‘Patchwriting’ as Unintentional Fact Writing

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When we think of writing facts, we primarily think of writing procedures by means of which we intentionally create facts: By using specific strategies of representation and argumentation, we claim the status of facticity for certain propositions. However, there are forms of unintentional fact writing. Such fact writing can occur when the writer lacks knowledge of the specific text features that serve as fact-generating within a particular communication like academic writing. Ignoring such fact-generating features can then lead to an unintended attribution of facticity to certain assertions.

In the context of academic writing, this effect might become relevant for students who are not yet familiar with the norms and conventions of academic texts. The phenomenon of unintentional fact writing particularly displays when students apply a writing strategy called ‘patchwriting’ which occurs when sources are paraphrased. It consists in copying from a correctly documented source text and in then making small changes like deleting single words, modifying the syntax or applying synonyms. This strategy is frequently adopted by students who are in the early stages of their study programs. By deploying patchwriting, they try to ensure that they accurately reproduce content from sources that are still difficult for them to understand. Despite the intention of inexperienced students to meet the requirements of academic writing in terms of content accuracy, patchwriting tends to entail a violation of academic conventions at the level of handling facts.

In the everyday practice of academic instruction, however, patchwriting is usually perceived only very vaguely as a violation of a standard that is difficult to pin down as such. This uncertainty of what exactly is wrong with patchwriting favors the trend of bringing it close to or even identifying it with plagiarism. In recent years, this tendency has increased in view of heated public debates about plagiarism in higher education and is clearly at the expense of students who by applying patchwriting attempt to live up to the standards

of academic writing. Since universities need to provide propaedeutic spaces where academic writing can be taught and learned, it seems important to clarify that on the one hand patchwriting is the effect of a learning process and on the other hand to analyze the academic standards violated by it as a result.

Thus, in the following, I will explore patchwriting both as a learning phenomenon and as an offense to academic discourse conventions. Regarding patchwriting as a specific stage of the learning process students undergo when acquiring academic writing skills, I will draw on insights from composition studies and linguistic writing development research. Linguistic research on academic language will provide the means to understand why patchwriting is a noncompliance with the way facts are handled in academic writing and can be conceptualized as unintentional fact writing. In a first step, the description of an example from everyday teaching practice in academia allows for an overview of the issues patchwriting raises in the context of higher education. After having elaborated on the concept of patchwriting, it will then be argued why patchwriting can be perceived as unintentional fact writing. After a side-glance at the current tendency to consider patchwriting an offense close or equal to plagiarism, I will turn to the reasons why patchwriting is used and close with some suggestions for further research on patchwriting and some hints to a productive approach to this writing strategy in higher education.

A Case of Patchwriting

The following example case comes from my professional practice as a writing educationalist and director of the Writing Center of an Austrian University. At the beginning of 2021, the office of our university's Study Director contacted me and asked me to examine an inquiry they had received from faculty. The office is managed by a lawyer and deals with legal issues arising in the context of study and teaching. The inquiry concerned a seminar paper from a bachelor's degree program and was in the form of an email. The email said that a group of students from the BA study program had submitted a collabora-

tively authored seminar paper that, according to the instructors, consisted to a great extent of what they call "a collage of patchwriting."[1]

The instructors had checked the paper with a plagiarism detection software and could state that "in general, the sources of the original texts have been indicated." Nevertheless, they emphasize that, according to their academic understanding, patchwriting is a form of plagiarism. At the same time, they point out the basic definition of plagiarism from the Austrian legal framework, according to which plagiarism only occurs when sources are used "without appropriate identification and citation of the source."[2] Concluding their email, they finally ask if, even with documented sources, the "collage of patchwriting" in the seminar paper should be judged as plagiarism and should be graded negatively.

