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In animated battles of the 80s and 90s, teachers and scholars of composition have defended themselves and their discipline against what they variously describe as the hostility, contempt, or indifference of the literature faculty. Unlike most other internecine English contests, usually only one side of this debate is waged in public print: whereas compositionists’ arguments are a familiar form of scholarly publication in composition studies (see, for example, Little and Rose; Miller), contradictory beliefs held by scholars of literature seldom find their way into print. Instead, the arguments of literature faculty are typically expressed in semiotic silences (e.g., Marshall Gregory’s description of English departments being composed of literary theorists and teachers of literature, without any mention of compositionists) or in performative silencings (e.g., denying tenure to compositionists). The arguments of literature scholars can also be traced in the college catalogues that list advanced offerings in literature but only required normative courses in composition; in the dominance of tenured faculty in the teaching of literature but adjuncts and teaching assistants in composition; and in comparisons of salary and advancement for literature and composition faculty.

In this agonistic climate, some scholars of composition have endeavored to assert that the work of composition and rhetoric should not be measured by the standards of literature. Composition, so goes this reasoning, is different from literature and should be measured by its own standards. Others have endeavored to demonstrate that composition actually does measure up to the values of literature. One strand of this reasoning asserts that composition and literature are inextricably linked (e.g., Horner 1983). Another asserts that composition pedagogy is a form of theory. A familiar variant of this assertion is one described by Peter Smagorinsky and Melissa E. Whiting: behind all pedagogy is theory, articulated or unarticulated. To teach, therefore, is to practice theory (Horner 108).
This essay offers what I believe is powerful counter-evidence to that assertion, counterevidence emerging from my explorations into how the figures of the author and the plagiarist are described and represented in our culture and especially in our pedagogies. In those explorations, I have found that composition scholarship, especially in its discussions of collaboration, appreciably accords with the “new” author emerging in critical theory, the author who neither is nor can be autonomous and originary. Composition pedagogy, in contrast, continues to uphold and reproduce the “old” author inherited from Romantic literary theory, the author that still prevails in lay culture. In a variety of articles and books, Martha Woodmansee and Peter Jaszi have endeavored to demonstrate that the public, including copyright law, persists in clinging to the Romantic author, notwithstanding critical theory’s challenges to it. In matters of the author, I find that composition studies comports with the lay public rather than with the discipline of textual studies. In at least the arena of representing the author, composition pedagogy is not a form of theory—or, rather, its “theories” are lay rather than disciplinary theories.

This is a troubling statement for me to make, for it undermines an argument by which many hope to win better treatment for composition and rhetoric.

I am indebted to the composition faculty at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, and especially Ronda L. Dively, for increasing my understanding of how readily my argument can be co-opted for the purpose of demonstrating the inferior status of composition studies. That appropriation and distortion is indeed possible if one is measuring composition pedagogy by the standards of literary theory. In this essay, however, I am urging that composition pedagogy be measured by its own standards—which, I am proposing, include a dialogic function. I find myself taking an argumentative tack paralleling that of W.E.B. DuBois in *The Souls of Black Folk*: nineteenth-century African Americans suffered from a racial “double consciousness” in which they could fully appraise themselves neither by their own standards nor by those of white people. Composition studies labors in a state of intellectual double consciousness, trying to demonstrate its value by asserting its identity with literary studies. The relation, however, is not one of identity. Rather, the two are separate though related disciplines within the larger category of “English,” and each needs to be evaluated by its own standards.

**COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY’S “DIFFERENCE”**

Those standards must in part be derived from an appreciation of difference. An examination of three descriptions of citation—one from a critical theorist, one from a composition theorist, and one from a composition textbook—reveals significant divergences that, as I will show, can lead to an informed appreciation of the work of composition pedagogy.

In her 1991 *Crimes of Writing*, critical theorist Susan Stewart investigates transgressive forms of writing such as forgery and graffiti. When she says, “An
ideal . . . device of citation would be a full (and necessarily impossible) history of the writer’s subjectivity” (25), she emphasizes how arbitrary must any practice of citation be, since none of “our” words or ideas are “our own.” We cannot fully cite our sources, Stewart says, because to do so, a writer would have to limn his or her own intellectual history. In *Crimes of Writing* Stewart herself does engage in citation, but she acknowledges the contingency and arbitrariness of the practice.

