

Rhetoric, feminism, and the politics of textual ownership

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Abstract (Article Summary)

Lunsford examines some of the issues surrounding agency and ownership (especially of language) and some of the changes made which she believes signal a challenge to the appropriation of authorship for largely commercial ends. She offers some alternatives to this appropriation and explains why embracing these alternatives is crucially important.

Full Text (7216 words)

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As a longtime advocate of collaboration and collaborative writing and as a persistent critic of the kind of radical individualism reified by the "author construct," I might have been expected to welcome the moves to dispersed authorship represented in so much of the postmodern world. But I am not at all sanguine about these moves, for I believe now that they signal not a challenge to the old ideology of authorship but rather its appropriation for different and largely commercial ends. In the essay that follows, I hope to identify some alternatives to this appropriation and to explain why embracing these alternatives is crucially important.

These changes in my understanding of the issues surrounding agency and ownership (especially of language) have been very slow to evolve; they began fifteen years ago when Lisa Ede and I

were working on what we took to be a fairly straightforward little essay called "Why Write. . . Together?" In it, we argued that the concept of the lonely scribbler-the romantic concept of the author as singular, originary, autonomous, and uniquely creative (in a word, as "original")-effectively hid from view the largely collaborative and highly dispersed nature of most creative endeavors, from art, drama, literature, and film to scientific experimentation and discovery. In *Singular Texts/Plural Authors* we explored further the deeply collaborative nature of much professional and academic writing, and we noted some of the problems attendant on continuing to try to fit the square peg of multiple, polyvocal creativity into the round hole of singular "authorship." We were responding to work in composition studies that was revealing the collective nature of much on-the-job writing, to the poststructuralist critique of the founding subject, and to feminist activism in recovering the voices of women silenced by the hegemony of romantic authorship as well as to our own material conditions: we wanted to write together, but the academy (and especially our department colleagues) didn't want us to.

We found supporters among women in many fields: in aesthetics and the history of ideas from Martha Woodmansee, who has been arguing passionately since the early 1980s that our culture's obsession with the "author" of intellectual property that can be commodified and bartered in a capitalistic system has disenfranchised many, many creators-a great many of whom are women. In anthropology, we found scholars like Alma Gottlieb ("Beyond the Lonely Anthropologist: Collaboration in Research and Writing") and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy ("In Pursuit of Connections: Reflections on Collaborative Work") reflecting not only on the ambiguous meaning of "collaborator" (after all, during the war collaborators were shot . . .) but on academic suspicions of all cooperative work. In the field of anthropology, Kennedy now notes that "it is unquestionably easier to do collaborative research and writing in the 1990s than it was in the 1960s"-and she credits three intellectual developments for managing such a change: "feminist scholarship, anticolonialist scholarship, and interpretive anthropology," all of which, she says, "present challenges to the traditional 'objective' report authored by the heroic anthropologist, the scientist of culture who works alone" (26).

We found support in many other fields as well, and for a (short) time it seemed to us possible that some kind of subtle but powerful rebalancing act might be possible: we would simply work with others to demonstrate the degree to which all discourse is produced socially, and growing recognition of this fact would break the hierarchical binary so firmly entrenched: solitary, original authorship = powerful, privileged, and good; collaborative, shared authorship = "uncreative," transgressive, and bad, very nearly a "crime" of writing.

I'm oversimplifying this narrative to make a point: during the '80s, we sensed a moment where change might be possible, change that would give voice to many women and members of other underrepresented groups, as well as to many means of cultural production not valued by modernist epistemologies or economies. It felt to us like a "postmodern moment" opening a space in which we could help work for change in the dynamics of intellectual property, of textual ownership, of the value structures surrounding certain kinds of cultural/textual production.

As with other such moments in the history of intellectual property, this one passed swiftly. Indeed, such a moment had occurred at the inception of intellectual property as we know it in copyright law today (in the early 1700s), when the "many hands" that produce a book were not hierarchized as they are today and when the "author" was not the solitary proprietary owner. Another moment seemed to occur with the 1798 edition of the collaboratively produced and

anonymously published *Lyrical Ballads*: a moment in which language might be of and for the common people—the "folk" of the "middle and lower classes" as Wordsworth and Coleridge called them. In hindsight, this moment could have allowed for much greater democratization of language. But it passed swiftly, hardening into the Romantic iteration of originality and of individual proprietary ownership.