What is particularly striking about the view of the instructors is that, on the one hand, they clearly recognize that the seminar paper is not plagiarism in the sense of the law, but, on the other hand, they tend to proceed with the patchwritten seminar paper as if it were actually plagiarism. It therefore seems that the violation they perceive in the paper is so serious that they locate it in the legal sphere and equate it to breaking the law. This raises two main questions: What kind of standard, norm or convention did the students exactly violate by patchwriting their seminar paper? And why did the instructors react so strongly to the students' patchwriting which is, as already mentioned, quite common among inexperienced academic writers? Before turning to these questions, I would like to describe some general considerations accompanying the discussions of the concept of patchwriting.

The Concept of Patchwriting

The term patchwriting was coined by Rebecca Moore Howard in 1992. It served the author to identify a specific writing strategy students adopt when paraphrasing sources: For Howard, this strategy is present when students take passages or sentences from a source and integrate them into their own text

1 This and the following quotes are from the email that the instructors sent to the office of the Study Director on 3rd February 2021.

2 Österreichisches Universitätsgesetz 2002, II. Teil Studienrecht, 1. Abschnitt, Allgemeine Bestimmungen, Begriffsbestimmungen § 51. (2) 31; in German: "ohne entsprechende Kenntlichmachung und Zitierung der Quelle."

with minor linguistic changes. They modify, for example, the word or sentence order of the source text, replace individual words with synonyms, delete sentence elements or change syntactic constructions. According to Howard's observations, this way of integrating sources into one's own text is particularly widespread among students in their first semesters.[3]

By coining the term patchwriting, Howard pursued the goal of separating the phenomenon from an understanding of plagiarism that dominated American universities at the beginning of the 1990s. According to this understanding, the paraphrase of a source is to be regarded as plagiarism if it remains linguistically too close to the source text, even if the source is correctly documented and cited.[4] Since patchwriting necessarily involves a linguistic proximity to the source text, it corresponds to this definition of plagiarism – regardless of whether sources are documented or not.

Howard counters this with the argument that a legal and ethical stigmatization of patchwriting as plagiarism thwarts an important learning process and criminalizes a crucial learning stage.[5] In order to initiate a change of perspective, she advocates recognizing the value of patchwriting as a learning phenomenon. In Howard's view, patchwriting must be considered as the effort that inexperienced writers make with their still very limited means to gain access to the academic discourse community of their subject.[6]

A few years later, Howard elaborates on possible reasons for patchwriting and distinguishes three of them: The first reason for patchwriting can consist of a student's inexperience with conventions of academic writing; the second, of a student's unfamiliarity with the words and ideas of a source text; and the third, of a student's intent to deceive.[7] In this last case, however, sources would not be documented and the legal definition of plagiarism would in fact apply. This special case of patchwriting can be neglected, however, because Howard's aim in coining the term was to focus on the learning

3 Cf. Howard 1992: 233–236. Howard's exact definition of patchwriting is: "copying from a source text and then deleting some words, altering grammatical structures, or plugging in one-for-one synonym substitutes." (233).

4 It can be found, for example, in the 1991 edition of the *Bedford Handbook for Writers*: "Two different acts are considered plagiarism: (1) borrowing someone's ideas, information, or language without documenting the source and (2) *documenting the source but paraphrasing the source's language too closely*." Hacker 1991: 507, my emphasis.

5 Cf. Howard 1995: 796, 802.

6 Cf. Howard 1992: 233.

7 Cf. Howard 1995: 799–800.

of students instead of a priori presuming intentions to deceive. Howard's intention has shaped the use of the term in composition studies and writing didactics, where patchwriting is mainly used when sources are correctly documented.[8]

The Offensiveness of Patchwriting

Given all this evidence for the inoffensiveness of patchwriting applied by students in academic learning processes, why did the instructors of the example case react so strongly to the student's paper and why did they perceive it as something as serious as plagiarism? The precondition for this view of patchwriting is the modern conception of science as it developed on the threshold from the 18th to the 19th century. At this time, an older conception of science was eroding: one according to which science is to be understood as the totality of knowledge or as a supratemporally valid system of true statements. This understanding of science was replaced by the concept of science as a continuous search for new and always renewable knowledge. This understanding of science as an interminable search for everchanging knowledge was powerfully shaped by Wilhelm von Humboldt who defined science as "something that has not yet been fully found and can never be fully found."[9] This temporalized concept of science, which defines science as a permanent research process, highlights the provisional character of existing knowledge and the need to continuously revise and expand it. In this sense, producing new knowledge by expanding, questioning, and correcting existing knowledge is at the core of modern scientific practice.

