

Managing intertextuality – meaning, plagiarism and power

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Abstract

This paper seeks to recast the discussion of plagiarism in terms of ‘managing intertextuality’. Intertextuality refers to how our contemporary cultural environment is marked by duplication, interpenetration of texts and the circulation and recirculation of images, sounds and words in multiple forms and formats. Intertextuality is ubiquitous and inevitable: the challenge is how to respond to it.

Drawing on a multidisciplinary literature of plagiarism and pedagogy the paper examines contemporary cultural practices that are based in intertextuality: from literature to fashion to music. It suggests that both students and academic staff are immersed in this world of meaning, yet must still strive to make sense of intellectual practices founded within a very different context.

The challenge for teachers and learners is to develop a language and strategies that recognise the reality of intertextuality. The development of this language cannot be divorced from the social context in which tertiary and other levels of education take place.

This social context - especially in Ireland but also in other societies - remains resolutely

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hierarchical, where the content, purpose and styles of teaching and learning are determined from outside and 'above' the learner.

A more democratic pedagogy might help us to develop new ways of talking about and managing intertextuality. This will inevitably raise questions about learning for whom?, and for what?, and what constitutes 'knowledge'? These are fundamental questions that must accompany the more technological, administrative and legal issues related to plagiarism and its management in the educational setting.

Introduction

There is nothing new about intertextuality: it is there in the works of Shakespeare, Joyce and other 'famous authors'. As Burstein (2006) notes: 'literary history consists of authors reading, rewriting, alluding to, parodying, and saluting each other'. But intertextuality is also central to the development of the contemporary mass media, cultural industries and other popular cultural forms and is of particular salience in a time of technological and commercial convergence.

The challenge for educators is to recognise that we live in an intertextual world, not as a postmodern literary conceit (MacDonald Ross, 2004), but as a matter of practical reality (Lessig, 2004). We must enter into a discussion with learners about intertextuality and how it should be understood. It makes sense to stop talking about *plagiarism* – a term with very negative connotations and much emotional baggage - and to talk about the challenges of 'managing intertextuality'. This is about understanding the nature of contemporary

communication; the ethics of writing and research; the peculiar nature of the academic community; and, ultimately, the purposes of education itself.

Plagiarism is a complex phenomenon, not easily addressed through the ‘technological fix’ of detection software, or the enactment of complex and comprehensive institutional policies, though such responses may certainly have a place. A better understanding of the contemporary cultural context for the making and remaking of meanings can provide a basis to engage with the issue of plagiarism in a way that might help academics to avoid the frustrations that the current response inevitably engenders.

Intertextuality – it’s (in) the culture

Writing of Tarantino’s film *Kill Bill Vol. 1* reviewer Jeff Shannon of Amazon.com remarked that it was ‘either brilliantly (and brutally) innovative or one of the most blatant acts of plagiarism ever conceived’. And - if the latter – so what? Each option is implicitly seen as positive in its own way. For the reality is that intertextuality is a fundamental element of modern and (especially) postmodern popular culture.

In March 2002 rap artist Eminem and his record company were sued by French jazz musician Jacques Loussier for allegedly infringing on the copyright of Loussier’s work *Pulsion* - in Eminem’s track *Kill You*. What was unusual was not that the action was taken – there are numerous such examples of (usually fairly obscure) artists taking on major cultural figures in such ways – but that numerous other artists did not follow suit. Eminem’s music, like that of many of his contemporaries (eg De La Soul, Beastie Boys,

Puff Diddy), is essentially and purposively derivative. In recent times the ‘mash up revolution’ (Cruger, 2003; DJ Shir Khan, 2004) has seen the recombination of existing music tracks enter the mainstream popular music industry, exemplified by the success of various versions of Kelis’s song *Milkshake*, which topped charts worldwide during the summer of 2004.

