What Monkeys Teach Us about Authorship:

Toward a Distributed Agency in Digital Composing Practices

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Introduction

As a composition teacher endeavoring to spark controversial and yet interesting discussions in class, I have been drawn to the recent "monkey selfie" lawsuit (Slotkin, 2017), which productively adds to the theoretical framing of nonhuman authorship in digital media spaces. It started in an Indonesian forest, when a macaque monkey named Naruto took a series of photograph selfies with a camera belonging to British photographer David Slater. The selfie image ended up being uploaded on Wikipedia Commons as a public domain photograph. Citing copyright, Slater asked Wikipedia to remove the image, but was later sued by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), an animal protection organization, for violating the copyright of the monkey. The lawsuit soon swept through social media, culminating in the twitter posts with thousands of retweets by a Vlogger named Calum McSwiggan, who condemned PETA for "ruining the photographer" in the "monkey selfie" case (Gladwell, 2017). Even though the case has been settled with Naruto being denied his copyright, the lawsuit has drawn public attention to the issue of animal authorship and copyright. When I first introduced this news story to the students in my composition classes, their reaction was a mixture of surprise and amusement, as if they were trying to say "What? Are you serious?" The story may earn a similar reception from teachers and scholars, too. In the academic sphere, there has not been a shared understanding among postmodern and poststructural theorists of who assumes authorship for a text, i.e., whether the authorship is at the hands of the putative author, the reader, or the text itself (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1981; Foucault, 1987). Regardless of the disparate takes on the issue, the philosophical debate surrounding authorship has to be extended to the nonhumans.

Different from the longstanding tradition of engaging primarily with humans as rhetors in the linguistic and symbolic turns of rhetoric and composition, recent years have witnessed a growing scholarly interest in nonhuman rhetors and their authorship in digital media spaces. Animal and posthuman rhetoric brings to the fore the influence of nonhuman agents in composing practices (Barnett & Boyle, 2016; Boyle, 2016; Cooper, 2011), the presence of animal in Western rhetorical and political history (Hawhee, 2017; Kennedy, 1998; Massumi, 2014), and the ability of animals to co-author with humans (Bradshaw, 2010). Extending the posthuman discussion, the very definition of "authorship" in digital spaces awaits further disruption and problematization. Researchers in digital rhetoric and composition (Brooke, 2000; Howard & Davies, 2009; Lunsford & West, 1996), for instance, delve into the complexity of authorship issues in digital spaces, complicating the law governing notions of authorship and challenging the conventional "scare" techniques in teaching. In the past 20 years, a myriad of articles published on *Kairos* (DeLuca, 2015; Digirhet, 2008; Howard, 1998) have also expanded the scholarly discussion of authorship to incorporate digital citizenships, activism, and engagement. It is thus incumbent on us to become attuned to the changes brought about by the ever-changing landscape of digital ecologies. Technologies surfacing in the digital ecologies and pedagogies, such as Twitter and YouTube, call for a shift of focus from human engagement to nonhuman rhetors, including animals, in addition to human agents. Following and expanding the current scholarly framing of digital authorship, this webtext further explores the pedagogical possibilities of teaching with and through "monkey selfies." Specifically, I argue that the issue of animal authorship and copyright opens up new pedagogical avenues for challenging the static and fixed views of authorship in composing practices. Instead, moving from a conventional pedagogy prioritizing human agents to a distributed agency among humans and nonhumans, new

affordances and circumstances in digital ecologies provoke our colleagues and students to rethink and reconstruct the very notion of authorship in flux.