This modern scientific practice is accompanied by a specific kind of communication for which, in recent years, the term 'eristics' has emerged in linguistic research on academic writing. The term goes back to the Greek 'eristiké téchnē' ('art tending to dispute') and was originally used pejoratively to brand empty sophist disputation. Despite this negative connotation, linguists have taken up the term and introduced the concept of 'eristic literacy' to characterize the specificity of academic literacy beyond the manifold discipline-specific writing cultures. The foundations for this were laid in the 1990s by Harald

8 Cf. among others Jamison 2016, Li/Casanave 2012, and Pecorari 2003.

9 Humboldt 1964 [1810]: 257, my English translation. In German: "etwas noch nicht ganz Gefundenes und nie ganz Aufzufindendes."

Weinrich and Konrad Ehlich. Weinrich spoke of the "criticism imperative" in science, according to which a critical examination of existing knowledge is a necessary condition for scientific activity and writing.[10] Ehlich pointed out that academic texts do not only have an assertive dimension but also an eristic dimension because they are applied to challenge existing knowledge.[11] Since the 2010s, the establishment and elaboration of the concept of 'eristic literacy' has been largely driven by the linguists Helmuth Feilke and Katrin Lehnen.[12]

Now that the importance of questioning and criticizing in academic writing has been highlighted, one can note that referring to existing knowledge of course not only occurs through argumentation and critique. Rather, we can assume that in science there is always something like a "realm of dispute" and a "realm of reliability" to use a compelling pair of terms from Winfried Thielmann.[13] While the realm of dispute refers to all the research findings whose validity is still being discussed and negotiated by a certain community, the realm of reliability is that part of shared knowledge that is recognized as undisputable and binding. Researchers use to refer to it in an affirmative way. Nevertheless, we should keep the concept of eristic literacy in mind because we can assume that in the paradigm of modern science new knowledge always has to cross the realm of dispute before it reaches the binding realm of reliability. At this point, however, we can state that modern scientific practice always includes an affirmative or critical reference to previous knowledge.

In academic texts, this reference to existing knowledge takes the shape of intertextuality. It is a very specific form of intertextuality that can be described with Thorsten Pohl as "explicitly controlled intertextuality."[14] According to Pohl, this explicitly controlled intertextuality is characterized by the following aspects:

1) The references to other texts have to meet the highest standards of precision.[15] This occurs in the form of precise source citations and an appropriate citation apparatus.

10 Cf. Weinrich 1994: 3; in German: "Kritikgebot."
11 Cf. Ehlich 1995: 329.
12 Cf. Steinseifer/Feilke/Lehnen 2019.
13 Thielmann 2013: 51, in German: "Streitzone" and "Verbindlichkeitszone."
14 Pohl 2007: 294; in German: "explizit kontrollierte Intertextualität."
15 Cf. ibid.

2) Authors have to be aware of references to other texts and they have to make them identifiable to readers by marking them meticulously with the appropriate means.[16] At first glance, this second aspect may seem not so distinct from the first one, but by 'marking them with appropriate means,' Pohl asserts that in most cases markers like footnotes or in-text citations have to be accompanied by explicit linguistic introductions of references. One can think here of signal phrases like "According to XY" or "XY states that."
3) An academic text usually 'does' something with the texts it refers to. It relates to them affirmatively or critically, which is to be indicated in both cases.[17] This confirmative or critical intertextual relationship needs to be signaled with linguistic means like "As XY has shown in his/her influential study" or "XY makes no attempt here to differentiate between," etc.