Composition scholar Elizabeth Rankin strikes a similar chord when, in her 1994 book *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher*, she enumerates tenets of her theory of authorship:

that the idea of ‘authorship’ is problematic indeed; that language itself is inherently dialogic, shot through with voices of all those we have read and met and spoken with and listened to; that all our theories are socially constructed, sometimes of the most unlikely and incongruous materials; and that the stories we tell about teaching are really theories in themselves. (83)

Rankin then goes on to declare, “And besides, the simple truth is that I couldn’t begin to name all the sources of my own theoretical thinking” (84). For her, as for Stewart, complete citation is impossible.

I remember my own pilgrimage to full citation. One of my first essays about transgressive authorship, an essay that was eventually published as “Plagiarisms, Authorships, and the Academic Death Penalty,” was initially rejected by journal reviewers. One of their criticisms was that I cited too much. They wanted to hear the author’s “own” voice. One reviewer even said that the essay sounded too much like the students’ patchwriting that it was describing.4

Today I cite much less. Part of my maturation as a scholar has been to learn that full citation is not actually a desideratum for professional writers; equally important is the appearance of autonomy, of having one’s “own” words and ideas.

Composition students, however, are urged to engage in full citation. Although acknowledged by scholars such as Rankin and Stewart, the impossibility of full citation is suppressed in composition textbooks, as is the desirability of limiting citations. Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper provide a typical textbook statement on plagiarism:

Writers—students and professionals alike—occasionally misuse sources by failing to acknowledge them properly. The word *plagiarism*, which derives from the Latin word for “kidnapping,” refers to the unacknowledged use of another’s words, ideas, or information. Students sometimes get into trouble because they mistakenly assume that plagiarizing occurs only when another writer’s exact words are used without acknowledgment. . . . So keep in mind that you must indicate the source of any ideas or information you have used in your research for a paper, whether you have paraphrased, summarized, or quoted directly from the source. (602)
Axelrod and Cooper then list three causes of plagiarism: ignorance of citation conventions, sloppy note-taking, and students’ “doubt[ing] their ability to write the paper by themselves.” These pitfalls can be avoided, though: “This chapter makes clear how to incorporate sources into your writing and how to acknowledge your use of those sources” (603) Like most other composition textbooks, The St. Martin’s Guide elides the complexities of citation and plagiarism; all can and will be made “clear.” It then becomes the student’s responsibility to adhere to those clear guidelines, notwithstanding the belief among composition scholars and critical theorists that this clear task is actually very murky, indeed. If composition pedagogy is a form of theory, why do its representations of student authorship, revealed in its injunctions against plagiarism and in favor of citation, contradict those of composition scholarship?

These contradictory representations of authorship demonstrate a disjunction between composition theory and composition pedagogy. We need not, however, assume that lack of unanimity between composition theory and composition pedagogy signals a fissure in the discipline; rather, it may signal the discipline’s commendable attention to its remarkably varied and powerful audiences.

CRITICAL THEORIES OF AUTHORSHIP

In representations of the student author, composition scholarship accords much more closely with critical theory than with the composition pedagogy expressed in and guided by rhetoric textbooks. The status of the author has been a focus of attention in twentieth-century criticism, with New Criticism insisting that the text and not authors’ intentions are the origin of meaning. (Already a difference between composition pedagogy and critical theory is apparent, since composition pedagogy aims to help student writers articulate and pursue what are represented as their own intentions.) In “The Intentional Fallacy,” one of the landmarks in this strand of criticism, Wimsatt and Beardsley declare that the author’s intentions should not be a criterion for critical evaluation of a text. Such declarations distance New Criticism from the Romantic textual theories that dominated the nineteenth century, when the author—solitary, autonomous, free of influence, and shouldering the responsibility for what Stewart calls “an unbearable originality” (22)—invested texts with an intentionality that governed not only the meaning of the text but also the evaluation of the author’s character.