Postmodern fine artists use techniques of reproduction to ‘challenge the conception of originality underlying traditional conceptions of art’ (Pfohl, 2000: 193). The practice of ‘double-coding’ plays with the concepts of signifier and signified (Barthes, 1973) to evoke a response from an audience already located in a media and message-saturated world. It is almost as if everything and anything that can be said, has been said. The only remaining creative option is to rejig and manipulate existing narratives, images and texts. Despite explicit links between such ‘borrowing’ and postmodernism, this approach is nothing new. Many notable creative people, from Warhol to Hitchcock, have revelled in the magpie-like borrowing of images and symbols. Païni and Cogeval (2000: 18-19) say of Hitchcock that his films:

resonate with numerous iconographic themes descended from Symbolism and Surrealism . . . in turn Hitchcock has become an extraordinary “purveyor of images” to late 20th century art. A great many contemporary visual artists have drawn on the filmmaker’s motifs to create artistic offspring that would doubtless have astounded him.

Artists who provided visual inspiration for the filmmaker include Magritte, Munch and Duchamp, while those influenced by him include Cindy Sherman, Eldon Garnet and Willie Doherty. Contemporary fine artists who express the ‘sample culture’ include the British sound/video artist Mark Leckey; the American DJ, composer, collagist and sculptor Christian Marclay (Tate Modern, 2003); and, in Ireland, the painter John Paul McAree (McKervey & Long, 2002).

Other art forms have also embodied practices of ‘borrowing’, such as the incorporation of ‘folk’ tunes in classical music by composers such as Dvořák or Seán O’Riada. In literature the reuse of existing plots, characters and lines was widespread amongst Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Schwartz (1996: 311-315) lists numerous celebrated authors and public figures who also happened to be plagiarists, including Coleridge, Poe, Martin Luther King and Laurence Sterne (‘who borrowed so thoroughly for his fiction, sent his mistress love letters copied from those he sent his wife years before’). To this line-up we could add Eliot, Pound, Wilde and many others (www.famousplagiarists.org). More recently, the mythical events of the *Harry Potter* stories have been adapted from fairy stories extant in western folklore, such as that of Cinderella (Wheeler, 2002).

Fashion is a field where inspiration is routinely drawn from the ‘looks’ of the past: perhaps no more so than in the enthusiasm for ‘retro’ dressing. As *New York Metro* notes:

it may come as a shock to customers, but most designers regularly dispatch staff worldwide to scour vintage depots in search of inspiration. (The fashion world is stalled in a staunch postmodernism, where success is measured in the ability to

synthesize various influences and make them commercially viable.) These designers buy up bags, belts, or even a coat and then limit their pilfering to the details: the stitching here, perhaps, or a buttonhole there. But they usually stop a hemline short of producing a direct copy (Larocca, 2002).

The practice is only condemned when the ‘borrowing’ is seen to go too far: as when in 2002 French fashion designer Nicolas Ghesquiere’s blatantly copied a 1973 work by the Californian designer Kaisik Wong. This is where, according to *I.D.* magazine (Chen, 2003: 79) ‘referencing something becomes ripping it off’. Nevertheless Ghesquiere was unperturbed by the exposé of his plagiarism: reported as saying: ‘Yes, I made a mistake. Now my team and I laugh about it’ (Garnett, 2003). It has had no negative impact on his career: indeed it probably made a positive contribution to his profile.

Contemporary postmodern culture rejects the tenets of the individually creative Romantic Author (Woodmansee & Jaszi cited in Livingston-Webber, 1999: 268) and is more interested in the ‘realignment of [existing] elements in transformative recombination’ (Livingston-Webber, 1999: 265). Such recombinatory activity, whether in dance music, *The Simpsons*, TV advertising, blogging or Hollywood film, is the cultural context within which contemporary discussions of intertextuality and plagiarism must be located.

The point here is not to say that ‘there is a lot of plagiarism out there, so it must be OK’. Rather it is to stress that teachers and learners exist in a context where intertextuality is routine, rarely sanctioned, often rewarded, and recognised as central to numerous popular cultural processes. If we wish to suggest that the field of student writing is somehow

different, we need to make a strong and logical argument. Alternatively, we may need to reassess our approach. This is particularly the case as the lofty position from which we speak is perhaps not so elevated, as the next section argues.