All three of these aspects described by Pohl are fundamental, yet we can note some differences concerning their relevance:

If a text completely lacks citation – aspect (1) –, it usually cannot be considered an academic text. It would then be perceived as an essay or at best as a popular science text. If there is a partial absence of citation, i.e., if some of the intertextual references are marked by citations and others are not, then the category of plagiarism comes into play and the text cannot pass as a proper academic text either.

As for aspects (2) and (3) – the linguistic signaling of intertextuality – the conventions and norms are more diffuse and discipline-specific. Roughly speaking, we can say that in the natural sciences a reference to binding knowledge can, in many cases, occur without signal phrases, and in-text citations can be sufficient. In the cultural sciences and humanities, where it is all about discourses, cultural phenomena and their interpretation, this is different. No matter if the engagement with the source is affirmative or critical, it is in almost all cases necessary to introduce references linguistically.

Thus, in the humanities, we would always tend to expect an explicit linguistic signaling of intertextuality in academic texts. And going back to our example case, this seems to apply to the instructors as well, since the student authors of the seminar paper have complied with aspect (1) and have

16 Cf. ibid.

17 Cf. ibid.

indicated their sources in the form of in-text citations and bibliography. In contrast, they did not meet aspects (2) and (3) to a sufficient extent.

The question now is why exactly, in the eyes of an experienced academic, this neglect to include aspects (2) and (3) seems to be such an offense, that the instructors tended to place the paper on a level with plagiarism. Apparently, the instructors initially had only a diffuse perception that there was something wrong with the seminar paper and that it somehow did not meet the standards of academic writing. In a first attempt to determine more precisely what the offense or the failure was, they had first checked the student text with the university's plagiarism-checking software. The plagiarism-check, however, only confirmed that there were similarities with the source texts, but these sources were mostly correctly documented. The instructors had therefore realized that aspect (1) was met and that they could clearly exclude plagiarism. Still, they felt that the students had done something wrong, and they continued investigating the case by browsing citation manuals. There they came across the term 'patchwriting' and considered it appropriate to label the student's error. For them, the offense was so strong that they tended to consider patchwriting equal to plagiarism and were ready to grade the paper negatively. Since they were not sure if such a decision was covered by law, they turned to the lawyer in the office of the university's Study Director.

Obviously, the way the instructors had dealt with the matter is quite comprehensible. For it is certainly not a core task of academics to precisely read up on concepts of writing-didactics. Nor do they need to reflect in detail on academic intertextuality norms. They need to do this even less, since experienced academic writers handle the standards and conventions of academic writing largely as practical know-how, which is not automatically accessible to systematic reflection. Of course, academics too operate with explicit knowledge about the genre rules of academic texts, e.g., with knowledge about citation systems or with certain structuring conventions like the IMRAD structure.[18] However, implicit knowledge makes up the main part.

This is a basic argument for the questions that came up with the case example: Why did the instructors react so strongly to the student's patchwriting and why did they perceive it as something as serious as plagiarism? Since the implicitness of genre knowledge poses a methodological problem, one would probably need empirical research to solve it definitively. What I would like to

18 The acronym 'IMRAD' stands for the following structure: Introduction, Material/Methods, Results, and Discussion.

elaborate on here is some hypotheses that would have to be empirically tested later on.

In the attempt to find an explanation for the instructors' reaction, at first, I remembered observations made when reading student papers during my doctoral studies in Romance Literature. Sentences like: "Boccaccio develops his institutional argument most fully in the defense of poetry in the Author's Conclusion of the *Decameron* (cf. Eisner 2013: 21),"[19] used to give me the impression that something was wrong. If the person had written: "As Eisner pointed out, Boccaccio develops […]," everything would have been sound. With the first version, however, the impression arises that something is reproduced without distance, as if it had not even occurred to the student that this was a statement by Eisner that could also be questioned and not to be taken for granted. It even seems as if the student was simply confusing a philologist's observation on a text by Boccaccio with a fact. At this point the concept of 'fact' becomes important.