Certainly in retrospect, Lisa and I should have been more wary of this 1980s postmodern movement for change in understandings of intellectual property. In fact, we should have been wary of the term "property" itself, of the ways it has been raced and classed, as well as gendered; women and African Americans (and many Native Americans in the "new" world) were themselves thought of as property, their bodies commodified in many ways. From Latin *proprietas* for ownership, "property" connotes exclusionary rights and possessions. Locke inscribed this view in his declaration that every man is entitled to "life, liberty, and property," and we can find that same concept enshrined in many discourses of Western government and religion from Locke's time to our own.

At the same time that Lisa and I were meditating on the metaphor of "property" and becoming more and more wary of "intellectual property" and all its baggage, other feminists were calling into question the supposed "death of the author"—the owner of intellectual property. Agreeing with Nancy Miller that this "death" does not "necessarily work for women," Linda Hutcheon puts it this way: "The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and postcolonialist discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses" (168). These cautions seemed compelling enough to suggest that the old economies of intellectual property—perhaps even the metaphor of property itself—should not be rejected out of hand if doing so once again disenfranchised many white women and most people of color. Perhaps ownership of intellectual property, and the "author" along with it, could be rehabilitated.

In fact, as many now recognize, during the three decades that literary theorists have been debating the notion of "authorship" and ownership of texts, the terms of the debate over intellectual property have shifted swiftly and dramatically. The "momentary space" I mentioned earlier, marked by challenges from poststructuralist theory, the electronic revolution, and women's (and particularly women of color's) modes of collaborative practice, has been closed up in the wake of a powerful appropriation of the "author" construct in the legal and corporate worlds. In the body of law governing copyright, the solitary and sovereign "author" holds sway: copyright cannot exist in a work produced as a "true collective enterprise"; copyright does not hold in works that are not "original" (which, as Peter Jaszi has demonstrated at length rules out protection for "nonindividualistic cultural productions, like 'folkloric' works, which cannot be reimagined as products of solitary, originary 'authorship'" [38]), and copyright does not extend to what the law sees as the "basic components" of cultural production (the rhythms of traditional musical forms, for example). What copyright law does protect is "author's rights," which have been repeatedly expanded during the last thirty years, and which have recently been expanded once again, effectively keeping a great deal of cultural material out of the public domain and further restricting the fair use of copyrighted works.

More interesting and alarming to me as a feminist and a rhetorician today, however, is the appropriation of the sovereign "author" construct by the corporate world, especially in

cyberspace, where the largest single domain is now .com, with four and a half million hosts accounting for almost 25 percent of the Internet-and .com, the latest figures tell us, is growing by 52 percent annually, or at the rate of 18,000 new "hosts" per day. In this and other arenas, corporate entities now assume the mantle of the "author," who has clearly come back to life with a vengeance: look at Disney, at [Microsoft](#), at the multinational corporations, even at the [New York Times](#), which recently attempted to take copyright for everything printed in its pages, a move barely averted by the newspaper's writers. These large entities now claim "author's rights"-and they have squads of lawyers working around the clock to help them. (If you think you are an "author," think again-and check your contracts. In the last fifteen years, even the educational journals in our field have begun appropriating the copyright-in essence taking on "authorship" for themselves-and getting fees for our work when it appears in coursepacks, for instance.) I could, of course, cite further instances of the corporate and legal appropriation of the "author" construct and the use of it to shape intellectual property regimes that favor corporate interests. The trend has resulted in a kind of a "gold-rush" mentality to copyright and patent everything under the sun: Bill Gates is trying to corner the world's market of images; plastic surgeons in New York are trying to patent the faces they "produce"; scientists everywhere are patenting strings of DNA; Disney is working hard to extend the limits of copyright to over a hundred years because-horrors!-Mickey Mouse is coming out of copyright in 2003 and might become part of the cultural commons; and drug companies are moving to patent and copyright chemicals found in the plants of third-world countries in order to process them and sell them as "cures"-at a great profit (for a fascinating related discussion, see Boyle). In this atmosphere, it's no wonder that the Italian government is trying to copyright the Tuscan landscape, that [NBA](#) players are trying to copyright certain moves, and that cartoons show children affixing copyright notices to their homework. Property indeed.

Perhaps most troubling of all, however, has been the move in legal and corporate worlds to apply the mantle of proprietary authorship to hardware and software. In spite of their wide public use and the fact that they are the products of a wholly collaborative process, computer programs (with a very few notable exceptions) are increasingly defined in the law as works of "originality" and "creative genius," that is, as works that fall within the expansive protection of copyright and author's rights. This latest move, seen in all the documents coming out of WIPO (the World Intellectual Property Organization), to my mind puts an end to the possibility for democratization of language and knowledge that cyberspace at one time seemed to promise. (Indeed, one of the postings on a listserv I read, CNI Copyright, had the subject line "Fair Use Now Dead on the Internet.")