Institutionalised copying

Outside of the arts and media, textual copying and appropriation are routinised in other aspects of culture. Government ministers give speeches – using the first person – written for them by civil servants or speechwriters; writers of leading textbooks add their name (or brand) to material largely written by research assistants. Celebrities and sportstars routinely have their words or their lives recreated under their name by ghostwriters. None of these practices is viewed in a particularly negative way (except perhaps by unaccredited subordinates) but are seen as both routine and necessary. This is what Martin (1994) calls ‘institutional plagiarism’ - ‘a feature of systems of formal hierarchy, in which credit for intellectual work is more a consequence than a cause of unequal power and position’. Some are in a position to get others to do some or all of their intellectual labour for them, just as they can get their housekeeping or nannying done by domestic staff.

More prosaically it is obvious to anybody working in the academy that copyright legislation is being thwarted on a massive scale through bulk photocopying of images, sheet music, articles, chapters and often entire books. It is estimated by the global publishing industry that 300 billion pages of text are illegally photocopied per annum, representing a potential loss to publishers of over US\$15 billion (PASA, nd). Such activity is clearly visible to students when they are provided with such materials by tutors and lecturers.

Similarly, while an issue of copyright and piracy rather than of plagiarism, businesses are known to engage extensively in unauthorised copying of software. It is estimated by the Business Software Alliance that 41% of software in use in Irish businesses is illegally copied: a loss of a potential US\$71 million ('Software piracy cost highlighted', *Irish Times* 8 July 2004). Piracy on such a scale indicates that such copying is widely seen as an acceptable, perhaps economically necessary, practice. Increased use of websites by businesses of all sizes and types has also stimulated copying: as the 'look and feel' of commercial websites increasingly becomes standardised (as with software and TV formats) it is easy to detect possible instances of plagiarism in website design.

Another 'acceptable' face of plagiarism can be found in the use of others' materials in lectures and other teaching activities – often in the form of what Howard (1999: 89-91) calls 'patchwriting' – 'copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes'. Patchwriting is not just an activity carried out by novice writers; lecturers commonly provide information in lectures that is not adequately sourced, nor indeed referenced at all.

Intertextuality is also part of the academic writing process (Haviland and Mullin, 1999). In the production of research papers and grant applications academics routinely draw on the input of others – circulating drafts; incorporating comments made at seminar presentations; making use of amendments suggested by anonymous referees; treating already successful papers or funding submissions as templates. Hunt (2004) reports that his research on writing practices at a Canadian bank workplace found similar processes at play: workers

‘regularly found themselves participating in an ecology of documents in which texts were passed among many hands to be edited, reshaped, rethought, touched up, repurposed’.

Academic researchers often ‘repurpose’ their material: they deliver similar material in a number of contexts – as a conference presentation, a journal article, a chapter in a book, a lecture - without necessarily drawing attention to the lack of originality. Such activities are not only seen as legitimate, but are actively rewarded in a competitive academic context: they provide for extra lines in the academic’s CV and may provide additional publication ‘points’ for the academic’s employing institution.

We can see that in many institutional spheres of contemporary life, in entertainment, art, politics, business and academia, intertextuality is recognised as acceptable, even necessary and routine. In some cases it is regulated by clearly understood mechanisms of intellectual property rights, licensing or contracts; but in other cases the practices take place in quasi-legal and rapidly changing normative contexts. There is no certainty about the management of intertextuality in the ‘real’ world; thus it is a challenge for educators to enforce a simple and absolute concept of plagiarism within their own world. It is particularly difficult for educators to provide a rationale for their claim that plagiarism by students is a deviant act, when those same students can easily see that numerous others – perhaps even their own lecturers and tutors – engage quite shamelessly in the exercise.

Asserting the value of intellectual property

Whilst many artists have made free with the world of signs, and others have routinely ‘borrowed’ material for their own purposes, countercurrents have developed amongst those who make their money from intellectual property [IP]: particularly those who own and control global consumer brands. Klein (2000: 176) points out that we have:

almost two centuries worth of brand-name history under our collective belt, coalescing to create a sort of global pop-cultural Morse code. But there is just one catch: while we may all have the code implanted in our brains, we’re not really allowed to use it. In the name of protecting the brand from dilution, artists and activists who try to engage with the brand as equal partners in their “relationships” are routinely dragged into court for violating trademark, copyright, libel or “brand disparagement” laws – easily abused statutes that form an airtight protective seal around the brand, allowing it to brand us, but prohibiting us from so much as scuffing it.

