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Plagiarism, Greed, and the Dumbing Down of Performance Studies

On the overleaf of Philip Auslander's new book *Theory for Performance Studies* (Routledge 2008) there is the following text:

Theory for Performance Studies: A Student's Guide is a clear and concise handbook to the key connections between performance studies and critical theory since the 1960s. Philip Auslander looks at the way the concept of performance has been engaged across a number of disciplines.

Beginning with four foundational figures - Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, and Saussure - Auslander goes on to provide guided introduction to the major theoretical thinkers of the past century [...].

Brisk, thoughtful, and engaging, this is an essential first volume for anyone who works in theatre and performance studies today.

The key words in the above proclamation are: "Philip Auslander looks at" and "Auslander goes on to." The fact is, more than 90% of the book is plagiarized from William E. Deal's and Timothy K. Beal's 2004 Routledge book, *Theory for Religious Studies*.

The theorists discussed in the two books are identical; the order in which they are presented is identical; the wording in the two books is almost entirely identical; the overall length of the two books is identical (168 pages). There is one significant difference: the Deal and Beal book is "copyright 2004 by Taylor & Francis Books, Inc." (Routledge's parent company) while Auslander's book is "copyright 2008 Philip Auslander." Auslander makes the legal claim that the book is his. When I asked him about the plagiarism, he emailed me that he did not feel the book was plagiarized because Deal and Beal signed a contract that gave Routledge the right to use their material in anyway Routledge determined - including, it seems, letting Auslander copyright it.

But a rose by any other name smells as sweet.

And this plagiarism stinks.

The plagiarism first came to my attention when *TDR* Associate Editor Mariellen Sandford passed on an email she received asking her if she had seen an article in the August 5, 2008 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (<http://chronicle.com/temp/email2.php?id=dzmmh8bYkwqrGPrkzwmwzs4F6xpCPzP6yS>). The article is titled, "2 Authors Say Routledge Recycled Their Work Without Credit." From *The Chronicle* article:

But this isn't your average plagiarism case. Back in 2005, Mr. Deal and Mr. Beal signed an agreement with Routledge, allowing the company to use the material in their book however it saw fit, provided they were given credit and royalties. Routledge planned a series of introductory books, dubbed *Theory 4. Theory for Religious Studies* would be the first volume.

Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal—the rhyming co-authors—never thought the agreement, which they now regret signing, meant that their work could be lifted more or less whole cloth and put under someone else's name. And the authors received neither the promised credit—nor, initially, the promised royalties, they said. [...]

Auslander [...] said he sees nothing wrong with copying most of the book and reacted strongly when a reporter asked if he had committed plagiarism. [...]

Talia Rodgers [the Routledge editor in charge of the book], says the failure to credit Mr. Beal and Mr. Deal was an oversight. Ms. Rodgers says she does not think Mr. Auslander's use of the text—for instance, assiduously changing each "we" to an "I"—was unethical. "If he agrees with a certain statement, then changing the 'we' to an 'I'—I don't think that's a problem," she says. Besides, she says, she was unable to keep a close eye on the project. "I inherited an enormous number of Bill [Germano's, a former Routledge editor] books when he left, so there's a limit to the amount of monitoring I can do," she says. [...]

Since the publication of *Theory for Religious Studies*, there have been four other books in the series (including Mr. Auslander's). They have all, to some degree, used the first book's structure, and in some cases its exact words.

Because Routledge is such an important publisher for performance studies; and because Talia Rodgers has been such a supportive editor at Routledge; and because Auslander is a leading figure in performance studies and a *TDR* contributing editor, I - and I hope not me alone - need to go into this more deeply. And, putting my cards on the table right now, we need to absolutely oppose and condemn this practice, stop it immediately, and make sure it does not happen again.

Happily, after several long phone calls, Rodgers sent me the following:

This is a deeply regrettable incident - but it must be stressed that it is only that: an isolated incident related to one series which has now been discontinued. We have never published anything like this before, there are no further books under contract, and we will not publish anything like this in the future. Without wishing to minimize the debate which has developed around this issue, we don't see any connection to - or implications for - other books published by Routledge, in performance studies or any other field, past or present. We remain committed to innovative, ground-breaking books which contribute significantly to scholarship and pedagogy.

Basically, the incident is over, but its implications and aftermath are not. The plagiarism apparently was hatched by William Germano, Routledge's longtime New York editor who is now the Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences at Cooper Union. His bio there states: "For over twenty years he [Germano] directed programs in scholarly publishing, first as editor-in-chief at Columbia University Press and then as vice-president and publishing director at Routledge." Germano left Routledge before Auslander's book was in print. But he certainly knew that *Theory for Performance Studies* was a ripoff of *Theory for Religious Studies*. How that qualifies him to be Dean I leave for you to figure out. Both the Deal & Beal and the Auslander emerged under Germano's tutelage. What Auslander did, Germano encouraged, and Rodgers condoned is unacceptable, unethical, intellectually dishonest.