Patchwriting and Fact Writing

Relying on implicit genre knowledge, one can say in a first approximation, that when reading such a sentence in a student paper, the impression arises that facticity is falsely attributed to a simple statement that still has to be discussed and verified. This leads to the assumption that the absence of explicit linguistic signaling of intertextuality can become a marker for facticity in academic texts. Or, to put it another way: Given the eristic grounding of academic communication, the absence of linguistic intertextuality markers leads to the perception that the respective content can be referred to as something factual.

The confusion caused by sentences like the one quoted above seems to result from dissonant experiences that we have when reading them. This experience of dissonance arises because, on the one hand, the in-text citation clearly indicates that someone else's statement is being referenced. And, on the other hand, according to the rules of eristic-based scholarly communication, the in-text citation triggers the expectation that the author will likewise signal her or his perspective on the reference in the form of an introduction to or a comment on it. This expectation is not fulfilled, however, because the author's perspective on the reference is missing.

19 Fictional example based on Eisner 2013: 21.

In the reader's perception, then, the disappointed expectation triggered by the missing of the author's perspective makes its absence all the more palpable. What is more, the perception that an author's perspective is missing in turn triggers the impression of facticity. This may seem paradoxical and therefore needs to be analyzed more closely – even more so, since the impression of facticity is due to the implicit genre knowledge of academics. It occurs below the threshold of reflection and is rarely based on a systematic consideration of philosophy of science. What is intuitively perceived as factual in the academic context is the following:

1) Something that has not yet been explained, analyzed, systematized, or interpreted. For example, we could say that the starting point of this paper is the fact that a group of instructors approached the legal department with an inquiry about patchwriting, and the goal of the paper is to analyze and interpret that fact.
2) On the other hand, what appears to be fact in scientific communication is something that is accepted by a research community as shared knowledge and no longer needs to be discussed.

(ad 1) As far as the first of these two conceptions of 'fact' is concerned, we are confronted with an understanding of 'fact' that we are also familiar with from everyday life. In our everyday lives, we perceive phenomena and events as facts, even when they are situated beyond interpretation. For example, we use the phrase 'the fact is' (or more explicit: 'Be that as it may, the fact is') when we want to override possible interpretations of a phenomenon and put them up for debate. According to this everyday understanding of fact, a 'fact' is something that has not yet been processed, something that is beyond interpretation and as well beyond valuation. This everyday understanding of fact corresponds to the epistemological perspective of empiricism and positivism. For empiricist and positivist epistemology/philosophy of science, 'facts' are, as Wilhelm Halbfass and Peter Simons write in their article on "fact," "the unprocessed basic material of cognition, not affected by interpretations and hypotheses."[20] In this meaning, 'fact' is still contained in our intuitive understanding of scientific practice.

(ad 2) The second understanding of 'fact,' which is effective in the practice of academic communication and writing is employed when we attribute fac-

20 Halbfass/Simons 1998: 911.

ticity to those elements of knowledge that are considered binding and valid by a research community. In this understanding, a fact is what a research community assumes to be something given in the sense that the research community has given it to itself or – in other words – in the sense that the community has 'made' it (as contained in the Latin root of the word fact, *factum*, 'something that has been made'). And 'having been made' means in this case that a research community has elaborated upon, discussed, examined, questioned, criticized, defended, developed, etc. an element of knowledge until it became consensual. The researchers have thus brought it, with more or less effort, through the realm of dispute into the realm of reliability. As science and technology studies have shown, this is the case even with so-called 'scientific facts,' which are supposedly only 'discovered.'