In a world where IP – from one’s personal image to computer code – is becoming ever more central to commerce, companies such as Disney, McDonalds and Mattel (makers of Barbie dolls) are acting to exert greater control over what they regard as their exclusive property (Klein, 2000: 177-178; Rand, 1995: 76; Livingston-Webber, 1999: 268).

Attempts to circumscribe intertextuality have had many critics (Lessig, 2004). For example, according to Pfohl (2000: 196) ‘copyright law reifies existing ways of perceiving art, and in

so doing, stifles, rather than encourages, creativity'. Conversely '[the means of] self-expression is often appropriation and redefinition of the images of popular culture'. Indeed there is merit in the use and reuse of ideas, concepts, knowledge, language and symbols: according to Moulton and Robinson (2002) 'building new ideas from old ideas, using existing components and combining them in new ways, might be creativity, not plagiarism'.

This is certainly what Tarantino, Warhol and Eminem believe – as do numerous DJs, bloggers, mash-up practitioners and fine artists. But what you can do depends on the discursive field in which you operate. What might be admired in the realm of a reflexive and winkingly-ironic postmodern popular culture may elicit a very different response in the rather more rarefied (but, significantly increasingly marketised) world of academia (LaFollette, 1992). It may also raise the ire of IP owners and their legal representatives.

The IP environment has been fundamentally challenged by digital technology and modern media structures (Lessig, 2004). Convergence between both media forms and media industries has dissolved many of the boundaries created and sustained by specific technologies and business forms. Indeed, Mirow and Shore (1997, cited in Carroll, 2002: 15) suggest that the process of digitisation has altered the nature of the 'ownership' of texts.

This is the environment in which media-savvy students live: where downloading music is a ubiquitous activity of often debatable legal status; where blogs (such as www.bebo.com) incorporate masses of 'copyrighted' material and where amateur designers and visual artists gleefully alter existing images with Photoshop (www.fark.com) or mash-up existing

websites to create interesting and often useful hybrids ('It's all in the mix'. *Guardian*, 2 February, 2006). Once again, there is a challenge in trying to evolve a relevant discussion of academic plagiarism within this dynamic environment.

Intertextuality: a problem of morality or of ethics?

Intertextuality is an area of considerable ethical complexity. Unattributed use of others' words or ideas is not universally perceived as a 'bad thing'. Indeed there is a strong argument that our notions of intellectual property and the ownership of ideas is a culturally specific one (Swanson, 2000: 136) and evidence that the notion of individual 'ownership' of texts is relatively recent (Goldschmidt, 1943, cited in Chandler, 2003), notwithstanding that the concept of plagiarism has its own long genealogy (McLemee, 2004).

Permission, under specific circumstances, to borrow, adapt and reuse ideas is entrenched in copyright and patenting law. Using others' ideas or words then is not morally suspect in itself. Rather, as Swanson (2000: 133) argues: 'plagiarism is an ethical question (in the sense that it pertains to prohibitions of specific groups)'. But ethics are a social construct, developed within specific social and historical contexts. To recognise an ethical basis for our judgements about plagiarism is to admit that the concept itself is contingent and open to critique: it is not a moral absolute.

Plagiarism has often been described as a type of theft (Green, 2002): it deprives the 'real' authors of a work of credit for that work. The 'victim' may be seen to be the individual creator, or even society as a whole, deprived of the rigorous construction of new ideas and

expression. But is this any more than an analogy? As lawyer Green (2002: 170) points out, no plagiarist has ever been prosecuted for theft. It is arguable that ideas, or even the language they are expressed in, are less 'real' than other forms of property. As Moulton and Robinson (2002) argue, there is a major difference between intellectual and other types of property:

if words and ideas were merely property, and plagiarism merely a form of theft, then there would be nothing wrong with buying the rights to authorship from another, as in the case of commercial term-paper services. The original authors sell their claim to authorship for money. The plagiarist who uses these services is not stealing the credit from another person because the original author does not want the credit. But credit for authorship is not something that can be sold or given away. Credit for authorship is so undetachable that even the reverse of stealing, falsely attributing one's own work to another, is also wrong; it constitutes forgery.