In 1968 Roland Barthes contributed to the undermining of the Romantic attribution of divinity to the author when he combined it with the Nietzschean declaration of the death of God: if the author is divine and God is dead, then the author, too, is dead. If the author is dead, then intentionality is not only inappropriate for evaluating a text but is unavailable for interpreting it. But whereas Foucault a year later would offer fresh proposals for the text itself as the source of meaning, Barthes locates meaning in the reader:
Thus is revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (129)

And that reader, Barthes declares, is without history; he or she can only be described in terms of the person reading at the moment of reading, not in terms of that reader as a collective or unified, transtemporal subject.

Foucault, too, attests the death of the author: “It is obviously insufficient to repeat empty slogans: the author has disappeared; God and man died a common death” (Barthes 121). His essay “What Is an Author?” focuses on the name of the author and how readers construct from the text an “author” that may have little or nothing to do with the person who composed the text. An author’s name differs from other proper names in that it functions as a means of classifying texts and establishing relationships among them: a change in how we view an author’s works accomplishes a change in the meaning of the author’s name (Barthes 122–3). This “author-function” is not attributed through naming but is instead a rational entity constructed through a complex process that includes our projecting dimensions of our “way of handling texts” upon an individual author-function, as we assign qualities like “profound” or “creative” to it (Barthes 127). So Foucault, too, attends to the role of the reader, but for him the reader is a collective that constructs an author-function from the text.

Although Jacques Derrida’s work is often “misconstrued as radically anti-intentionalist,” Séan Burke’s reading of Grammatology, Book II, finds Derrida “actually resist[ing] the polarities of the debate” (1995). Derrida acknowledges that intentionality matters but denies that it fully controls the text; the text can have signification beyond the meaning intended by the author.

The successors to Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida have developed these ideas even further. Much of contemporary critical theory focuses not on the reader but on the author—but for the purpose of debunking the Romantic ideology of individual, autonomous, originary authorship (e.g., Piglia; Randall) This line of reasoning is not without its adherents in composition studies. Conducting a rhetorical analysis of a “developmental” student’s writing process, Glynda Hull and Mike Rose conclude that patchwriting, which is commonly regarded as a too-heavy appropriation of language from a source text, is actually a valuable writing strategy whereby inexperienced students learn unfamiliar discourse. Working from the theories of Derrida, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Jacques Lacan, Mary Minock laments the gap between postmodern composition theories of the author and Romantic composition pedagogy. She undertakes the task of bridging that gap. Students’ imitation, she says, is always creative, if for no other reason than that it places the passage of text into
a new context (499). “Repetition presumes alterity; the more a text is repeated and altered, the more it is committed to unconscious memory, and the more the power of its words and syntax is there to be imitated” (501). Minock therefore encourages her students to patchwrite, unfettered.

**COMPOSITION THEORIES OF COLLABORATION**

Hull and Rose’s and Minock’s treatments of patchwriting go only a little beyond representations of collaborative authorship that are widely endorsed in composition scholarship. Anne Ruggles Gere’s 1987 book *Writing Groups* represents an important transitional position between the notion of individual authorship and the vision that all authorship is collaborative:

Theories of collaborative learning . . . build upon an opposition to alienation and to the highly individualistic view inherent in traditional concepts of authorship and emphasize the communal aspects of intellectual life. In the collaborative view individual genius becomes subordinate to social interactions and intellectual negotiations among peers. (75)

Gere’s description very much accords with critical theories of authorship, lending credence to the unity of composition and literature. Nor is hers an isolated voice; collaborative theory increasingly questions the possibility of autonomous authorship, as John Schilb suggests when he says that collaboration is valued for its challenge to “the misleading image of the isolated writer” (1992, 107). In the same volume, John Clifford denies the possibility of scholarly autonomy: “Academics have never existed as autonomous agents outside disciplinary or institutional discourse” (1992, 174). Edward M. White offers this cautious 1995 composition theory of collaborative authorship:

In one sense, all writing is collaborative: Every writer needs some kind of audience, some conversation, some reading, some responding. The peer groups that are now part of many writing classes serve as sounding boards for initial ideas, responders to drafts, and even editors for presentation copies of final drafts. The picture of the writer as a solitary genius, holed up in an attic, emerging on occasions waving a manuscript that expresses his or her inner self, has not been a useful one for writing instruction. (139)

In a much earlier article that might qualify him for the title of “transdisciplinary author” if not “founder of a science,”7 Kenneth A. Bruffee observes that collaborative learning seems a comfortable pedagogy until we recognize that it is “not merely a better pedagogy” but also a model of “how knowledge is generated, how it changes and grows” (1984, 647). It is that model, made increasingly explicit in the accretion of collaborative theory, that brings composition scholarship on collaboration so close to contemporary critical theories in which authorship is not autonomous and cannot be originary and in which a writer’s text cannot clearly be differentiated from its sources: a writer’s text
always already functions as a repetition of its sources. In its representations of the author, composition theory accords very closely with critical theory.

COMPOSITION TEXTBOOK REPRESENTATIONS OF PLAGIARISM

Composition pedagogy, on the other hand, evidences great discomfort with such theories. It’s all well and good to assign a paper and then place students in peer response groups; that makes collaboration a useful means of developing an individual student’s paper, and it defines collaboration as an activity that takes place face to face between one living writer and another. It’s quite another thing, though, to suggest that a student writer “collaborates” with her precursor texts, and that “her” text cannot be differentiated from “theirs.” That’s when proposals such as those of Hull and Rose and Minock pose dangers from which most composition pedagogy recoils.

Critical theorist Martha Woodmansee succinctly describes the notion of authorship that prevails outside English studies: “In contemporary usage an ‘author’ is an individual who is solely responsible—and thus exclusively deserving of credit—for the production of a unique, original work” (1994, 36). But this vision of the author prevails inside English studies, as well: it prevails in pedagogy’s representations of plagiarism and citation. The excerpt from Axelrod and Cooper’s *The St. Martin’s Guide*, with its assurance of clear guidelines for citation, is typical of pedagogical representations in which no blurring of “my” text and “theirs” is necessary or permissible. Linda Anstendig and David Hicks’ textbook implies a similar clarity when it observes, “Most of the cases of student plagiarism arise because of uncertainties about, or insufficient attention to, correct research procedures” (54). The uncertainties to which they refer are not in authorship itself but in the student who doesn’t yet know “correct research procedures.”

Emphasizing the need to make major rather than minor changes when appropriating the language of a source text, Ramage and Bean’s *The Allyn and Bacon Guide to Writing* places the issue squarely in the “realm of ethics” (561). Mary Lynch Kennedy, William J. Kennedy, and Hadley M. Smith also focus on the need for substantial change, and their *Writing in the Disciplines*, 3rd edition, provides extensive guidelines for successful paraphrasing, including the suggestion that what’s needed is for the student author to achieve distance from the concrete language of the source text (24). The rhetoric section of Sheridan Baker’s *Practical Stylist with Readings and Handbook* also emphasizes the need for students to make major changes:

The solution is, again, to take down and mark quotations accurately in your notes or to summarize succinctly in your own words, words as far away from the original as possible, keeping the two as distinct as you can, so that nothing from your source will leak through your notes, unmarked, into your paper, arousing your reader’s suspicions. (408)
Baker’s passage is notable in its allowing the possibility of ambiguity: first, the student is to keep self and source “as distinct as you can,” and second, it is readers’ suspicions rather than some transcendent textual purity that governs the effort. Far more than most textbooks, Baker’s pedagogical treatment of student authorship suggests the ambiguity of interpretation that is intertextuality.

Brenda Spatt devotes more than the usual page or two to plagiarism; her instruction on the issue appears in six different passages of Writing from Sources, 4th edition. Like other textbooks, hers urges students to speak in their own voices, and it imagines paraphrase as an exact linguistic translation: “When you paraphrase, you retain everything about the original writing but the words” (117). But Spatt doesn't limit her injunctions against plagiarism to legal or ethical admonishments; she also points out that plagiarism prevents learning (116, 119). She’s right; if we only repeat verbatim the words of others, we don’t necessarily understand their ideas. If, however, we can rephrase the words of others, we are forcing ourselves to understand those ideas, especially if the rephrasing is done in the absence of the original text.