Thus, before a scientific statement acquires factual or fact-like status in this sense, eristic activity has usually taken place. We could also say more casually: In science, there is a certain amount of argumentation or debate until something is indisputable. Once consensus has been reached, the eristic activity stops. And with the suspension of the eristic activity, we also enjoy a suspension of the necessity to explicitly introduce a scientific statement or to comment on it when writing about it. As Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar have shown in their analysis of scientific statements in *Laboratory Life. The Construction of Scientific Facts*: The more accepted, consensual, and taken for granted a statement is, the fewer signal phrases are used when reference is made to it.[21]

With that in mind, I can now return to the patchwriting issue in the example case and answer the question of why we can conceive patchwriting as unintentional fact writing: The students' patch-written paper contained references but lacked signal phrases. This lack of signal phrases, within academic communication, acts as a rhetorical agent that triggers the expectation that a statement or a proposition is factual or has fact-like status. As this expectation belongs to the implicit genre knowledge of the academic reader, it acts in an intuitive, non-reflective way. As such, both of the conceptions of fact discussed above are activated in the reader's expectation: (1) the positivist conception of fact as something that has not yet been processed, analyzed or interpreted and (2) the consensual conception of fact as an element of knowledge that in a specific academic community is taken for granted and belongs

21 Latour/Woolgar 1986: 75–88. Their observations condense to the insight that a "fact is nothing but a statement with no modality […] and no trace of authorship." (Ibid.: 82).

to its realm of reliability. In the perception of an academic reader, it is neither permissible to present a referenced statement as something unprocessed and uninterpreted nor to simply pass it off as consensual knowledge if it was not sufficiently exposed to or shaped by eristic activity. Therefore, the confusion caused by a patch-written student paper comes from the violation of an implicit convention of academic communication according to which the absence of signal phrases indicates the facticity or fact-like status of a statement. If an intertextual reference is marked by an in-text citation and not framed by a signal phrase, it gives the impression that there is an unwarranted attribution of facticity. We can assume that students make this unwarranted attribution of facticity or fact-like status to statements from sources because they are unfamiliar with the corresponding (implicit) convention of academic communication and we can therefore suppose that the false assignment of facticity or fact-like status, which students make by patchwriting, occurs unintentionally. In this sense, we can understand the patchwriting from our example as non-intentional fact writing.

But before turning to the students' perspective and the unintentional character of their mistake, I would like to refer to a contextual aspect that seems significant to fully understand the example case at issue.

A Sideglance: Plagiarism Scandals and Sensitivity to Norms

This contextual aspect arises from the circumstances in which the request concerning the patch-written seminar paper was made. The request was submitted at the end of January 2021, a few weeks after an Austrian federal minister had to resign because of accusations of plagiarism. This may be a coincidence, but we cannot deny that the tendency to treat a patch-written seminar paper the same as plagiarism is an extremely strong reaction to a mistake that probably happens frequently in student papers. This strong reaction might have to do with the discomfort that the plagiarism scandals of recent years have caused among academics.

These plagiarism scandals have not only led to the resignation of top-ranking politicians, they have also put pressure on universities: For every time a case of plagiarism is discovered and discussed in public, universities face accusations of failing to adequately monitor and enforce compliance with their quality standards. To protect themselves from this kind of accusation, almost all universities in the German-speaking countries, by now, have anchored

commitments to the so-called best practice standards in their charters and mission statements and have implemented the use of instruments such as plagiarism-detection software.

However, it seems that these measures are not enough to eliminate the danger and the anxiety of being condemned by the public. Rather, we can observe a dynamic interplay between public accusation of academia and its self-disciplining process. The sociologist Peter Weingart explains this phenomenon from a systems theory perspective: He states a new kind of coupling of the social subsystem of science and the subsystem of the media where the latter has become a constant observer of the former. This constant observation has urged the subsystem of science to make public its internal rules, which until then had been inexplicit and largely unknown to the public. Once made public in the form of 'Codes of Conduct', these rules not only act as a binding framework within the scientific community, but become also a reference for the public when observing and judging science. Weingart notes that this dynamic interplay potentially sets in motion a spiral that pushes rules and demands, the concerns and anxieties related to academic writing higher and higher.[22]