In relation to ideas *origination*, not ownership, is the key. Authorial credit is like virtue or guilt – an attribute that cannot be readily transferred.

For Briggs (2003: 19) 'the rush to condemn acts of plagiarism risks riding roughshod over a problem that may turn out to be a far more complex – behaviourally, ethically, conceptually, even linguistically – than has been previously granted'. Briggs notes that to equate acts of plagiarism with 'cheating' or 'theft' is to adopt a 'heavy-handed' moralising tone that may actually prevent the issue from being examined in a useful and productive

way. Similar arguments, that focus on plagiarism as part of the writing process, have been made by Hunt (2002), Levin (2003) and Clerehan and Johnson (2003).

As an alternative to the 'morality' approach, Briggs suggests an ethical approach that: 'focuses on highly contextualised practices and decisions, seeing all decisions and practices in terms of their many, potential and not always foreseeable consequences and outcomes' (2003: 20). An ethical stance calls for a response, not of condemnation or judgement, but of understanding and problem-solving.

This is quite a challenging stance, in an area where moral judgements may be rapidly made, where emotions run high and where attempts towards understanding have the potential to raise complex and difficult issues in relation to knowledge, pedagogy and power. As Lunsford (1999: x) puts it, the issue of plagiarism can reveal: 'the deeply repressed and unspoken formalist, positivist, and individualist ideological assumptions underlying the seemingly simple need for exclusionary ownership of intellectual property'.

Intertextuality, teaching and learning

It is commonly accepted that the massification of third-level education has had implications for teaching and learning. Across the West, entry into post-secondary education has become a mainstream and majority activity for significant sectors of the population. Those who now enter the tertiary system may bring with them a far more diverse set of motivations and experiences than was the case when a university education was available to only a narrow social elite.

Of particular concern in recent times has been the question of student engagement with the education system. For a number of reasons students are now less likely to treat the tertiary college as a 'greedy institution'. Rather their interests may be complex and multi-faceted, incorporating complex spectra of study, paid work, travel, commuting, social life and caring responsibilities (McInnis, 2003). It is argued that students increasingly reflect the managerialist and marketised approach of higher education policymakers (Marginson & Considine, 2000) and are adopting an increasingly utilitarian approach to their education (James, 2001). At the same time, argues Hinkson (2002), the free sharing of ideas within academia is increasingly displaced by self-interest. Academic work is now seen as a means to an end in a competitive environment, rather than a set of skills and values to be fostered and valued for its sake. These trends are reflected in changing approaches to teaching and learning, including assessment.

It is one thing to posit that such changes are linked with a greater incidence of plagiarism: another to demonstrate the validity of such a connection. According to research by Cox et al (2001, cited in Carroll, 2002: 18) UK university staff and students cite poor time management as the main reason the latter engage in plagiarism. This has been supported by at least one subsequent small-scale study in a UK institution (Dennis, 2004). This factor may reflect an increasing involvement by students in 'outside' activities, driven by economic necessity or consumerist desires.

Another reason for increasing levels of plagiarism may be the increased ease with which students can carry it out: in particular the opportunities afforded by digital technologies. As

well as fostering and even celebrating the ‘borrowing’ culture, as outlined above, the web, in particular, just makes copying simpler. It is quicker and easier to cut and paste, edit and reformat material in digital form than it is to laboriously handwrite or type material from printed sources (Hansen, 2003: 777). Added to this is the speed and efficiency with which search engines can find material on just about any topic.

A further reason underpinning the practice of plagiarism (if not a factor in its apparent increase) may be the inability of tertiary teaching and assessment practices to respond to broader cultural shifts in the creation and dissemination of knowledge, as manifested in the communication, media and entertainment industries. Contemporary communication products are typified by speed, intertextuality, visual impact, real-time synchronicity, high levels of redundancy and constructed forms of ‘reality’ that have nothing to do with ‘realism’ or authenticity (Turnbull, 2005). Students living in a postmodern media-saturated culture - where information is both valuable but increasingly banal and evanescent - are often faced with demands to produce written work bounded by narrative structures and expressive styles that are as old as (or older than) the printed word.

