word *plagiarism*.

Although we are specifically interested in plagiarism, in keeping with the themes of this collection, our discussion ranges widely. Before returning to the pedagogical benefits of the *i-map*, we will explore the challenges faced by higher education teachers. The current concerns both within educational circles and in the media about plagiarism are understood to be, in part, a manifestation of a change in our underlying relationship with information. This change is itself a consequence of economic and cultural shifts, such as the move to knowledge or information modes of wealth creation, and the widespread adoption of digital information technologies. In our discussion we use the metaphor of the “economy” because it seems to us that information is traded through gathering, refining, and presenting activities, through transactions of effort in networks of values, and that trade brings benefits through the assessment of work and the conferment of awards. We suggest that this economy has changed significantly in recent years, and it may be that its modes of operation no longer represent a shared culture across the groups who utilize and who maintain the academy.

In recent years, and in many places, the cultural economies of information handling and academic practices, as well as the ways in which they dynamically interrelate, have changed. Several factors account for those changes, including

- the deployment of information communication technologies in their myriad forms and functions
- political initiatives seeking to increase the numbers of people gaining higher-education qualifications, and broadening the access to higher education
- shifts in the way that education is funded, and changes in the modes of delivery that can be managed within the resources available (including increased student numbers and corollary reductions in time available for teaching delivery and assessment activities, distance and blended learning initiatives)
- the increasing corporatism of higher-education institutions, and the change in ethos that comes with a customer/consumer role for students

These changes, and concomitant shifts in the intellectual infrastructure of attitudes, skills, and performances through which education operates, have affected concepts of the ownership of knowledge and its expression, as well as the ways that the worth or value of knowledge is understood. We contend that recent changes have disrupted higher education's historical intellectual infrastructure; clearly some parts of the current model sit at odds with it. We note that the preexisting model of a shared intellectual community lingers on in many ways; one effect is that for adherents to the older model, plagiarism has come to represent the worst consequences of the new consumerist model of higher education. We also note that its incidence has increased (both in actual acts and in the perception of the acts), and there have been changes in the understanding of its meaning and consequences.

Although commonly described as a form of cheating, plagiarism can be understood as a behavioral activity within a community concerned with the worth of knowledge and the values of academic activities. In particular plagiarism is about attitudes to the ownership of knowledge, and taking appropriate responsibility for the expression of ideas. Plagiarism does not stand in isolation. Where it is found it exists as a pattern of transgressive behaviors, relative to other patterns that are conforming. Plagiarism is the

behavioral and concrete response to traditional academic attitudes about the ownership of ideas, and about the expression of ideas, about the use and understanding of conventions of citation, reference, quotation, acknowledgment, bibliography, allusion, and intertextuality, as well as about the value of doing these things in the way the academy requires and the worth of the academy itself.

Particular ways of dealing with the ownership of ideas and the worth of expression characterize cultural activities and distinguish one from another, and are declared through sign systems of diverse kinds. Academic practice “owns” one set of attitudes and maintains a sign system through which they are demonstrated. That sign system marks the academic out among other cultural activities through the codes and modes of reference and citation that express and consolidate the academic infrastructure in both form and presence. This academic sign system performs an explicit citation function in that it marks out extracts from other texts, signaling where information and ideas have been found, through typographic differences and the ways that names and dates are used. Within these academic codes repetition creates a redundancy of utterances that, themselves, signify a form of ritual.

Using the sign system of academic citation embodies a cognitive position; a way of thinking about knowledge, and of expressing our relationship with information. As a set of marks, citation inscribes beliefs about the ownership of knowledge by others and by ourselves, about the worth of the author, the value of the academy, and the cultural systems in which those activities take place. Failure to use, or to use correctly, the codes of citation is taken as a failure in the cognitive position, and is taken to demonstrate improper attitudes about information. In turn this is understood as a form of appropriation, a taking of ownership that is not due, a form of theft, deception, or cheating, and constitutes plagiarism. At the very least, a failure to use the signs of ownership and expression is taken as an indicator of ignorance of the system, and that ignorance is seen as a failure of the individual.