Theoretical Framing

Postmodern and Posthuman Definitions

There has not been a shared understanding among postmodern and poststructural theorists of who assumes authorship for a text, i.e., whether the authorship is at the hands of the putative author, the reader, or the text itself (Barthes, 1977; Derrida, 1981; Foucault, 1987). Despite being a critical approach rife with debates, the postmodern movement disrupts traditional notions of authorship that reduce knowledge production to individual works and contributions. Roland Barthes challenges conventional literary criticism that prioritizes the author in interpreting a text and argues for a redefinition of authorship that is reader-oriented. In "The Death of the Author," Barthes (1977) reconstrues texts as "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (p. 146). That is to say, as texts build on other texts, it is the reader who facilitates the intellectual exchange of the texts or sustains the dialogues in between. Nevertheless, Barthes's reader-oriented definition of authorship has been later complicated by Michel Foucault, who in "What is an Author?" questions the displacement between individuals and discourses in the aftermath of "the death of the author." Instead, Foucault brings to the fore the significance of "discourse" in framing authorship. As he notes, the designation of the author "points to the existence of certain groups of discourse and refers to the status of this discourse within a society and culture" (Foucault, 1987, p. 123). In this sense, Foucault reminds us of the need to investigate the function of discourses, or social contexts and cultural forces underlying the prioritization of certain

ideologies over others, in shaping our very understanding of what constitutes an author in creative works.

Given the postmodern critique of individual authorship, the longstanding tradition of engaging primarily with humans as rhetors in the linguistic and symbolic turns of rhetoric and composition awaits further disruption and complication. To this end, I follow a posthuman reading of rhetorical agency as distributed, dispersed, embodied, emergent, and enacted (Barnett & Boyle, 2016; Boyle, 2016; Cooper, 2011; Dobrin, 2015; Hawk, 2011; Sheridan et al., 2012; Shipka, 2011; Wysocki, 2004). Drawing heavily from Bruno Latour's actor-network theory, David M. Sheridan, Jim Ridolfo, and Antony J. Michel (2012) extend agency beyond anthropocentric traditions that succumb to a romantic understanding of autonomous subjects. As they assert, "agency does not evaporate, but is distributed across a fragile and complex dance among multiple and ontologically dispersed actors" (Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 107). The "distributed" conceptualization of agency can also be glimpsed in Wysocki's (2004) definition, wherein agency is fostered through an increased attention to "social forms" (p. 13) and to "historically-situated and contingent material structures" (p. 4). That is, social and material structures provide opportunities for human agents to exercise their agency in rhetorical practices. Due to the complexity of social and material relations, what is at stake here is that agency is not a property or value that can be attributed to individual rhetors.

Furthermore, reconfiguring agency as "exceeding the subject" (Sheridan et al., 2012, p. 106) and as distributed across multiple actors and relations, both human and nonhuman, opens up the possibility for investigating authorship and copyright issues beyond the single axis of human rationality and intentionality. The posthuman turn in rhetoric and composition, thus, signals a shift away from manifesting conscious awareness and toward articulating "serial encounters with

a variety of different relations" (Boyle, 2016, p. 551), heeding "nonconscious processes in providing meaning" (Cooper, 2011, p. 435), and recognizing "fundamentally fluid, flexible, and changeable identities" (Dobrin, 2015, p. 5). In other words, agency has been reframed as embedded and enacted in lived experiences and flexible relations that do not always result solely from human action and consciousness. For instance, if we reread the "monkey selfie" issue from a posthuman vantage point, it is manifest that the issue involves the rhetorical actions of multiple authors or agents—including the monkey who took the selfie, the photographer who claimed copyright to the selfie, the animal protection organization who brought up the issue of animal copyright, and the Vlogger who responded to the copyright issue—not to mention online platforms and digital apparatuses that further distributed the selfie. In this sense, the composition of the "monkey selfie" vivifies the posthuman manifesto that the multimodal and digital composing practices should rather be relocated at the confluence of multiple composers, audiences, and contexts.

More importantly, lying at the heart of the "monkey selfie" debate, or whether Naruto should be granted the copyright of his photographic work, is whether nonhuman rhetors, such as animals, are capable of assuming rhetorical agency just as humans do. This discussion signals rhetoricians' attempts to veer away from the view of rhetoric as solely a human act, since animals are also capable of performing rhetorical and symbolic action (Kennedy, 1998; Hawhee, 2017). The tendency to reframe animal agency in Western rhetorical history and composition practice continues to exert substantial influence on recent discussions in animal rhetoric. By way of bringing animal rhetors to the fore, these scholarly works reshape rhetorical history as co-created by humans and nonhumans. For instance, Debra Hawhee (2017) extends George A. Kennedy's (1998) discussion on animal rhetoric, tracing the agential roles played by animal

