A Haunting Song:
The Originality of Author and the Authenticity of Narrative in Digital Textuality
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Authorship is a central matter in digital textuality. The primary source material has an author, or authors, different from the authors-creators of the digital objects. Do the different authors and author-creators change the concept of authorship of the digital work? Even Foucault (1998/1969) asked: "What difference does it make who is speaking" (p. 391)? The answers become significant points in the argument of digital textuality because it focuses on the intention of the author-creator of the digital objects.

Before untangling the matter of authorship and authors-creators in digital textuality, a couple of points of clarity are necessary. First, while it is possible to create a pure form of originality in digital textuality, the specific digital works I will discuss in this paper were created from a primary source, thus that creative structure is the frame of reference. In a second point, it is prudent to acknowledge that the concept of author is itself a creation.

Authorship arrived with the rise of print and establishment of copyright laws (Barthes, 1967; Foucault, 1998/1969; North, 2001). "Print made writing into a commercial act, an industry, whose members required regulation and protection" (North, 2001, p. 1380). With the dominance of print and its protections of commercial trade, literary works became a focus of authorship as the written word's chief maker of textual meaning, "Situated as it is at the intersection of copyright law and Romantic aesthetics, the literary work thus becomes a peculiar kind of property" (North, 2001, p. 1381).

North (2001) stated that "on one hand, what it meant to own a literary work had to be defined so that investments could be protected. On the other hand, writers began to assert that prerogatives of authorship, in part to guard their own commercial interests and in part to establish their priority and independence in the new world of commercial creation" (p. 1380).

Both critics and advocates of authorship appear to disparage the underlying commercial intention of the concept. Foucault (1998/1969) offered that an author's name "was a gesture fraught with risks before becoming goods caught up in a circuit of ownership" (p. 382). North (2001) explained with a thin veil of dismay that "authorship has never been an unassailable concept, and modern doubts about it, radical though they may seem, recast in new form an uneasiness that has always haunted literary creation" (p. 1382).

Along with the concepts of authorship and copyright surface their connections to the idea of originality. "The author's claims on an uncompromising notion of originality, it has always been obvious that at some basic level, at least that of language, the materials of literature are common property" (North, 2001, p. 1381). At this intersection of author originality and common goods arrives the philosophical disagreement between Barthes (1967) and Foucault (1998/1969).

In the "Death of the Author" essay of Barthes (1967), authorship, with a capital "A" is rendered textually insignificant at best, the grandiosity of uselessness at worst, and the result should be the death of the author. Barthes (1967) asserted that nothing the author creates is original because all of his work is built on something that came before, thus without the purity of originality there is no author.

In outlining this point of view further, Barthes (1967) asked: Who is the speaker in a literary work? "It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and that literature is precisely the

invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (p. 6).

Foucault (1998/1969) argued for the validity of authorship in a rebuttal essay to Barthes' declaration of death. In the philosopher's point of view, authorship "performs a certain role in narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function…and establishes a relationship among the texts [of a specific author]…. The author functions is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society" (pp. 381-382).

One of the major disagreements between Foucault (1998/1969) and Barthes (1967) seems, at heart, to derive from the work of the critic. In proclaiming the death of the author, Barthes (1967) decries "once the author is discovered, the text is 'explained:' the critic has conquered; hence, it is scarcely surprising not only that, historically, the reign of the Author should also have been that of the Critic, but that criticism (even 'new criticism') should be overthrown along with the Author" (p. 5).

In his warming to his denouncement of the author with the capital "A," Barthes (1967) sets forth that "the author still rule sin manuals of literary history, in biographies of writes, in magazine interviews, and even in the awareness of literary men, anxious to unite, by their private journals, their person and their work; the image of literature to be found in the contemporary culture is tyrannically centered on the author, his person, his history, his tastes, his passions…. The explanation of the work is always sought in the man who has produced it, as if, through the more or less transparent allegory of fiction, it was always finally the voice of one and the same person, the author, which delivered his 'confidence'" (p. 2).

One of Barthes' (1967) central objections is the position of the author as omnipotent. He declared the demise of the author-god and with his death, "the claim to 'decipher' a text becomes quite useless. To give an Author to a text is to impose upon that text a stop clause, to furnish it with final signification, to close the writing. This conception perfectly suits criticism, which can then take as its major task the discovery of the Author… beneath the work: once the author is discovered, the text is "explained…." (p. 5).

In rebuttal, Foucault (1998/1969) replied that "it is a familiar thesis that the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationship with the author but rather to analyze the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form and the play of its internal relationships…. Consequently, it is not enough to declare that we should do without the writer (the author) and study the work itself. The word *work* [Foucault's emphasis] and the unity that it designates are probably as problematic as the status of the author's individuality" (pp. 378-379).

Barthes is too stringent with his "death of author" declaration, and it probably stems from his immersion with a medium other than the text of the print medium. "It would not, in fact, be difficult to show a connection between Barthes' attack on authorship and his equally influential interest in photography, or even to argue that this relation in Barthes's[sic] work reproduces a more general crisis caused in social and legal concepts of human creativity by the advent of the photograph" (p. 1378).