In the same way that a coin or banknote has a monetary value in one country, but becomes only a souvenir or keepsake in another, so attitudes about knowledge and information circulate within cultural practices. Across the broader culture many activities embody and inscribe attitudes about ownership of knowledge that are markedly different from those of the academy. This may create eddies of resistance and flows of concordance within the experiences of groups and individuals when they engage with the academy’s codes. As an example, the use of sampling in music where

the pleasure of the text may in part derive from getting the reference. This is a form of implicit citation, and it can be seen to be oppositional in form and cultural meaning to the explicit citation required by the academy. Similarly, we see the complex intertextual referencing of films and computer games, those knowing, allusive in-jokes that thicken the pleasures of those texts through implicit citation. And here we note, in passing, the Modernist tradition of borrowing, best seen in the poetry of Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

This concern with ownership, expression, value, and worth supports our economic metaphor as a means of understanding plagiarism in higher education. It directs attention to networks of exchange and transaction; to cultural economies where values, behaviors, and moral judgments are inscribed in material objects such as essays, posters, and performed spoken presentations; and to an individual's expenditure of effort balanced against anticipated outcomes, rewards, and gains. In broad terms we characterize the academic as someone who balances *effort* and *values* (Szabo and Underwood; Collins, Judge, and Rickman).

Effort

- Energy required to complete task (physical and cognitive, time taken, resources needed)
- What else the energy and time could be used for (personal and social life, part-time work, other academic tasks)
- Energy available to complete
- Apprehension of task: understanding of what is required, prior experience of similar tasks, reward level from prior experience, feeling of preparedness (precursor learning, established knowledge), detailing of outcomes (format, conventions, presentation)
- Motivations of plagiarism: the effort saved by taking shortcuts (reframing task, less-than-best effort, plagiarism, other cheating)

Values

- Opportunities for plagiarism: likelihood of detection, consequences of detection, attitudes of teaching staff, moral opinions
- Relevance of task to future career aspirations ("necessary" knowledge, transferable skills)
- Worth of this task as a scholarly activity (process versus expression)
- Worth of scholarly activities generally (desire to learn, intrinsic moti-

vation, curiosity, valuing knowledge of others, valuing knowledge for itself)

- Importance of this task in relation to other activities (before or after)
- Role of higher education: functional attainment of qualification versus opportunity for betterment of self

The “intellectual infrastructure” of the academy, including its ethos and myths, sustains a particular effort:value ratio that is inscribed in the behaviors of students and teachers and in the regulations of institutions. It holds an understanding of what is normal behavior in terms of acknowledging and claiming ownership of ideas and their expression, and, by extension, an understanding of what is transgressive behavior, and what that means, in terms of the likelihood of detection, sanctions, punishments, and so on. For individuals who share the ethos, the motivations and opportunities for plagiarism are minimized, and plagiarism, when it happens, is seen as the outcome of a deliberate act that constitutes deception, cheating, gaining of unfair advantage, an evasion of the benefits of learning for oneself, and a denial of the virtuous efforts and learning of others. As the academy engages with groups that do not share that ethos, or do not understand it, or who find it contradicts value:effort balances that are embedded elsewhere and have important cultural significance for the other group(s), then incidences of plagiarism may occur inadvertently (unknowing transgressions), or may be expressions of resistance to an erosion of an alternative, preferred effort:value balance. For instance, the implicit citation strategies of popular media or the detailed knowledge web of sports fans show few signs of what academics would see as necessary and appropriate.

The intellectual infrastructure is a product of wider cultural systems than the academy alone. Broadening access means including groups that have historically had little or no access to the academy, who bring their very different cultural experiences, that is their “meme-pool” (Blackmore 41) to the intellectual community of the academy. The cognitive processes involved in maintaining, for example, a positive view of the worth of scholarly activities may require considerable additional effort for a student whose cultural milieu does not otherwise view them so positively, or holds an ambiguous view of their worth. Similarly, broadening access may mean that the need to explain and justify academic criteria to new groups leads to exposing rather than strengthening the academy’s intellectual and moral standards. And that may reveal internal contradictions within the

infrastructure, or open out its conflicts with other codes, modes, and values in the wider culture. The recent widespread adoption of information technologies has disrupted higher education's traditional effort:value ratio in a number of ways. We center our discussion here on two aspects in particular—shifts in the signs of ownerships of texts produced by students, and in the signs of ownership and authority in the source materials they use.