In short, while many have been debating the "death of the author" and theorizing about the possibilities of agency and subjectivity for silenced, muted, or disenfranchised groups, the horse is most definitely out of the barn. While most of us watched from the sidelines, the old cloak of the originary author-genius has been (through an act of "theft" or "disguise" perhaps, to use Nancy Miller's terms?) spruced up and donned by the corporate entrepreneurial interests-and the bigger, the more global, the better. Especially on the Internet, which Marc Andreessen (the twenty-four-year-old multi-millionaire creator of Netscape) calls, in an understatement, primarily a platform for entrepreneurial activities.

In such an atmosphere, issues of "authorship" and intellectual property are getting really complicated. And given the complexity I've already conjured up, I won't even go into the ways we

as academics perpetuate what I think of as the negative aspects of this authorial/entrepreneurial regime through our institutional policies, pedagogies, and practices. As a gesture toward this complicity, however, I can note a piece of a hypertext I worked on for the online journal Kairos, in which I said that "for a long time now, I have not felt a strong sense of individual ownership of any text I work on producing.... But I would be disingenuous indeed if I did not recognize the degree to which my position as a white tenured full professor gives me the luxury of this stand: were I a beginning assistant professor, much less a graduate student, I would have to acknowledge a major truth of our profession: individual ownership of intellectual property is the key to advancement" (Lunsford et al., "What Matters . . .?").

Rather than dwell on this complicity, however, which I think is fairly obvious, I want to ask instead how a feminist rhetoric can engage this complicated moment, and these complicated notions of ownership and intellectual property. What can we do in the face of the "land grab" or "gold rush" mentality that is currently driving legal, governmental, and corporate efforts to own and control more and more, to hedge off for their own benefit and profit most of the world's natural and intellectual resources? First and most obvious, I suppose, we can join 'em-taking on the mantle of entrepreneurial authorship whenever and wherever possible as one way to gain the agency and the presence of subjectivity long denied to women. Indeed, some feminist scholars have advocated such a move: if the tools of the master cannot dismantle the master's house, well, then, steal some new tools-and buy the house. I take this option seriously, especially given the vastly oppressive material conditions under which many of the world's women labor. And yet, given the history and ideology of this model of proprietary ownership, I am deeply troubled by this particular response.

A second response may be to hope for a shift in the values underlying the model of ownership, a shift (articulated by many in the digital world) that might redistribute "intellectual property" in new and beneficial ways. In composition studies, I've been especially encouraged by the Computers and Composition special issue on Intellectual Property guest-edited by Laura Gurak and Johndan Johnson-Eilola. Especially provocative in that issue are Carrie Shively Leverenz's "Citing Cybersources: A Challenge to Disciplinary Values," John Logie's "Champing at the Bits: Computers, Copyright, and the Composition Classroom," and Karla Saari Kitalong's "A Web of Symbolic Violence." In addition, two recent CCC essays also work at least indirectly toward new understandings of intellectual property. In one, Linda Adler-Kassner looks at models of ownership in terms of student writing, tracing two competing views (which she calls "democratic" and "individualistic"), and ends with a provocative overview of ways in which portfolio assessment and service learning courses work to move beyond limiting and individualistic agendas. In the other, Candace Spigelman discusses definitions and understandings of ownership among members of peer writing groups and argues for making the tensions in current students' conceptions of ownership central to the composition classroom.

Esther Dyson, author of *Release 2.0* and an influential member of the digerati (daughter of astrophysicist Freeman Dyson and sister of George, of "The Starship and the Canoe" fame), has argued for just such a shift in value, which, she insists, will no longer reside in "content" at all-not in the product, that is, of the originary genius. (Nicholas Negroponte apparently agrees, saying that the "content" of books may be "evolving toward being free" [Maney 2B]). Nor, says Dyson, will value reside in the producer of the content-the genius himself; nor even in the user of the content (Barthes's triumphant reader?). Rather, she claims, value will "lie in the relationships

surrounding and nurturing the movement of content through networks of users and producers" (182-84). What Dyson predicts seems to me nothing less than the ultimate triumph of process over product, of networking over singularity. But this shift in value has, as I've just been arguing, already been appropriated as the province of the entrepreneur corporation or conglomerate-the entity that will "own" the efforts of those who, to use Dyson's words, nurture "the movement of content through networks of users and producers." In short, this particular response to the complicated set of issues surrounding debates over intellectual property may well lead only to a new kind of "work for hire" or "piecework." I don't need to point out that too many writing teachers have already been there, done that. So I am not optimistic about the potential of this second response.