rhetors in co-constructing rhetorical canons such as Aristotle's *logos*. The active presence of animals in Western rhetorical and political history, thus, calls into question whether the language art is a purely human art and propels us to attend to nonhuman rhetors' authorship issues. The possibility of animals co-authoring with human beings (Bradshaw, 2010) and even surpassing human rationality (Massumi, 2014) further blurs the boundary between human and nonhuman creations. In *What Animals Teach Us about Politics*, the source of this webtext's title, Brian Massumi sheds light on how animals' creativity and agency are displayed through and embedded within the nonverbal ludic plays of combat and game. Animal play— such as the use of nonverbal gestures manifested in the "instantaneous back-and-forths between logical levels...and between domains of experience and the creative movements by which they [animals] surpass themselves" (Massumi, 2014, p.22)—not merely intertwines with but also exceeds reflexive and conscious acts.

The controversy over the "monkey selfie," as a case in point, gestures towards alternative definitions of authorship beyond the anthropocentric view of rhetorical agency. The lawsuit invokes interdisciplinary debates and discussions surrounding animal and nonhuman copyright, contesting the current judicial construct of "legal personhood." Even though "legal personhood" is not restricted to human individuals—since corporations, rivers, and sacred texts also possess legal personhood—animals are still passively perceived as "things" (Hutton, 2017, p. 100) by law, or properties owned by human beings. In this sense, despite the recent movements in nonhuman rights, the lawsuit further generates public conversations that query the questionable binary of animals as "things" *vis-à-vis* corporations as "legal persons." Resonating with the posthuman view of animal agency, PETA claims that Naruto's copyright is violated, arguing that the selfie image results from the "independent, autonomous action" of Naruto in manipulating

Slater's camera and in pressing the shutter button ("Naruto et al. v Slater," 2015, p. 2).

Nevertheless, granted that animals are capable of exercising agency in composing creative

works, it remains disputable if the selfie image emerges solely from Naruto's agential action.

One counterargument is that Slater provides Naruto with "the ambience and technological props"

(Pallante, 2016, p. 129) that are crafted to support the monkey's selfie taking. The digital

distribution of the selfie may likewise involve the interaction of human actors (such as Slater)

and nonhuman agents (such as photo editing software), that contributes to the design and

arrangement of the photograph as we now see it. As researchers and practitioners, we should,

hence, be wary of confining the notion of "agency" to single authors, whether they be human or

nonhuman, in the digital age. The next section of this webtext will focus on furthering the

discussion of distributed agency in digital media spaces.

Authorship in Digital Media Spaces

Aside from nonhuman rhetorical agency, the "monkey selfie" issue also calls our

attention to the circulation and distribution of original works in digital media spaces. Along with

the advent of digital technology comes new ways of distributing and circulating creative works.

Before we turn to the theoretical and pedagogical implications of authorship in multimodal and

digital composition, it is necessary to review how new material circumstances and developments

destabilize our pre-established conceptions about authorship and copyright in the academic

community.

Underlying the perpetuation of singular authors and the penalization of plagiarized (i.e.,

non-cited) texts is the dominance of market values and economic ideologies in academic

discourse communities. The recent decline in free access on the internet, not surprisingly,

coincides with the birth of monetized texts, by which means "textual content has become