Our media habitats include myriad signs of ownership: the unique signs of a person's voice, the way a musical instrument is used, the way paint is spread on a surface, how light is manipulated, or the camera angle used. All of these are indexical signs of original ownership in the sense that they are existentially tied to the creative and expressive acts of individuals, even if they are working through mechanical or digital processes. These "autographic" (McCullough), or process, signs are as distinct and personal as, say, manuscript handwriting.

While it is banal to say that the word-processed essay has replaced the handwritten one, it is important to note that this has come with a marked shift in the signs of ownership of the material written object. Handwriting, an autographic process, inscribes personal ownership throughout the material object in the idiosyncrasies of letterforms and in minor crossings out and amendments that litter the surface. For those who will remember them, the typewritten pages of an essay, dense with white blobs of correcting fluid or the backspace overtyping of a spelling error, carry in their material form an indexical sign field of personal effort and ownership. The word-processed text, say Times Roman 12-point with double-spaced lines (even, perhaps, the format supplied as a macro), is an allographic text, one produced by the instructions sent to a machine. While such a text is a field of signs, it is not so indexical of the author as one produced by an autographic process. Personal ownership is less clearly signed in the object itself, and the evidences of cognitive ownership are equally diluted. It is possible that acts of "compilation" that appeared owned when autographically inscribed, seem less clearly owned when allographically presented. While copying out a section of a source text by hand signifies cognitive engagement of some kind, copying when done mechanically is more readily identified as plagiarism than it may have been before.

"Prior to the widespread use of the Internet," say Collins, Judge, and Rickman, "plagiarism principally entailed physically assembling hard copies of sources to plagiarise from and then transcribing and integrating them into a coherent, hopefully seamless essay format" (5). Copy and paste, an integral part of the authoring of word-processed texts, amplifies

acts of compilation because it changes the economy of effort:value within the allographic relative to that which was available within the autographic. Handwriting a text, laboriously and accurately copying a section from a source text (and academic practice does require accurate quotation), may well require more effort than rephrasing the section in one's own words. *Putting it in your own words* is taken as a clear signifier of ownership, a demonstration of cognitive engagement. However, such intervention requires skills of summary, paraphrase, and précis, as well as an extensive vocabulary of terms, phrases, and words. Bernstein's work on elaborated and restricted codes suggests that those may well be sociolinguistic performances and cognitive skills indigenous in some social groups, but not all. A student with little sociolinguistic experience of, and expertise in, rephrasing to a uniform authorial voice will relate to rewording a section of a source in a way very different from a student who finds rewording it straightforward and who also very likely shares the effort:value position of the academy.

The resources of the Internet, and other information available in electronic form, are often experienced, and their ownership thought of, as a "commons." That is to say, they are experienced like a public park, say, rather than a cinema. Websites are like a park because access is free and requires no simple payment and because what happens there is unstructured—in a park you can picnic, play games, lounge, chatter, do what you will. In a cinema a particular event takes place; it is organized, structured, and provided for you at a given time. A park is made up of air, sky, grass, the natural world (and increasingly signed as "natural" as styles of municipal gardening shift from formal beds and clocks to simulated wildernesses), while the cinema experience, the darkness, volume of sound, brightness of light, construction of narrative, is markedly artificial. The pleasures of a park are largely a product of one's own actions; the pleasures of the cinema are provided for you. Set against the park, the cinema is more readily identifiable as a consumable product. Set against the cinema, the park is difficult to understand as a consumable object.

The sign systems of activities and pleasures, ownership and payment, for a park or a cinema distinctly communicate different concepts of product and ownership. The film-viewing experience is clearly identifiable and so can be clearly owned and purchased through payment. The less distinct ownership of the park, and of the experiences there, models the apparently freely accessible digital resources available online, and the user experience of being there. If we think of payment for the Web, it is as a payment to a

phone company or to a broadband provider for the line not the content, rather like paying the bus fare to the park. And when we get there, as in the park, the pleasures come from what we do, through our own effort, from our own ergodic activities (Aarseth 1). A key concept in the current discussion of hypertext and hypermedia, *ergodic* is derived from the two roots of *ergos*, “work,” and *hodos*, “path.” It describes the path through a hypertext that is formed by the reader’s work, his mainly intellectual effort in following links, making choices between them, understanding how this-that-is-here-now relates to that-which-has-been-before, and which constructs the particular instance of a hypertext. In terms of our discussion of effort:value balance, this is a useful concept, as it reminds us that when using hypertexts, and the Web especially, the effort involved seems to emphasize the personal effort of the reader, and the uniqueness of her experience, which, of course, she feels she owns.