We do have a third possibility, however: we can, as Nancy Miller suggests, try to articulate a new rhetoric of authorship, one that rejects the naive construction of author as originary genius or as entrepreneurial corporate entity, without diminishing the importance of agency, and of difference, to the lives of working writers. (I might also mention many other scholars, such as Judith Butler, who eschews the "prediscursive I" or sovereign subject of modernism as well as the deterministic view of discourse that precludes the possibility of human agency.) My own hope is for more than that. I hope that, working together, feminist rhetoricians can create, enact, and promote alternative forms of agency and ways of owning that would shift the focus from owning to owning up; from rights and entitlements to responsibilities (the ability to respond) and answerability; from a sense of the self as radically individual to the self as always in relation; and from a view of agency as invested in and gained through the exchange of tidy knowledge packages to a view of agency as residing in what Susan West defines as the "unfolding action of a discourse; in the knowing and telling of the attentive rhetor/responder rather than in static original ideas" (190).

Given the speed with which the traditional forms of ownership and intellectual property have been appropriated by global corporate and legal interests, however, such work is going to be exceedingly difficult. Nevertheless, I believe there are enactments, tracings of alternative forms of being and owning, already available to us. If we intend to create what [@Stanford](#) public policy analyst Milbray McLaughlin calls a "new public idea" about intellectual property, we will have to work together on a number of fronts, for such public ideas are hard to invoke. Today, I can only gesture toward some of the work we may draw on to make such a new public idea possible-work that aims to create a "new idea" in the discourse of corporations, of technology, of politics, of law, and of cultural (including literary) production. Let me turn first to the lion's den of the corporate world, where we might least expect to find alternative models of ownership or intellectual property available. I am only just beginning to learn about some of the efforts being made, particularly by and on behalf of the indigenous peoples' knowledge of plant biology that has been appropriated so stunningly and successfully in recent years. Some firms are trying to do business in a new way: Shaman Pharmaceutical, Inc., is publicly committed to sharing its profits with its "collaborators." Their "process is driven," they say, "by the science of ethnobotany, or how native peoples use plants. Shaman uses data provided by a network of ethnobotanists and physicians engaged in ongoing field research-in Africa, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America-to provide initial direction.... Working with traditional healers of various rainforest cultures allows Shaman access to the largest in vivo laboratory in the world" (King and Carlson 136). Significantly, I think, Shaman is committed to sharing profits with all the communities with which they work, not just the ones that yield a marketable product. Further, they say that compensation plans will be arrived at collaboratively-with the Healing Forest conservancy, a

nonprofit foundation established by Shaman, and representatives from communities Shaman works in and that "payment" will include the support of land rights, "strengthening indigenous peoples' organizations and fostering communication...; and promoting sustainable, ecologically sound development through local harvesting of products; and linking public health and welfare of indigenous cultures and tropical forests" (139). This model of intellectual property-with its accompanying version of agency-is one radically different from the traditional Western paradigm; the Shaman model creates a middle space between radically individual proprietary rights and the international public domain. In short, while I am not optimistic about corporate attempts at sharing-to put it mildly-such a model may offer an alternative to the copyright regime founded on the notion of the solitary, sovereign, and proprietary author.

I can see similar if more modest attempts among cyber-citizens like Esther Dyson, who gives away much of her "proprietary" knowledge as a way of gaining a wider audience for her views and of working collaboratively with others interested in the development of cyberspace. And she has some allies, among them Richard Stallman, one of the original [MIT](#) artificial intelligence hackers of the sixties. Stallman, known for his determined attempts to establish "copyleft," has founded the Free Software Foundation, which sells-and gives away-his software. As he puts it, "I develop free software. . . I do not necessarily distribute it for free. Free software is a matter of freedom, not price. Think of free speech, not free beer" (Benedek 46). What this means, I think, is that Stallman indeed "sells" his software (for about \$60). But once a customer buys it, he or she is free to look at its source codes, figure out how the whole thing works, and modify it to meet personal needs-or, says Stallman, even give it away to friends. As readers will readily imagine, Stallman's generosity is seen as quirky if not mad by most of the computer industry, and Dyson-who is somewhat more conservative-is also viewed by some as overly generous. Nevertheless, their methods work toward a balance between protecting individual dignities and rights-especially those not protected by earlier regimes of intellectual property-and protecting the public good. Stallman's conception of software recently received a surprising show of support from browser pioneer Netscape when the company released the source code of Navigator, its immensely popular browser, to be freely copied and adapted by users and developers; Netscape CEO Jim Barksdale made this move to combat [Microsoft's](#) strategy of distributing its Explorer browser for free but then, as is typical in the software industry, keeping its code secret and proprietary.