With regard to our example case, we can assume that this interplay of external control and internal self-regulation of universities not only fosters a tendency to codify internal rules but also increases the sensitivity to implicit academic norms like the handling of facts. This increased sensitivity to norms may have made the instructors of our example feel so uncomfortable with the inappropriate factualization inherent to the students' patchwriting. If we assume that the combination of external control and increased internal self-regulation makes implicit norms palpable, it is likely that these implicit norms concern central aspects of research and academic writing. It seems, then, that we are confronted with the violation of a vital academic norm when assertations that do not yet belong to the realm of reliability and are therefore not yet granted fact-like status are treated as factual. The violation seems to consist in skipping the process of debate and intellectual negotiating at the core of research and academic writing practices.

22 Weingart 2005: 141–144.

Patchwriting as a Learning Phenomenon

Generally speaking, students do not adopt patchwriting with the intention to provoke or to deceive their instructors. They adopt it out of inexperience in academic writing – for academic writing is a most complex skill that students acquire gradually by undergoing a learning process. The problem in the discussed case was a lack of knowledge of genre rules and the inappropriate factualization resulting from it. If we look for explanations of how students learn to master the academic genre, we can rely on the insights of linguistic writing development research. Torsten Steinhoff, for example, assumes that students who learn to write academic texts first start with an inadequate use of academic language that he calls "context inappropriate."[23] They then go through various learning stages and finally develop a "contextual fit" by using a "context appropriate" academic language.[24]

Among the learning stages indicated in Steinhoff's model, we can concentrate on the stage of "imitation" here. Imitation occurs at the basic level and means that students try to imitate the formal linguistic characteristics of academic texts.[25] They rely for instance on heavy use of the passive voice and nominalization, accumulate labored vocabulary and strive for overlong sentences. The result usually is a linguistically overly complex text with a lack of consistency in content. According to Steinhoff, this happens because: "In imitation, form is separated from content, and the focus is on form."[26] Nevertheless, imitation is a powerful learning tool. Students linguistically learn a lot from the imitated academic texts; they gradually begin to use the imitated linguistic means consciously and appropriately till they reach the so-called contextual fit.

If we now try to locate patchwriting in Steinhoff's model, we can say that it is probably the most basic form of imitation. Students who adopt patchwriting do not imitate the academic style in general, but they imitate two most basic elements of academic writing: First, they imitate the convention of marking intertextuality by giving a source and second, they imitate the source itself by rephrasing it word by word. With Thorsten Pohl we can therefore say that patchwriting is a form of "developmentally implicit – and thus

23 Steinhoff 2007: 137, in German: "kontextinadäquater Sprachgebrauch."

24 Ibid., in German: "kontextuelle Passung" and "kontextadäquater Sprachgebrauch."

25 Cf. ibid.: 143–145.

26 Ibid.: 144.

[…] uncontrolled – intertextuality."[27] We could even say more precisely that it is a form of mis-controlled intertextuality, because students adopt patchwriting out of an intention to control the fidelity to the source at the content level. When they rephrase a source by changing the source's words one by one, they want to make sure that they do not distort its content; and in doing so they end up by creating the effect of an inappropriate factualization of the referenced statements. However, Pohl could show that this implicit and uncontrolled intertextuality decreases later in the students' learning process in favor of the already quoted explicitly controlled intertextuality that is, as we saw, typical for academic texts.

To conclude this section about the reasons for patchwriting in the learning process of students, we can state that patchwriting is a phenomenon of implicit and mis-controlled intertextuality that occurs in the early stages of academic writing. It can be understood as the most basic form of imitation described by Steinhoff, which is a learning strategy adopted to get into academic writing. The causes of this extreme form of imitation are firstly a lack of discipline-specific subject matter knowledge. For students in the early stages, the contents of the sources are new, unfamiliar, and therefore difficult to understand and rephrase. Secondly, inexperienced writers lack understanding of the aim of scientific communication and its eristic quality and, thirdly, they are not yet capable to evaluate if an assertation belongs to the taken-for-granted or to the disputed area of the discipline and has fact-like status or not.