The park experience itself is not readily identifiable; it is intangible, indistinct, and particularly individual. Ownership of the place, and the experiences had there are unclear. The signs of ownership in a cinema are at once identifiable and tangible and can be shared with many others. Access is ritualized (often architecturally, certainly in the exchange of money for ticket), and there is a clear and distinct organization, structure, provision—an identifiable product that is owned somewhere. In the clarity of its signs of ownership and its implicit acts of provision the cinema models the “book and library” and the canon as a source of information, while the park models online information gathering.

While the historical intellectual infrastructure of the academy references the “cinema” model of ownership in its implicit understanding of effort:value, the increasing use of Internet and digital resources exposes students to the “park” model of the ownership of the material they work with. Access is free, the place is unstructured, and what comes from being there is the outcome of your personal activities and effort. When compared to the “book and library,” the sign systems implicit in the experience of the Web make ownership less distinct, harder to be clear about; it may create the illusion that the stuff is unowned, and that what is found is somehow the product of the user’s efforts and so owned by him. This confusion of ownership is compounded by the incunabula nature of the Web itself where conventions of declaring identity and ownership are not established, where the stable sign system of ownership needed for citation is not necessarily present, and where the concept of ownership collides with ideas about authority, reliability, or standing of a source. Confusions of owner-

ship such as this mark a shift in the intellectual infrastructure and in the play of effort and values. We suggest that often that shift requires of the student a greater effort, and of a different kind, than required in a “book and library” structure. That additional effort may not be readily accommodated in assessment tasks that reward content and product rather than practice and process; in turn, it creates conditions in effort:value ratios such that plagiarism may appear to be to the individual’s advantage.

Within the broader economy, effort required to take ownership of information is balanced against effort required to locate the information. This equation has shifted from acts of finding books, often named within a canon and distributed on shelves, to acts of searching for information sources—and this has implications for ownership in significant and subtle ways. Library books, as tangible objects, are clearly owned, often inscribed with library index numbers and institution stamps; they have authority embodied in their presence. The process by which they have come into being and into place gives, of itself, the imprimatur of an authoritative and reliable source. And the same extends to individually owned copies of the library book; the signs inscribed by the library on its book are carried as ghostly echoes on the ones students own and carry around. Online information is not only less clearly owned and ownable, but it also has less clear authority partly because we have, as yet, no sign system for that authority. Finding a book brings the authority of the source, while searching for information online means having to gauge, evaluate, and establish the value of the source itself, a significant shift in the play of effort within acts of studentship.

This is made more complex by the fact that information can change and become outdated. Books change relatively slowly and stay out-of-date longer. Internet resources potentially change very rapidly but maintain currency. In terms of how memes are understood, these are the relative balances of fecundity, felicity, and longevity. From the library of books to the Internet, knowledge has become transient and contingent, as it can be superseded tomorrow by a newer version, and so the older version is no longer valid. Given that it needs less effort to find the new version than to recall the older one, because memorizing and recalling take more effort, and, besides, what was memorized is no longer valid, it makes sense economically not to own, as such, but to know how to find when needed. However, the academy asks for quotation and reference partly to show that a student has taken ownership of ideas. But if powerful parallel sign systems indicate those ideas are contingent and transient, then the purpose of

quotation and reference is reframed and may seem questionable. The historical ethos of the academy values a play of fecundity, felicity, and longevity that is antithetical to online information sources, and possibly to the aspirations of many students and their perception of the skills needed for employment. In a time of rapidly changing knowledge, and a shifting currency of what it is valuable to know, how do students understand the relevance of their studies, how can they gauge their “need for knowledge in the future,” or judge the “future usefulness of knowledge gained through sincere work” (Szabo and Underwood 182)?