These textbooks propose a variety of reasons for not plagiarizing: ethical considerations, the need to avoid readers’ punitive actions, the need to learn. But they all advance the possibility of authorial autonomy, the possibility of something called “your own” words. Proper writing from sources is an act of paraphrase and citation, and the paraphrase is an exact translation of the source’s ideas into significantly different words.

The difficulty is that one doesn’t readily leap from unfamiliar ideas in an unfamiliar discourse to the ability to rephrase those ideas. The typical intermediate stage is appropriating the words in which those ideas were originally expressed; the intermediate stage is patchwriting. It doesn’t take much, in fact, to assert that all our writing at all “stages” is patchwriting. Describing collaboration, Charlotte Thralls says,

“According to Bakhtin, “The word in language is half someone else’s.” Language is never the purview of the individual only, but always an interaction of the individual with others because language is, in Bakhtin’s words, “not a neutral media that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others.” (66)

Insofar as composition pedagogy urges students to a heuristic translation, then, it contradicts neither composition theory nor critical theory. But when pedagogy invokes students’ “own” words and “own” ideas and declares that patchwriting is unethical, subject to punishment, or countereducational, a great chasm opens. Patchwriting, according to composition theory and critical theory, is at the very least a necessary stage in learning new ideas. By many accounts, it is how all of us write all of the time. Hence patchwriting is not an ethical transgression but a natural function of academic life, and citation is not a separation of self and source but a research trail, a gesture toward language and ideas encountered recently enough that the writer can still identify the
source. The question is not whether we patchwrite; we all do, all of the time. The question is only whether we do so clumsily, or with panache.

**COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY IN THE CONTACT ZONE**

Why is it so difficult for composition pedagogy to embrace these critical insights? Drawing on the work of Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, Susan Miller, Pierre Bourdieu, and Sharon Crowley, I have argued elsewhere that it is intellectual hierarchy that makes the plagiarist such a perennial, persistent figure in composition pedagogy’s representations of student authorship. In “The New Abolitionism Comes to Plagiarism,” I review two related phenomena in the American academy: the nineteenth-century emergence of composition pedagogy and the early-twentieth-century emergence of students’ plagiarism as a perceived social problem. Both of these phenomena derive at least in part from intellectuals’ need to differentiate themselves from those who are only functionally literate. The recently educated masses of the nineteenth century were reading trashy novels and newspapers and failing to appreciate the esoteric texts of the intellectuals; composition instruction endeavored to change their tastes. The masses were also gaining access to institutions of higher education from which their forebears had been barred; labeling patchwriting (which had previously been considered an acceptable textual practice) as unethical plagiarism established an intellectual hierarchy within the academy. By virtue of their patchwriting, students were on the bottom of that hierarchy; and by virtue of patchwriting’s ethical transgression, they could be ejected from the academy altogether.

One constructive response to this chilling scenario is to advocate the decriminalization of patchwriting. “The New Abolitionism Comes to Plagiarism” urges that patchwriting cease to be categorized as plagiarism and instead be treated as a natural part of academic writing—that students be taught how to write sophisticated intertextual prose. This is, I believe, a satisfying and plausible pedagogical remedy.

My present task, though, is not to describe sound pedagogy but to explore disciplinary quandaries. What does it mean that, despite the mid-century emergence of the discipline of composition studies and despite the late-century assertion of composition scholarship that no writing is ever autonomous, composition pedagogy nevertheless continues to sustain the inherently hierarchical binary of the autonomous author and the unethical, ignorant, plagiarizing patchwriter? Although I believe my own argument in “The New Abolitionism”—that intellectual hierarchy is a significant factor in the early-twentieth-century criminalization of patch writing—that argument provides only an aetiology. It does not explain why the ideal of the autonomous writer persists in the face of contradictory scholarship.