commodified, put into motion in the capitalist system, forced to earn its keep by moving incessantly" (Johnson-Eilola, 2004, p. 203). Under this circumstance, teachers and practitioners continue to associate knowledge as a commodity to be sold to student consumers, thereby inadvertently entrenching an academic obsession with plagiarism, or as Andrea Lunsford and Susan West (1996) put it, endorsing a "false ownership" (p. 398) that emerges alongside the construction of autonomous subjects and singular authors. Singular authorship, however, has been demystified in digital composition studies (Losh, 2014; Porter, 2018; Seader, Markins, & Canzonetta, 2018) for failing to recognize language as a "shared resource" (Porter, 2018, p. 262) stemming from community rather than individual practices and for losing sight of the rapid distribution of copies resulting from new technologies and social networks. Articles published on *Kairos* since its 1998 special issue on "Copywrite, Plagiarism, and Intellectual Property" (Deluca, 2015; Digirhet, 2008; Howard, 1998) further delineate how the academic framing of copyright and plagiarism is subject to a hierarchical power relation between professionals and non-professionals in the academia. For instance, Rebecca Howard (1998) has problematized the academic convention of reducing authorship to full citations, which is differently evaluated for novice and experienced writers. As she argues, while plagiarism by student writers is penalized as a form of disobeying academic honesty, plagiarism by professional writers is celebrated as a way of foregrounding their own voices. Simply put, relegating the connotation of authorship to merely obeying citation rules is questionable, as "the pedagogical obsession with citation becomes a pedagogical obsession with denying students the possibility of authorship" (Howard, 1998, para. 5). Instead, the normalized and standardized ways of teaching copyright that focus on punishing and policing misuses of copyrighted materials should be replaced with a more complex understanding of plagiarism (Howard & Davies, 2009). Through this lens, Howard and

Davies outline the initiative to move beyond the conventional "scare" techniques in teaching and promote available means of preventing plagiarism—namely, engaging students in current discussions of intellectual property in new media spaces to unveil its complexity, and walking students through better practices of understanding and summarizing sources to achieve academic honesty.

Extending this more nuanced understanding of authorship may allow us to inhabit a critical space for bridging our cherished assumptions and new emergent possibilities. Equally important is the need to revise our conventional understanding and practices for addressing the changes brought about by digital media, as evidenced by the divergent voices championing or denouncing nonhuman authorship in the "monkey selfie" case. While nonhuman authorship would probably not have been a public concern decades ago, the issue has recently been propelled into the limelight, thanks to the advent of new media spaces. Digital hypertexts, remixes, and mashups incessantly pose a challenge to the traditional understanding of privacy as free from the "public gaze," under which circumstance "intellectual property laws that forbid people from copying and distributing a creator's work also seem out of place" (Jones & Hafner, 2011, p. 91). From this perspective, the postmodern and posthuman discussions surrounding authorship exert far-reaching impacts on issues such as intellectual property and academic honesty in composition studies and teaching practices. Conversations regarding the "death of the author" keep reverberating in new media spaces that have announced the "death of the hypertext." Citing as a case in point "Hypertext is Dead (Isn't it?)," a webtext published on *Kairos*, Collin Brooke (2009) foregrounds the multifaceted layers of mediation—the bringing together of multiple voices and contexts—through which process digital texts and hypertexts are rendered available. He notes that given their potential for creating a synergy of voices, and

positions, hypertexts are not bound by a single rhetorical purpose or focus but are rather assembled by multiple texts or artifacts.

Indeed, in everyday practices, it may be true that teachers still cling to the responsibility of warning students against the moral quagmire of recomposing beyond prescribed genres and conventions. However, remixing practice (Edwards, 2016; Johnson-Eilola & Selber, 2007; Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2008, 2017), or the "process of taking old pieces of text, images, sounds, video and stitching them together to form a new product" (Ridolfo & DeVoss, 2008, para. 9) is celebrated as a legitimate form of transformative work and creative composition. In this light, rhetoricians and practitioners need to consider the rhetorical objectives of recomposition in certain writing situations (Sheridan et al., 2012). By way of advancing a critical multimodal pedagogy that attends to remixing and recomposition, Sheridan et al. (2012) call upon researchers and practitioners to rethink canonical anthropocentric approaches in rhetorical education, such as prescriptive practices that rely solely on law governing notions of authorship and copyright. This critique, once again, finds parallels in the problematization of a single, uncontested author in composition studies (Lunsford & West, 1996) and the redefinition of authorship as dispersed across multiple material actors, structures, and practices. What is intriguing about the "monkey selfie" case, thus, is how multiple composers and audiences reshape the selfie photograph as a means of persuasion: while Slater profited from the image by maintaining that it was his creation, PETA alluded to the image for filing the copyright lawsuit against Slater, and yet McSwiggan circulated the image again in his Twitter post in defense of Slater. The question, thus, is not so much about whether individual rhetors should or should not exercise rhetorical agency as about how meanings undergo changes and remixes while being

composed and recomposed by multiple rhetors, both human and nonhuman, to achieve divergent rhetorical purposes.