But we need to go further than applaud Rodgers for correcting the mistake. We need to distinguish among several practices of "sampling," "borrowing," and/or "creative stealing." One shoe does not fit all feet. What goes on as

artistic practice cannot go on as scholarship. And constructing a collage or complexly recycling materials within artworks is fundamentally different than lifting 90% of someone else's book, copyrighting it in your own name, and publishing it as your own work. Artists who sample or deconstruct-reconstruct are quoting/collaging in ways that make the sources clear or totally deconstruct or absorb the sources making them into something new and different. This is true in my own work (*Dionysus in 69*, *Commune*, and *Prometheus Project* for three examples) or in the Wooster Group or in hiphop and in the visual arts and performance art. But even if source materials are bootlegged, disguised, and misrepresented, the "rules" of art-making are different than what ought to guide scholarship.

At one very important level, scholarship is about citation, referencing, and giving credit to predecessors and parallels. Scholarship is building an historical-processual accounting of the emergence of ideas. It includes recycling and repetition, of course, but with due credit given; and with the addition of significant new materials and/or insight. This is precisely what the Auslander book (and I suppose the other bogus volumes in the Routledge series) does not provide. There are no new insights; there is no new material.

So why did Routledge want Auslander to "write" such a book? Greed. Follow the money.

It is cheap to take one book and issue it under several titles. Amazon tells me that a hardback copy Auslander's 168 page book (I use the possessive ironically) costs \$110 (the paperback edition goes for \$27.95). Many libraries will buy the hardback which will withstand use better than paperback. The book will sell because Auslander is a big name in performance studies and Routledge a respected press.

This shoddy practice is very bad for performance studies. Not only don't we want this kind of thing going on in our discipline but also it is not true that the key theorists of performance studies are *identical* to those in religious studies. Yet lazy Auslander didn't bother to add or subtract a single name to/from the list Deal and Beal supplied. Therefore, the theorists of performance studies *does not include* J.L. Austin, Joseph Roach, Peggy Phelan, Dwight Conquergood, Herebert Blau, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Joseph Roach, Diana Taylor, Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, Bertolt Brecht (as a theorist), Antonin Artaud, Eugenio Barba, Gregory Bateson, Guillermo Gomez-Pena (as a theorist), Augusto Boal, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Allan Kaprow (as a theorist), John Cage (as a theorist), Michael Kirby, Brian Sutton-Smith, D. W. Winnicott, Jon McKenzie, Peter Burger, Amelia Jones, Patrice Pavis, Roger Caillois, Johan

Huizinga, ... Richard Schechner. You may want to add or subtract luminaries. But the bottom line remains: the Deal & Beal in Auslander's clothes is *not* a definitive book of *performance studies theorists*. It is mostly the Frankfurt School and the post-structuralists. It is almost entirely European - despite the fact that performance studies, so designated, originated in North America. And it is 24 men out of a total of 29 names.

I believe I was the first author professing performance studies to be recruited by Routledge. My *Performance Theory* came out in 1988. That book was an updated edition of my *Essays on Performance Theory* published in 1977 by Drama Books Specialists. So wasn't I doing exactly what I am accusing Auslander of? Not at all. First, I am the author of both books. Second, the title page of the Routledge book clearly states "Revised and expanded edition." Third, the very first sentence in 1988 book states: "The differences between this edition of *Performance Theory* and the one published in 1977 are considerable." Then I detail not only the differences but where the essays first appeared, in various journals. In other words, I was - and am - transparent about these matters. Auslander is worse than opaque. He and his editors at Routledge were intentionally deceptive. Liars.

I hope this "incident" does not presage a decline at Routledge. Recently, Elinor Fuchs pointed out in her TDR review of Hans-Theis Lehmann's *Post Dramatic Theatre* that the English edition was severely shortened, materials were moved around, and some text written by the translator - all without clear indications of what went on. I myself have been told by Rodgers that my next book needs to be fairly short - to keep the price under control. The Routledge series of books on directors are all brief studies. Doubtlessly there are big pressures on trade publishers to remain profitable. And I admire Rodgers for doing what she can between a rock and a hard place. But what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett emailed me is a warning we should all take to heart:

Auslander puts forward a vision of performance studies that basically reverse engineers it to a core of foundational texts shared by virtually all humanities fields. That's why Routledge can just change the covers and sell the same stuff. That makes PS a "me too" field, rather than a field for which we could really write a thoughtful intellectual history that would be more than the boiler plate for any field's foundations and history. Show me a field that does not owe something significant to Freud and Marx and the other luminaries in the volume. This is a student's guide through boilerplate, which is why it doesn't matter if the

title of the book says "religion" or "performance studies." And, the boiler plate is basically cultural studies and critical theory to which PS has been reduced or with which it has been conflated to point of disappearance as a field with its own multi/inter/disciplinary history. What Routledge is saying is that all the "first volumes" that they intend as a guide for students are basically the same, so it does not matter if the same material is packaged and marketed to different niches, religion, performance, etc.

It's part of the Wikipediazation of scholarship. That a senior scholar as renowned as Auslander should put his name to this lipsynch scholarship is, I fear, a harbinger more than an abberation.