Ironically, it is composition pedagogy that provides a plausible explanation. We teach our students to be attentive to audience. Composition studies, in the aggregate, also has an audience to which it must attend. In making this assertion,
I should identify not only who it is that I consider to be the “audience” of composition studies but also what I believe the discipline’s relationship to that audience to be.

We can think of the audience of composition studies as compositionists; thus scholarship in the discipline functions as a sort of talking to oneself, when “composition studies” is described in the aggregate. Indeed, that is how most academic disciplines conduct business; for the most part, the audience for their work is the participants in the discipline. Yet this phenomenon of disciplinary audience has, strangely, become a target for attack since postmodern perspectives emerged in textual studies. Journalist Richard Bernstein’s incredulity after visiting a Modern Language Association convention is just one among a plethora of critiques (16). From the perspective of Bernstein and many others, the language—and hence the ideas—of textual studies should be transparently accessible to all educated persons. Somehow an analogy between textual studies and, say, chemical engineering does not occur to commentators like Bernstein. Somehow textual studies is different from other academic disciplines, in that many inside as well as outside the discipline believe that textual studies should be accessible to a non-expert audience. And it is specifically postmodern textual theory—the very discourse in which the autonomous author is challenged—that is rancorously charged with the sin of exclusionary language.

When one considers the history of composition studies, a subfield or at least a relative of textual studies, this avowed necessity of a public audience seems not so strange, after all. Composition scholarship speaks not just to compositionists, and composition pedagogy speaks not just to its students. Both of them speak to the public that demands college composition instruction. Composition studies arose not just as an esoteric search for knowledge about writing, but as a way of relieving a social problem, the problem of appropriate literacy for the newly-educated masses. Composition pedagogy continues to be funded in colleges large and small because of a public perception (a “public” that includes a group as diverse as the professor of physics, the neighborhood real-estate agent, and the state legislator) that literacy, normatively conceived, is important to American citizenship and economic and social advancement and that it is the business of college composition to assure this normative level of literacy. So the audience for composition studies includes compositionists (both composition teachers and composition scholars); composition students; and a larger, concerned public (both inside and outside the academy). The students of composition and the larger public are primarily concerned with composition pedagogy; their complaints about esoteric textual studies may well be rooted in a hope that textual scholars will not lose sight of what the public defines as the paramount mission of transmitting normative literacy skills.

Composition scholars’ relationship to this diverse audience often tends to operate on very traditional notions of conflict and persuasion. In Ancient
Rhetorics, an undergraduate writing textbook drawing upon precepts of classical rhetoric, Sharon Crowley describes the classical notion of audience as those whom the rhetor will sway to her point of view. Cicero in De Oratore notes that the rhetor must consider whether the audience enters the rhetorical situation as “hostile, indifferent, or accepting.” The audience’s willingness to change its mind relates directly to the extent to which personal identity is tied to the argument, along with “the emotional intensity with which [the audience] clings to an opinion” (124).

A good deal of composition’s interchanges with the larger public, notably in writing-across-the-curriculum programs, works this vein, endeavoring to persuade that public to what compositionists consider to be enlightened viewpoints about literacy instruction. Corollary to this endeavor is a resistance to and even a demonizing of public values. Those who espouse textual values that conflict with those of composition theory are often depicted as the enemies of composition studies, enemies who must either be persuaded to more enlightened viewpoints or be vanquished. Thus Bruce Horner’s allusion to teachers’ work being coopted by social pressures and his allusion to “powerful others committed to the use of composition courses to police and exclude students from higher education” draw on a commonplace in disciplinary discourse (522).

In the classical notion of audience, argument is a one-way affair, involving persuasion rather than negotiation and exchange. The rhetor is not among the persuaded; if she changes her mind as a result of the exchange, she and her argument have failed. This is not, however, the only model of audience and argument available. “Clearly,” say William Covino and David Jolliffe, “real communication does not operate on such an immediate, one-way, agonistic street” (13). The “real” communication of which Covino and Jolliffe speak is multi-directional, dialectic; when successful, it results in change for all parties concerned.