Essentially, the emergence of new technologies in digital ecologies, such as Twitter and YouTube, ushers in a shift of focus from human agents to nonhuman rhetors, including technological interfaces, for articulating and speculating digital composing practices. With rhetorical agency being subject to complex systems of digital ecologies, the traditional assumptions of authorship as fixed and static will no longer suffice to keep up with the constant ecological shifts. Building on postmodern theorization of authorship, researchers in rhetoric and composition seek to revise canonical ideologies of writing. Brooke (2009) writes, "New media will transform our understanding of rhetoric as thoroughly as our training and expertise in rhetoric can effect a similar impact in discussions of new media" (p. 5). From this vantage point, technologies throughout history constantly change the dynamics and ecologies of authorship. The way we deploy writing as an extension of our physical memory is analogous to the means through which information technology further problematizes the dichotomy between the human and the nonhuman, the natural and the artificial. As such, it is paradoxical to adhere to a dichotomous nomenclature of technology *contra* nature: "As our memories and technologies have become even more artificial, they have done so only in so far as they circle back and approach the appearance of the natural" (Brooke, 2000, pp. 787-788). In other words, as human beings, we have been so used to setting "the natural" on a pedestal, since Plato's time, to the extent of relegating technological usage to a mere simulacrum of our physical experience. Contrastively, recent works in digital rhetoric (Brooke, 2009; Eyman, 2015) reconfigure digital media as generating activities and spaces, in which technology not only interfaces with the embodied practices of writing but also transforms our understanding of rhetorical agency. The

posthuman turn in rhetoric and composition, in this sense, puts a new spin on the means whereby we construe our existence as human beings in relation to technological inventions.

Resonating with this posthuman paradigm shift, the "monkey selfie" lawsuit triggers a spectrum of debates and repercussions regarding the legal construction of nonhuman authorship in digital media spaces. Conversations in legal and linguistic studies (Hutton, 2017; Kaminiski, 2017; Pallante, 2017), for instance, have extended the logic of animal authorship to digital algorithms, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and cyborg. Algorithmic authorship poses a challenge to the romantic framing of authorship as pertinent to human originality, since machines are also capable of producing creative works. Margot E. Kaminiski (2017) maintains that "it is harder to romanticize free expression as an essential output of human autonomy when machines can spew out news, poems, and co-eds" (p. 594). In today's digital age, co-authorship, as manifested in the use of a "paintbrush" in digital painting, further blurs the boundary between human agents and nonhuman actors in creative works. In a similar vein, new social relations arising from technological usage call for making room for emergent laws, e.g., "cyborg law." Aligning with the uptake of technology as an extension of our physical memory (Brooke, 2009), "cyborg law" rests on an "extended notion of the self" (Hutton, 2017, p. 101). From this perspective, instead of acting as a decorative "add-on," technology augments our modes of existence, which can be exemplified in the integration of modern cell phones into creating augmented human experience. As nonhuman created works continue to disrupt the construction of "authorship" and "copyright" in judicial discourses, our pedagogical practices in digital rhetoric and composition awaits disruption and extension as well to keep up with such discursive and material changes. In the next section of this webtext, I will discuss ways to build pedagogical

approaches that prepare us and our students for the ever-changing landscape of digital media

spaces.

Pedagogical Possibilities

To undertake a robust reworking of rhetorical agency in digital media spaces, scholars in

rhetoric and composition have become attuned to the pedagogical possibilities of merging the

divide between digital composition and public engagement. I concur with Marilyn Cooper

(2011) that "what we need is not a pedagogy of empowerment, but a pedagogy of responsibility"

(p. 443). Following Cooper's redefinition of rhetorical agency as emergent and enacted, what is

at stake now is no longer the initiative of empowering students to assert their individual agency

that has already become an integral part of their multimodal practices, but the need to propel

students to become public rhetors who respond to their relations with a conglomeration of

various actors in composition processes. Being responsive does not necessarily entail a solely

conscious activity, as I will discuss in greater detail in this webtext, but rather operate on both

conscious and nonconscious levels of perception. Recent articles on *Kairos* (DeLuca, 2015;