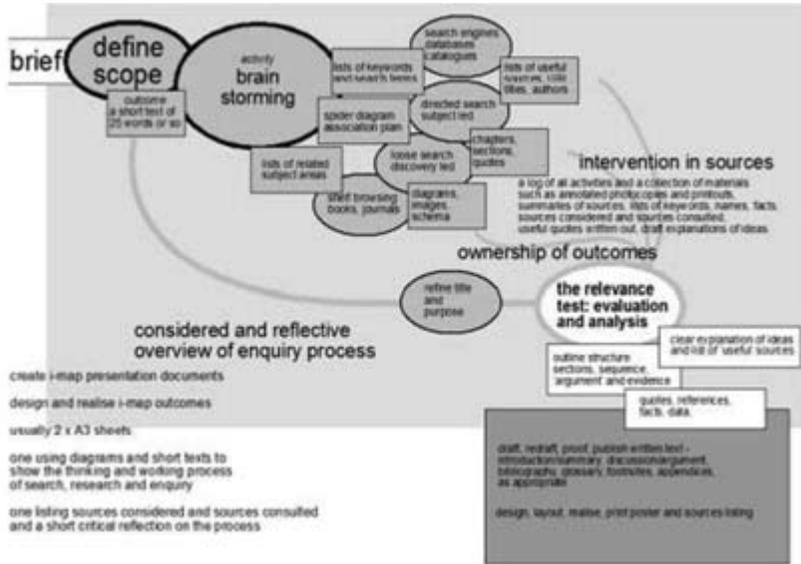
In educational systems whose response to rapid change is (quite rightly) to emphasize transferable skills, the balances of the intellectual infrastructure shift significantly. Transferable skills are inherently about knowing *how to* rather than knowing *about*, about processes rather than content, because content is contingent but processes can be used in many places. However, it may be quite difficult for students to identify the relevance of transferable skills in learning and assessment processes that emphasize the assessment of product and content (*about*) rather than practice and process (*how to*), if they do not understand the context of their learning of transferable skills and are not able to see what knowing *how to* means. These thoughts, and others, led us to develop ways we could enhance students’ information-handling skills, to enable them to recognize and value transferable skills, and to be rewarded for process as well as product. That developed into the i-map.

The i-Map

The i-map is a way of recording the research stages of a project, focusing on the information-handling process. It produces an artifact that can be assessed against stated criteria, and so can be used to reward the information-handling skills involved in many academic activities. An i-map logs such things as finding sources, reading and evaluating them, taking ownership of ideas, formulating a response or argument, citing sources when appropriate, and building a bibliography, in a visual account of the process.

An i-map may include the following:

- Annotated book-lists, articles, website URLs, databases, electronic journals, media sources (newspapers, newsgroups, blogs, discussion boards)



Doing an I-Map: A Typical Process of Enquiry Leading to a Written Text or Poster

- Diagrams: brainstorms, spiders, flow diagrams, pie charts showing connections and relationships between elements
- Graphic elements: symbols, drawings, boxes, circles, arrows, colors, highlights that organize elements into relationships
- Words: keywords, search term strings, definitions, quotations, bon mots
- Images: book covers, film stills, screen grabs, case studies, and any illustrations that are useful to an understanding of the subject

It uses space, layout, typography, lines and arrows to build sequence, links, and interrelationships within the visual representation. The act of creating an i-map requires reflective thinking about the process, and inscribes that reflection in the visual representation. The i-map is a pedagogic strategy that enables teachers to identify transferable process skills, and to reward them by shifting the emphasis away from a single-end-point, content-led submission. It enables the assessment of information-handling skills based on evidence rather than inferred from the qualities of a written text. The i-map rebalances the play of effort and values in the economies of aca-

demic activities, lessening the motivation to plagiarize, as well as reducing the opportunities for plagiarism, while providing a place to develop information-handling skills and to discuss the myriad issues around the ownership of knowledge, the uses of information, and the values of the academy. More information about the i-maps and examples of i-maps created by some of our students are online at <http://www.art-design.herts.ac.uk/a/mihs/index.htm>.

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