Accountable only to its discipline-internal audience, composition theory can recoil in horror from the hierarchical assumptions underlying public perceptions of college literacy instruction. Instead of running the risk of being affected by those perceptions, theorists can engage in New Abolitionist calls for the end of normative instruction altogether.11 But introductory college composition pedagogy must account for and respond to its audience; it must uphold the values of both composition scholarship and the academic and lay public. My studies of the representations of student authorship suggest that when those values conflict, composition pedagogy aligns itself with public values, not those of composition theory. This unfortunate reflex not only renders composition pedagogy a-theoretical—fueling the long-held suspicion that composition studies is not “real intellectual work”—but it also places a growing distance between composition pedagogy and the increasingly theoretical orientation of composition scholarship.

But if we can think of argument not as persuasion but as negotiation, perhaps we can engage arguments about literacy instruction—including arguments
about the functions of patchwriting—that will put composition pedagogy in the
salutary position of reconciling the values of composition theory and the lay and
academic public. Introductory college composition can involve composition
theorists in negotiations with a larger public, negotiations that compositionists
cannot and should not necessarily expect to “win.” Composition pedagogy is not
the same thing as composition theory; theory can maintain the illusion of its dis-
ciplinary autonomy (even while denying the possibility of individual auton-
omy), and pedagogy cannot—even that pedagogy which offers models of
autonomous authorship to its students! Composition pedagogy and its dialogue
with the public is what has made composition studies such a difficult place to
live; all too often that public does seem a “powerful other,” and all too often com-
position pedagogy is simply coopted, estranged from composition theory. Yet
that dialogue is also what makes composition studies such an exciting place to
live. Pedagogy is the contact zone in which theory talks with (not to) that larger
public.12 If as a discipline we can imagine that conversation in dialogic terms,
perhaps we can converse in such a way that we cease capitulating to or running
from public values that contradict those which our theories have developed, and
instead build syllabi and curricula that engage the ceaseless process of honoring
and negotiating the values of both.13

Does this mean that composition teachers need not be composition schol-
ars? No, it does not. Distress over the chasm between composition scholarship
and composition pedagogy was expressed by Maxine Hairston, who, as 1982
chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, called
for all composition teachers to be composition scholars. The assumption
underlying Hairston’s call is that composition pedagogy should be guided by
composition scholarship. Yet despite a proliferation of Ph.D. programs in com-
position and rhetoric, together with an increasing number of professional jour-
nals and regional conferences, the great majority of composition teachers today
are not composition scholars by anyone’s definition; it is even possible today for
a college’s writing department to include no composition scholars at all.

It would, however, mean that composition teaching and composition schol-
arship are not the same thing. It would instead mean that composition teach-
ing is responsive both to composition scholarship and public values. As a
composition theorist, I am horrified by the figure of the plagiarist that persists
in composition pedagogy. But as a writing program administrator, I see a cer-
tain dialogic wisdom to it. It signals composition pedagogy’s continuing
respect for public values. The danger comes, I believe, when pedagogy goes too
far in either direction, toward scholarship or toward lay values; then its dia-
logic function ceases. Composition pedagogy performs a unique, remarkable
function in higher education in America. Coming to an understanding and
appreciation of that singular function may do more than anything else to
establish an honorable place for composition studies in the academy and in
English departments. And that, in turn, may enable composition pedagogy to
accomplish its dialogic function, rather than converging with one pole while
ignoring the other. Then, instead of simply continuing to endorse the notions of plagiarism and authorship valued by the public, pedagogy could be the site at which the findings of critical theory have the opportunity to influence those values—and vice versa.

NOTES

1. Gregory’s argument appears in “The Many-Headed Hydra.” In a reconsideration of the article, Gregory calls the omission of composition and rhetoric a “neglect occasioned mainly by space requirements” and not a “principled neglect” (“Marshall Gregory Responds,” 92).

2. This line of reasoning has been used in support of establishing separate departments of writing and English. Separationism has gained enough adherents that the Conference on College Composition and Communication now includes a Special Interest Group on free-standing writing programs.