Digirhet, 2008) expand the digital rhetoric authorship to incorporate issues such as digital

citizenships, activism, and engagement. Articles including Katherine DeLuca's (2015) "Can We

Block These Political Thingys?" remind us of the ways whereby social media push forward the

advocacy of civic engagement and the creation of public rhetors. Similarly, Sarah Warren-Riley

and Elise V. Hurley (2017) uphold a multimodal public writing perspective that instantiates the

emergence of a digital advocacy from everyday and mundane rhetorical practices. In this light, I

contend that the issue of "monkey selfie" unveils pedagogical possibilities—i.e., sustaining

public writing advocacy and bridging reflexivity and practice—that subvert a fixed definition of

authorship and copyright. Below, I will focus on outlining the possibilities of teaching authorship and invention in digital and multimodal composition.

Sustaining Public Writing Advocacy in Digital Composing Practices

What do monkeys teach us about authorship? The lawsuit promotes further discussions about authorship and copyright, which may invigorate the multimodal public writing pedagogy that has recently blossomed in the scholarship of digital and multimodal composition. The recent scholarly discussion of multimodal public writing (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014; Sheridan et al., 2012; Warren-Riley & Hurley, 2017; Weisser, 2002) shifts the focus from abstract and detached theorizations to everyday and mundane rhetorical practices (such as Facebook posting and Tweeting). This multimodal public writing advocacy is in alignment with Sheridan et al. (2012)'s assertion that public contexts of writing and communities of practice can potentially yield a "kairotically" richer (p. 110) writing ecology, which, compared with conventional composition instruction, emphasizes the struggles of individual rhetors with rhetorical situations and encompasses a constellation of multiple actors and networks. While conventional composition classrooms place an emphasis on relatively fixed relations between teachers and students, their objectives and learning outcomes, the multimodal pedagogy taps into the multiplicity and flexibility of rhetorical situations that public rhetors encounter in their everyday lives. Through this lens, such a view of public writing also conjures up the conceptualization of objects and things as "vibrant actors, enacting effects that exceed (and are sometimes in direct conflict with) human agency and intentionality" (Barnett & Boyle, 2016, p.1). Extending the scholarly interest of engaging with "vibrant actors" in digital composition, I contend that mundane objects and things are also agential in creating a critical space for teaching authorship and copyright. The "monkey selfie" image, for example, generates more questions than answers

regarding who should assume authorship for nonhuman created works. The issue invites students to articulate multiple actors and stakeholders, including not only the monkey and the photographer who compose and recompose the selfie, but also the digital platforms that shift and challenge conventional understandings of authorship.
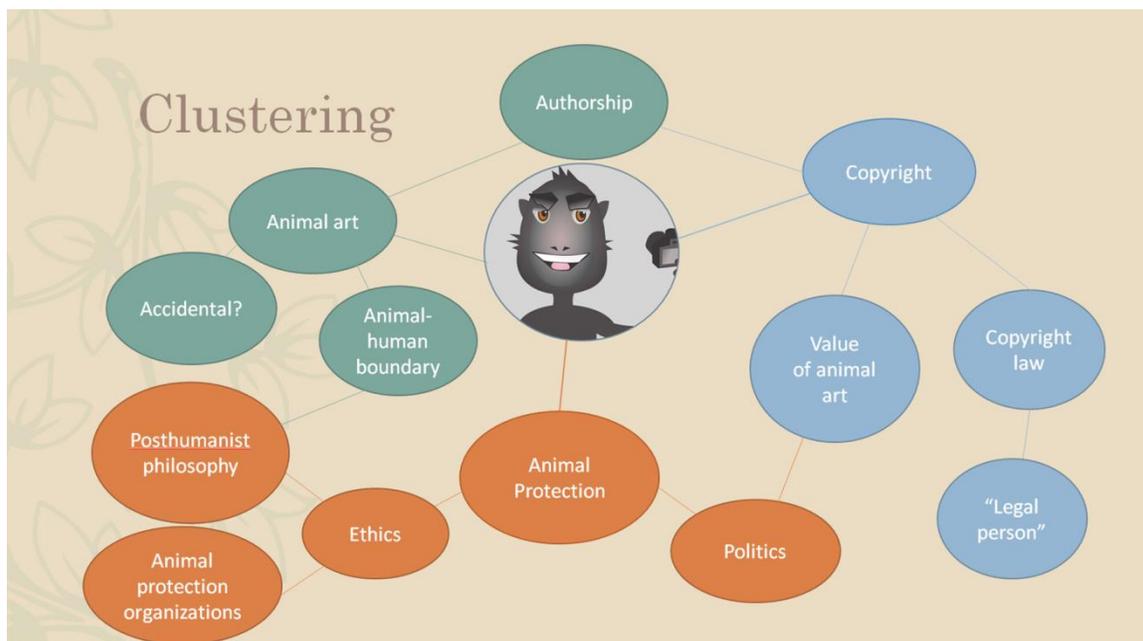
Figure 1. Using visual clustering to teach invention

