

Paradox of the Author-Nonauthor

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for Mike Palmquist

To be editors in what is now the Age of Artificial Intelligence is not without a feeling of *jamaïs vu*. Our practices are predicated upon the existence of the author, which has been called into question by large language models. Although artificial intelligence is not an author because it cannot produce an original text, its texts are, or soon will be, indistinguishable from those produced by an author. In other words, if the original text and the unoriginal text are identical, then any author is simultaneously a nonauthor. We see this paradox, in its mix of the strange and the familiar, as part of an epistemic transformation of our relationship to the text.

This paradox is sustained by a cultural resistance to our changing understanding of authorship. Despite the prominence of such essays as Barthes' (1977) "The Death of the Author" and Foucault's (1978) "What is an Author?", which dispute historical assumptions about the author as the origin of the text, these theories have never made "the pedagogical turn" (Graff, 1995) into a praxis for relocating the text's origin. Writing is still widely taught as a response to prompts, which locate the origin of the text inside the student. This method of instruction directs attention to the text as it tacitly perpetuates a belief that writing well is a "gift" innate to the individual. Michael Palmquist and Richard Young (1992) observed that this belief does indeed reappear in the writing classroom and pointed out that students who consider themselves ungifted may not pursue opportunities for learning, given the futility of trying to improve an ability they do not possess. There is a symbolic violence to this process by which students embody a belief that they cannot write but are nevertheless confronted with prompts to revise their writing. Consequently, they may avoid revision because they see it not as practice for improvement but as "punishment" (Downs, 2015, p. 67) for *being* wrong.

This symbolic violence can, however, be converted into critical thinking if the text's origin is relocated. Consider an instruction to produce a piece of writing not by responding to the prompt but by replacing its interrogative pronoun (*what, which, who, whom, whose*) with its antecedent. The student thereby locates the origin of the text outside themselves in a preexisting first draft they make present in writing. The instructor, in turn, decides what part of the text is still missing and adds to the draft the interrogative pronoun or proadverb (*why, where, when, how*) in a prompt for revision. The student, in turn, replaces the interrogative with its antecedent to produce a second draft. And as an interrogative can be addressed to any draft, revision, as a reversal of proformation, is the disclosure of a text that ever exceeds it. Through revision students gradually embody improvement as "a feel for the game" (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 25), a practical sense of which words go where, and through prompts they reflect on how their manipulation of these words enacts meaningful

changes to the text, developing a metalinguistic awareness for improving overall fluency (Hartwell, 1985). Revision, in the absence of symbolic violence, is not punishment but rather, in taking turns with the instructor who prompts, a kind of play, in which the joy of the gift—and the anguish of the ungifted—may become a love of the game.

This pedagogical turn resolves the paradox by merging author and nonauthor to form the *editor*. Writing, as a way of making a preexisting text present, comprises editing practices of prompt and revision, which is simply automated by large language models and can be disambiguated as *manual* versus *automatic inscription* (AI). The original text and the unoriginal text are identical because, in this new episteme, a text is neither original nor unoriginal but always already variant.

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