In a world where the visual is ever more influential, and where design rather than content is a marker of value, academic work remains resolutely text-based: and text of a most traditional kind. While the collaborative, the communal and the tribal is celebrated in contemporary youth culture (Maffesoli, 1996) the individual creation is still seen by academic discourse as the locus of authenticity. But it should be no surprise that a student of the 21st century is perhaps more likely to produce a clip-art festooned, idiosyncratically

spelled and derivative rant (perhaps produced in collaboration with peers) than a carefully-crafted essay, meticulously-referenced and with a unitary and original narrative thread.

Plagiarism and power

The concept of power is one that lurks, almost unacknowledged, in discussions of plagiarism (Vaccaro, 2000: 127). Sociological analyses of education draw our attention to how the education system operates to reinforce and reproduce existing hierarchies of power, inequality and domination, both through the formal syllabus and also through the so-called ‘hidden curriculum’.

Interactionist and post-structuralist writers stress the crucial role of language and discourse within education. There is much in the sociology of education and the sociology of power that could help us to place an analysis of plagiarism within a broader and more instructive context than has generally been the case.

It is instructive to ask, in the current social context: what is tertiary education for? At the state policy level the answer is clear: education is intended to underpin economic growth and development, specifically capitalist development. Allied to an instrumentalist and managerialist state approach to tertiary education are institutions that continue to retain almost exclusive power over the construction and delivery of education. There is little evidence that a more democratic approach to teaching and learning has permeated more than the surface layers of tertiary education. From government departments, through awarding and accrediting bodies, to the academic boards and councils of individual

universities and institutes, there is minimal participation by students in the shaping of their education. Indeed there is little informed participation by the majority of the so-called stakeholders. The system remains rigidly hierarchical and traditional.

Analyses of inequality in education have tended to focus on its redistributive effects: how participation in education impacts on the subsequent life chances, income and wealth of individuals or social groups. There has also been considerable interest in power inequalities rooted in the perception of ‘difference’, such as those related to gender, ethnicity or religion. But another important aspect relates to inequalities of power within the institutions of education themselves: kindergartens, schools, colleges and universities are massively hierarchical and controlling environments, as evidenced in almost every aspect of their being, from their architecture to their protocols and decorum.

Lynch and her colleagues (1999: 217-259; Lynch & Lodge, 2002) have drawn our attention to the lack of democracy in Irish educational institutions: specifically schools. Lynch remarks (1999: 219) that:

a paternalistic, caretaking ideology informs most of educational theory . . . young adults’ criticisms of schooling generally experience the fate of trivialisation . . . Young people’s critical views of education cannot be taken seriously within this paternalistic frame of reference.

While Lynch is referring to second-level schools, very similar conclusions could be made in relation to higher education institutions. A recent survey of students at my own Institute (reported in Reilly, 2004) revealed that most students feel they have very little or no control or influence over the content of their courses (85% claimed little or no control) or of how they were delivered (78%). As one remarked: ‘students don’t get to decide what they want to cover in their courses, it is outlined to them. You just have to go with whatever lecturers put before you’.

This approach is reinforced by disciplinary discourses and the pedagogy that inheres in textbooks. Textbooks, suggests Richardson (2001), ‘tend to facilitate pedagogical assumptions that construct students as consumers to be filled with disciplinary knowledge, methods and practices’. Richardson raises issues related to how students use the materials that education provides them with (for example, textbooks, or lecturers’ notes) to construct themselves (or not) within a disciplinary environment. He is interested in how students come ‘to understand the social, cultural and literacy practices of the discipline with which they [are] engaging’. Ultimately what is being asked for in academic work is almost invariably a response to a preexisting body of knowledge, embodied in texts, images or codes of some sort, whether practical, textual or visual.