One of the pedagogical implications the "selfie" image reveals is that nonhuman actors such as artworks, memes, and AI, open up the avenue for furthering invention practices. Visual arguments and digital activities provide an alternative entry point for positioning students' agency and creativity during the process of inventing composition topics (Kitalong & Miner, 2017, p. 53). Instead of implementing an anthropocentric framework that prioritizes human agency in invention practices, teachers and practitioners can think with online actors and apparatuses to produce more engaging inquiry questions. For English composition and research writing classes, we can invite students to brainstorm researchable topics related to nonhuman authorship. I have co-created with my first-year composition students a visual clustering (Figure

1) of potential topics emergent from the "monkey selfie" issue—including whether there exists a boundary between human-made and animal-made art and to what extent nonhuman artworks contain aesthetic values. My students reacted vigorously to the activity and brainstormed other potential topics such as animal protection and animal rights. Building on this invention activity, students were able to generate ideas about their own research topics. In this way, multimodal invention activities alike may cultivate a space for students to engage in more thought-provoking conversations about authorship issues in the public sphere.

Bridging Reflexivity and Practice in Digital Composing Practices

The "monkey selfie" issue also teaches us to bridge reflexivity and practice in multimodal pedagogy. New digital applications, apparatuses, and affordances continue to transform our traditional assumptions and institutional practices that separate theory from practice. This stance signifies a circle back to the epistemic gap advanced by Wysocki (2004), i.e., the gap between "writing about how to analyze or design isolated individual texts" and "writing about the broad contexts and functioning of media structures in general" (p. 6). As I have mentioned earlier in this webtext, it is not my intention to argue against the value of conscious awareness in reflection. Rather, I follow the call to promote a pedagogical approach that embeds reflexivity in practice, or, borrowing Boyle's (2016) words, to enact rhetorical actions that "operate on nonconscious levels with which we exercise that embeddedness" (p. 538). That is to say, we should prepare our students to attend more to their relations with other actors and agents in multimodal and digital composition, while exploring open-ended possibilities: "I do not yet know what a (writing) body can do; after which, we attempt to find out, repeatedly" (Boyle, 2016, p. 552). In this light, the "monkey selfie" issue prompts us to think beyond current discursive and material practices and towards changes that may take place

in the future. While "animal authorship" may not be a legitimate concern under the current legal

definition of authorship as germane to only "legal persons," how may the definition look similar

or different fifty years from now given progress to be made and directions to be charted in

animal and nonhuman rights movement? In the same vein, moving beyond a focus on human

agency in writing pedagogy does not necessarily foreclose possibilities for nurturing criticality in

composing practices. Instead, balancing theory and practice, reflexivity and unconsciousness,

propels students to inquire not so much into how much they already know as into what is yet to

be unveiled.