 In reading of Barthes, North (2001 stated that "like the photographer, the author does little more than initiate the process by which phenomena register themselves in permanent form. The authorial function thus becomes merely mechanical, or chemical, and the agency once so necessary to the prestige of authorship is reduced almost to vanishing" (p. 1379).

North (2001) explained that Barthes viewpoint is situated in the notion that an author's position is inscription rather than expression, which is a critical measurement of originality. "The death of the author is first a dismemberment, a reduction, until the author is nothing but a 'hand, cut off from any voice,' a hand, moreover, whose role is simply that of 'inscription (not of expression)[sic North's emphasis]" (p. 1379).

On the other hand, Foucault seems a bit muddled in his championing of authorship beyond the copyright-like notions of property. In other words, if a literary work is assigned ownership, classification, existence and circulation, it becomes commerce, thus a kind of property. But Foucault (1998/1969) asked a set of questions about authorship that has become central to the digital textuality: "Who really spoke? Is it really he [the author] and not someone else? With what authenticity or originality?" (p. 391).

In my digital textuality portfolio, "The Haunting of Billie Holiday," the primary source material was part of a magazine article adapted from a book that uses a famous song based on a poem inspired by news accounts of real-life events. With a nod to Foucault's questions about authorship, I view the digital objects as having textuality because they maintain the authenticity of narrative of the primary sources' authorship.

I was deliberate in not creating new written words (texts) of the already adapted, inspired, based reports of the primary source materials. My creative intention was to maintain an authenticity of narrative in the digital objects. Each digital object was designed to create a different kind of communication for the reader's interpretation.

The first digital object is the primary source's words in data visualization (Wordle), where I manipulated the nodes and edges to place visual emphasis on specific words in the

primary text, such as "Billie Holiday," "strange fruit," "black bodies," "poplar trees," and "haunting," which were my reader's interpretations of the meaning of the primary source.

The second digital object used black-and-white still images, mainly historic photographs, maps and meaningful objects (handcuffs) to tell the primary narrative within a slide show (PowerPoint) that I arranged and filtered using my reader's interpretation of the primary works. The third digital object was to use sound to produce a mood, or feel of the primary source material. I composed an instrumental piece (Garage Band). In the fourth, and final, digital object, I once again used visuals, mainly the black-and-white photos of trees and the lyrics on black background, in the moveable image of video (iMovie).

While the collective works, from news events to the digital portfolio, support Barthes' viewpoint about originality at their initial stages of formation. Barthes would argue that all the authored works, including the digital portfolio, lack of the purity of originality, which makes their authorship meaningless and just an act of inscription rather than expression (North, 2001). However, I disagree with that simplistic conclusion. True, all the works were built on something that came before, thus none of them hold the purity of entirely original things from the imagination of the author-creator (me). However, with my interpretation of the primary textual works, I used my imagination to become the author-creator of the creative imitation of the primary source material, which I explain later on.

Barthes immersion in photography does provide some "author" insight into his position about originality (North, 2001). At its core, a photograph is a replication tool that captures what has already been created, whether by human or nature. In that pure sense of the mechanical, "the originality of the author" becomes disingenuous. However, within the authenticity of narrative, the photograph was taken with human intention, since the photographer (the author) had to

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account for frame, time, space and light or darkness. The photographer's narrative of the photograph is authentic, even if the originality of the shot is a creative imitation of either another human or nature's creativity. Similar to photography, I used digital tools, such as Wordle, Garage Band, iMovie and PowerPoint, to create the digital objects.

The digital creations were more than my finger on a camera flash, thus more than a simplistic inscription; it was creative imitation. North (2001) described "the use of creative imitation makes the alternative work original in its own way without resembling the original" (p. 1380). In other words, the imitated works are author-creator originals within their focus, structure and interpretation while maintaining the authenticity of the narrative from which they were derived. Within the authenticity of narrative, the photograph was taken with human intention, since the photographer (the author) had to account for frame, time, space and light or darkness. The photographer's narrative of the photograph is authentic, even if the originality of the shot is a creative imitation of either another human or nature's creativity.

Each imitation, from the news accounts to the digital portfolio, has roots in reader interpretation, which is a hallmark of textuality. Even Barthes (1967) supports the sanctity of the reader's interpretation of the work. "…The unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination, but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all paths of which the text is constituted…" Barthes, 1967, p. 6). Therefore, what's the difference if that reader (me) uses her interpretation to make new digital works, thus giving them authorship and digital textuality?

North (2001) concluded that "[Barthes] has not so much killed off the concept of the author as raised it to a higher plane of abstraction" (p.1377). In applying that conclusion to

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digital textuality, the author-creator doesn't care so much care about the author, with the capital

"A" of the primary source material. The author-creator cares about maintaining the underlying

authenticity of narrative of the primary source material in her own creative imitation.

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