The disciplinary power of such established bodies of knowledge can make it very difficult for students to achieve any level of expressive freedom. Constrained by an overwhelming consensus over the ‘facts’ and established modes of knowing, students may almost be forced to plagiarise (Levin, 2003). To devise a way to operate within a disciplinary context, without plagiarising, may be an almost impossible task. As Briggs (2003: 20) reminds us:

‘the charge of plagiarism presupposes the ability to appropriately deploy the range of techniques suited to a specific task and commanded by the context’. The avoidance of plagiarism then becomes a learning and strategic challenge, about how to insert oneself within a discourse of power. In many ways this is a management and pedagogical rather than a moral issue. The challenge is how to encourage students and others in education to ‘manage intertextuality’ in a way that leads to personal and intellectual growth and fulfilment.

Concluding remarks

We live in a culture that is torn between, on the one hand, textual poaching in a digital bazaar; on the other a drive to assert ever-increasing control and ownership over valuable cultural products. Such issues are matters for lively public debate and material struggle: between Mattel and the riot grrrls; file-sharers and iTunes, student plagiarists and Turnitin.com. Technological change has had an irreversible impact on cultural production, in an historical moment perhaps as significant for human communication as the development of the printing press.

The far-reaching implications of such change have yet to be reflected in the mainstream of education. The shift towards a digital culture poses major challenges for a hierarchical and calcified institution. Already the healthcare system has had to come to terms with a body of ‘patients’ who can now challenge the monolithic expertise of ‘health professionals’ through independent access to medical information. Similarly the political system must

accommodate to a population that now has potential access to a huge diversity and range of opinion.

Students similarly now have unmediated access to limitless information, of infinite variety. They are ill-equipped to respond to or to manage this challenge, and what techniques they have come from their own familiarity with communication and entertainment media rather than tools provided for them by the education system.

Where might we find useful suggestions on how to respond to the challenges that the phenomenon of plagiarism - and the hierarchical system that perpetuates it - poses? One place might be in the seminal writings of those now-unfashionable radical educationalists of the early 1970s, Illich (1973) and Freire (1972). While much separated their work, they were alike in pointing to the irrationalities of the contemporary education system. Each saw a response in the facilitation of non-hierarchical networks of learning that empowered learners to make their own decisions. A similar ethos has underpinned the so-called 'community education' movement, described as 'non-hierarchical, autonomous, democratic and participatory' (Smyth, 2002, cited in Quilty, 2003: 57).

It is not suggested that the emancipatory ethos that underpins at least some of community education (Connolly, 2003) can be easily transferred into formalised tertiary teaching, but it could certainly act as a counterweight to the almost totally utilitarian, marketised and individualistic ideology that now pervades the sector. Formal tertiary education may wish to address the value-basis of community education, described as: 'a process of empowerment, social justice, change, challenge, respect and collective consciousness'

(Aontas, 2000, cited in Connolly, 2003: 15) Such an approach would better address the affective dimensions of education, those that relate to our personal connectedness rather than our increasingly atomised individualism.

As Lynch and Lodge (2003: 12) suggest: ‘naming the emotional dimensions of social life would . . . provide new frameworks through which to explore the implications of developments such as the intensification of work and competition’. It is certainly worth investigating how the psycho-social landscape of contemporary culture underpins how young people relate to the education system.

As it stands Irish third-level students have minimal power to shape their own learning. They have little influence over the content of their education nor how it is structured or delivered. They do not get to frame the discourse: rather they are asked to respond as best they can within a body of knowledge that they have little connection with. A more positive approach might be one where, as an IT Sligo student remarked:

student input should be taken more into account as it would make “us” part of the college, unlike just being told what to do. Also if we worked with our lecturers to get a mutual goal we would become more involved and interested in the work given.

This stance would represent a fundamental change in how most tertiary-level education is experienced. It might lead to a change in how students experience their courses of study, and how they might approach the tasks of writing and self-expression: for example through

approaches based on open-source, Problem Based Learning, co-creation or information literacy. There may be the potential to harness the peer-to-peer ethos of networked communication towards new methods of teaching and learning. Ultimately it might help us to reframe the question of plagiarism as one about how students are included in a democratic discourse about the construction and communication of knowledge, and how they might learn to manage intertextuality in a dynamic and powerful world.

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