Figure 2. Creating artworks to remix digital composition

Additionally, criticality does not always unfold along a linear and static trajectory. I, for

instance, have drawn and designed an animated GIF for this webtext using CorelDRAW and

Adobe Photoshop (See the home page). Digital creations and visual graphics, rather than being

neutral platforms of delivery, constantly mold and reshape human composers' rhetorical

objectives. Even though I was not fully aware of my artistic intentions at the outset, the graphic design platforms I used to create the artwork, predisposed my way of approaching the "monkey selfie" case. That is, by depicting a cartoon monkey (Figure 2)—as opposed to a realistic monkey—who grins at the camera while taking a selfie of himself, I convey to the audience, in a tacit and subtle fashion, that animals do exercise agency in composing creative works. At the same time, the construction of animal agency in the animated GIF is subject to scrutiny. That is, by way of portraying the monkey as exhibiting human behavior and characteristics, I may have inadvertently injected a humanized view of animals and nonhuman agents into the artwork. Using artworks and parodies in digital composition, students can also be encouraged to remix and recompose their research topics, such as those related to authorship and copyright. Memes and animated GIFs, I believe, constitute powerful means of persuasion whereby our students and public rhetors, not only creatively recompose digital images and visual artifacts, but also critically examine the evolution of their beliefs and assumptions.

Situating reflection in practice, thus, challenges students to go beyond discussing authorship issues and move towards producing creative works in new media spaces. For more advanced classes in new media studies and digital rhetoric research, teachers can prompt students to create and circulate digital artworks—e.g., memes and animated GIFs in response to a controversial issue of nonhuman authorship—e.g., cyborg and monkey selfies. Specifically, to reflect upon their recomposition and circulation processes, students will respond to more in-depth questions about the rhetorical choices they make and the potential consequences of those choices. Part of the digital advocacy initiative is to help students grow into responsible public rhetors who scrutinize and articulate the influence of material circumstances on their

understanding of authorship. As such, the following questions may generate further questions and critical discussions.

1. To what extent have you considered the issues of authorship and copyright while recomposing and redistributing online texts, such as creating and sharing animated GIFs?

2. How does your rhetorical choice and (in)attention to authorship and copyright reflect the ways through which knowledge is distributed in today's age of new media?

3. Due to the tacit presence or even absence of authorship in multimodal and digital composition, how do you evaluate online creative works to ensure the credibility of information being presented?

4. To what extent are you willing to cite nonhuman generated creative works? What factors have influenced your rhetorical choice of citing/not citing?

5. How is the "original" meaning of a text preserved, reshaped, or remixed during the processes of circulation and delivery in new media environments? What kinds of relations among human and nonhuman authors are sustained and/or challenged?

Rather than raising questions about end results, open-ended inquiries and assignments encourage students to continuously probe into their rhetorical choices in complex systems of digital ecologies. While I deem it useful to teach the legal definitions of authorship and copyright, presenting the definitions as a "given" to students may circumscribe the possibility of sustaining ongoing conversations on the topic. Instead, teachers can ask open-ended questions to cultivate students' reflection of their practices, and adapt the questions for students at different stages of composition. For example, questions about students' choice of citing or not citing nonhuman generated art provide the opportunity for students to rethink their conceptions and predispositions during digital composition. Questions about the "original" meaning of a text, on

the other hand, generate further debates and discussions for students to examine the contested construction of agency and authorship in today's digital age.

Taken together, these pedagogical activities provide alternative ways of teaching authorship and invention that foster criticality and reflexivity in digital composing practices. This being said, that agency is distributed in new media spaces opens up the gateway for examining not only technological affordances but also its constraints—which echoes the exigency to critically investigate the credibility of media texts in the presence of "fake news stories" and "alternative facts" (Warren-Waley & Hurley, 2017, p. 37). That authorship is not always present in an online text makes it challenging to evaluate the text. Such a constraint further complicates the ways through which public rhetors produce knowledge and remix values. Open-ended inquiry questions, in this sense, can be a good starting point for facilitating critical reflection embedded in practice.

Conclusion

Using the "monkey selfie" issue as a case in point, this webtext seeks to problematize static views of authorship using postmodern and posthuman definitions, and to envision emergent pedagogical possibilities for teaching authorship and copyright. What monkeys teach us is not only a new entry point for furthering composition pedagogies, but also an alternative way of examining our assumptions about rhetoric and writing. Probing into new affordances and circumstances in digital ecologies, our colleagues and students can work towards constantly shaping and reshaping the notion of authorship in flux.

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