3. The comparison here is theoretical rather than cultural. I am not suggesting that the situation of composition studies compares with that of African Americans at the turn of the century. Rather, I am suggesting that Du Bois’ analytic framework can be applied in more than one situation.

4. Patchwriting is a term defined in a still earlier article: “Copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym-substitutes” (Howard, “Pentimento” 233).

5. Although the distinction is seldom clear in college composition textbooks or in college policies on academic integrity, patchwriting is quite a different activity from purchasing a term paper. Nor is the difference simply one of intention, as is so often asserted. Patchwriting often derives neither from ignorance of citation practices nor from an indifference to textual ethics, but from an effort to understand and enter difficult, unfamiliar discourse. The conflation of patchwriting and ghostwriting, together with the erroneous beliefs that intention separates the two and that either ignorance or immorality causes patchwriting, makes end-of-the-semester writing program administration a needlessly complicated, onerous job.

6. See, for example, Ralph Waldo Emerson’s Nature: “A man’s power to connect his thought with its proper symbol, and so to utter it, depends on the simplicity of his character, that is, upon his love of truth and his desire to communicate it without loss” (IV 2).

7. The terms are Foucault’s, and they are useful for marking texts that have wide-ranging influence upon succeeding scholarship. The difference between the two is not always obvious, Foucault acknowledges, but he does identify Freud and Marx as transdiscursive authors, or “initiators of discursive practices.” These authors differ from, say, Anne Radcliffe, who made available to her successors analogies upon which the Gothic novel was built. Transdiscursive authors make not only analogies but also differences available to their successors. They are to be differentiated from the founder of a science (e.g., Galileo, Saussure), in that the latter function as successors to their predecessors, and their followers refine, test, and
prove their theories. The work of the initiator of a discursive practice, in contrast, provides the measuring-stick for the work of his or her successors. A return to origins is not uncommon among practitioners of such discourses, e.g., Chomsky's return to Descartes. In these returns, practitioners examine the interstices of the text—its gaps and omissions—and enrich the discourse. The discoveries and rediscoveries made in these returns “reinforce the enigmatic link between an author and his works.” “These returns, an important component of discursive practices, form a relationship between ‘fundamental’ and mediate authors, which is not identical to that which links an ordinary text to its immediate author” (131–6). Within the relatively modest realm of composition scholarship on collaboration, Kenneth Bruffee surely occupies a transdiscursive position.

8. In this essay, I take composition textbooks as an index of composition pedagogy. The two are not, of course, identical. But textbooks do reflect what are commonly considered pedagogical ideals, even though they may not always describe what actually takes place in the classroom. And the reports that I have read of teachers’ attitudes toward student authorship accord closely with the textbook representations that I describe here. For an enlightening collection of teachers’ commentary about student authorship, see the September 1994 issue of The Council Chronicle, which offers teachers’ definitions of plagiarism.

9. Translation from one voice to another thus approximates translation from one language to another, which is a time-honored pedagogy. (See Edward P. J. Corbett, “The Theory and Practice of Imitation in Classical Rhetoric,” College Composition and Communication 22 (1971): 247.) But, as Mary Minock explains, we should not assume that it is only the language that changes; “even a faithful interlingual translation of an original involves a series of interpretations along with ruptures and gaps” (497).

10. An oft- and long-contested feature of composition pedagogy—the gatekeeping impulse variously manifested in assessment and evaluation and especially in ability grouping—is clearly a function of this same hierarchical ordering of pedagogy.

11. Robert J. Connors argues that attitudes toward composition pedagogy alternate between two poles: the reformers who want to improve composition pedagogy, and the abolitionists who want to do away with it altogether. Connors’ argument offers considerably more nuance than this one-sentence summary can provide.

12. Mary Louise Pratt originated the term contact zone and its attendant concepts. The contact zone is where two cultures encounter each other, “often in context of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (34). In the contact zone a number of phenomena occur, including autoethnography, transculturation, oppositional discourse, and resistance.

13. I appreciate the readings of drafts and the conversations in which Gary Tate has urged me to articulate some of the implications of composition pedagogy’s dialogic function.