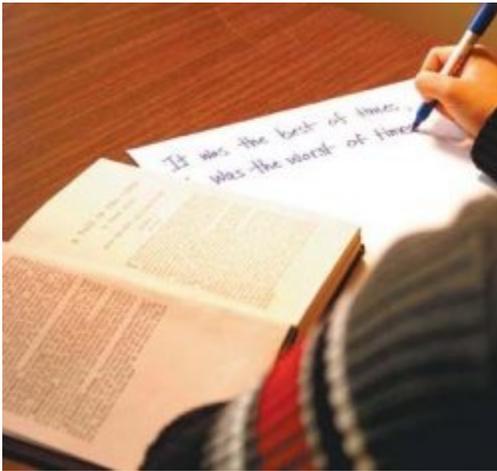


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Plagiarism Enthusiast Defends Plagiarism by Plagiarizing > kenneth goldsmith, meta, one big fucking headache, Penn, plagiarism, uncreative writing

by PETER FINOCCHIARO



“Fight the Power” Friday (Part 2)

Kenneth Goldsmith, an English professor at Penn, has a unique take on authorship, that being: Plagiarism ain't so bad, necessarily!

Goldsmith's argument (we think) has something to do with authorship being pretentious and paternalistic, especially in our hyper-connected day and age, when information is cycled and recycled millions of times every day, at the speed of an electron. (Maybe?) To that end, he teaches a class each year called “Uncreative Writing,” in which students are actively encouraged to rip-off their classwork from other writers. Seriously.

Straight from the horse's mouth:

“ Students are penalized for showing any shred of originality and creativity. Instead they are rewarded for plagiarism, identity theft, repurposing papers, patchwriting, sampling, plundering, and stealing.

Aaaanyway: Crimson columnist Isabel E. Kaplan wrote a pointed critique of Goldsmith's philosophy earlier this week, which basically amounted to, “This is bullshit.” And we were

interested in the good professor's response. So we shot over an email asking what he thought of the criticisms. In his reply, Goldsmith referred to the column as "stupidity," then threw the question to some former students, at which point things got *a little bit weird*.

Less than 20 minutes after Prof. Goldsmith's prompt, we received a reply from Artie Vierkant, Penn '09, who launched into a nearly 300-word defense of "uncreative writing."

An excerpt from the first paragraph: "His book contains brilliant moments of exegesis and archival documentation, and its keen attention to, knowledge about, and currency in artistic practice makes it as much a user's manual as a scholar's tome." **And, the second:** "Can techniques traditionally thought to be outside the scope of literature, including word processing, databasing, identity ciphery, and intensive programming, inspire the reinvention of writing?"

Upon receiving said missive, our immediate reaction was, "Well! What a thoughtful, detailed response, and on such short turnaround! You know what would be a fun exercise? Plugging these into Google."

At which point Google responded, "Shit's straight up lifted from Amazon, bro."

To be more specific, Vierkant cut-and-pasted two blurbs from Amazon about Goldsmith's new book, and shot them off in an email without any attribution. So, in defending the act of plagiarism, he himself actually plagiarized. Which I'm sure was the point, but c'mon, cut the meta schtick. This isn't an episode of "Community," and we're bored already. (A follow-up email was not returned.)

It would be hard to convince most people that presenting someone else's work as your own, with nothing added into the mix — and particularly when done for public consumption — isn't pretty shitty. Still, as an academic exercise, where the terms are clearly defined and nobody is actually getting hurt by the misappropriation, it all seems harmless enough. Another former student hinted at this, saying: "It's pretty clear that Ms. Kaplan fundamentally misunderstands what goes on in Kenny Goldsmith's classes, and that she takes his playful polemicism a bit too literally." And it's not an entirely un-valuable conversation to have, given, you know, the *state of things*.

Still we had trouble gleaning all this from some of the other responses we received. For example:

“ uncreative writing, in all of its forms is haunted. because it presents just as it is. because it cannot help how it is because of the world it exists in. because we cannot ignore where it came from in the first place, because of the methods by which i came upon this text and why this one and not the other. all of these

things are entwined with the social-economic-cultural structures of everyone/everything it involves – writer, uncreative writer, reader, text. what does this text tell you about me – i didn't write it but i passed its transmissions through my body and there are bits of me stuck to its surface.

Gross.

Also, what?

Also, stop it.

Happy Friday. It's time for a stiff drink.

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