Conclusion

I started with an example that had emerged in our everyday Writing Center practice. A group of instructors wanted to know if a patch-written seminar paper authored by a group of BA-level students had to be treated the same as a plagiarized text. To answer this, I basically raised two questions: What specifically have students done wrong when patchwriting? And why did this trigger such a strong reaction among the instructors? My answer to the first question was: Patchwriting is a violation of specific academic intertextuality rules. It goes along with a not further elaborated and thus inappropriate attribution of facticity to the academic statements of others. Since patchwriting

27 Pohl 2007: 295.

occurs as an unintended effect of the learning process students undergo when they familiarize themselves with academic writing, I labeled patchwriting as unintentional fact writing. With regard to the instructors' strong reaction, I suggested considering plagiarism scandals as contextual amplifiers that lead to an increased sensitivity to implicit norms of the academic discourse. These norms tend to become palpable especially when they regard core aspects of research and academic writing like dealing with the facticity of assertations.

While I could draw on extensive linguistic writing development research to describe patchwriting as a learning effect and as a violation of academic intertextuality norms, I had to hypothesize when going beyond the textual level and describing the meaning of this violation in terms of pragmatics. The effect of the violation of intertextuality norms is usually received intuitively by readers and seems to arise from an absence of certain rhetorical patterns. According to the conventions of the eristically-grounded academic communication, this absence is a marker for facticity or fact-like status. Although I could draw on science studies, especially on Latour and Woolgar, concerning the assumptions about the connection between rhetorical patterns and the attribution of facticity, more empirical research would be needed here to test the raised hypotheses. An aspect that I have neglected and that needs to be examined in more detail later on concerns the connection between patchwriting and the scientific-theoretical sensitization that students undergo as they advance in their programs of study. For the everyday professional practice of academics, a central conclusion can be drawn from the discussed questions: Patchwriting is the effect of a learning process that should be addressed as such. Rather than locating the phenomenon in the sphere of legal violations, it seems more productive to consider it an attempt of students to gain access to academic discourse and writing. A possible response to patchwriting could therefore be to show students how academic intertextuality works by analyzing discipline-specific examples with them.

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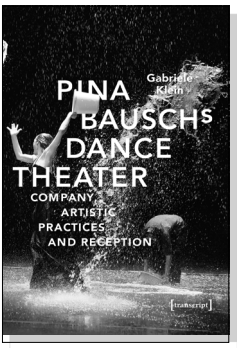

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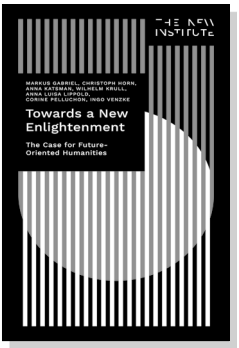

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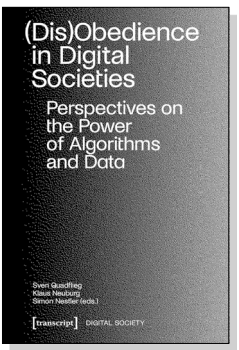

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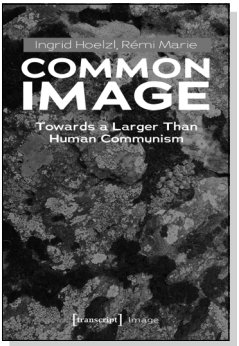

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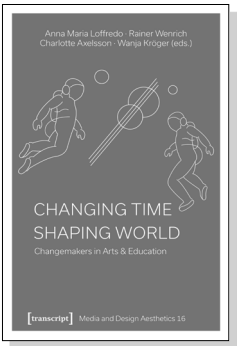

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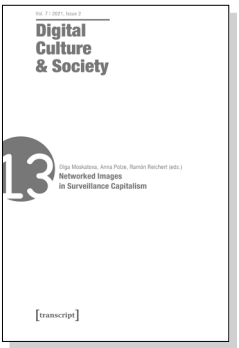

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