And finally, if those working at the heart of computer technology today are actually going to articulate a new model of ownership and intellectual property, they will need the help of groups like Spiderwoman, a nonpartisan, online international community of (male and female) feminist web designers. This group, founded in 1995, was in the news for vehemently protesting a "Technology Summit" held in May 1997 by Bill Gates. The 103 guests invited to the "summit" came from all over the world and represented a wide variety of companies. But, as Spiderwoman was quick to point out, they did not represent women. Out of the 103 participants, Spiderwoman could find only one woman, AutoDesk CEO Carol Bartz. When [Microsoft](#) insisted that there were many women there-at least as many as three Spiderwoman checked them out and found that one of the other two "many women" turned out to be not Mary but Marvin Runyan (<<http://www.amazoncity.com/spiderwoman/webspinning/newsflash.html>>).

In the realm of legal practice and theory, which I have associated primarily with the interests of Western corporate entrepreneurship, we can also find a few people questioning the link between copyright law and the "author construct" and searching for new ways to imagine the politics of

ownership. Foremost among these I would name Pamela Samuelson, a member of the faculty of Berkeley's School of Information Management and Systems and winner of a 1997 MacArthur award. Even as she offers colleagues the codes she has developed for constructing the web site she teaches from at Berkeley-saying "Take my stuff, please!"-Samuelson is careful to say that she is by no means trying to achieve a world in which everything is shared or free. Rather, she wants to work with people from Silicon Valley who are trying to develop new technology-and new business models-and help them reconfigure copyright laws to fit the new models. While she acknowledges the complexity of the current copyright situation, she says her goal is actually simple: "to see that copyright laws do not infringe on the sharing of knowledge in society" (Krochmal). This goal may sound simple, but creating a new public idea from it will not be, even with women as formidably bright and determined as Pam Samuelson at work. According to John Perry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, she has "stood up against the entire weight of the commercial legal world" (and I would add the male wild west frontier atmosphere of the digital world) in trying to find an articulation of copyright law that will balance individual agency and rights with public good and with freedom of information (Krochmal). Perhaps not surprisingly, Samuelson's work, and that of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, is not widely known in English studies, where few have taken notice of-or acted to influence-the deluge of legislation related to expanding protection and limiting access to information. In fact, recent Congressional bills demonstrate an alarming move toward ever-greater control of knowledge by a select few. "The Digital Millennium Copyright Act," Public L. 105-304, became law in October 1998. Following vigorous and persistent work by members of the Digital Future Coalition (of which NCTE and many other academic groups are members), the WIPO legislation is not as hyperprotectionist as it was in earlier versions. Nevertheless, its current incarnation is still a far cry from responding to the needs of teachers and students and scholars, or from protecting the public good. In fact, while the bill makes vague general references to the concept of fair use, it does little to protect the fair use doctrine itself, especially in key areas such as educational photocopying or home taping. As a result, it could prepare the way for destroying a concept that has been crucial to the work of scholars and teachers. Especially troublesome are a number of sections tacked on to this bill, apparently late in the game and without debate.

One of these additions incorporates (with very few changes) the substance of H.R. 2652, known as the "Collections of Information Antipiracy Act" when it passed the House of Representatives. In brief, this section seeks to expand protection of databases and database publishers in ways that will create strong disincentives for sharing data and, in turn, will be extremely harmful to scholars and teachers. Finally, a proposed revision of the Uniform Commercial Code, Article 2B, would create a new set of rights for "content providers," allowing them to claim that any use of their information, particularly in the case of digital access, constitutes the acceptance of a contract and thus enables them to control-and to charge for-any use of this information, whether in the public domain or not. While the language of the final Act was softened, and the most restrictive of the database protection material removed, these changes were made only at the very last moment after extensive and persistent lobbying. Even more troubling, this Congress passed (and the President signed into law on 27 October 1998) the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, making the term for most works the life of the author plus seventy years. In celebrating the passage of this Act, Mary Bono perhaps unwittingly gave voice to what seems the contemporary rush to hyperprotection when she announced that copyright should be forever.

In spite of Mary Bono's oversimplifications, these legislative initiatives are complex and often

cloaked in the most obscure legalese, but they are not impossible for teachers of reading and writing to understand. Moreover, they demand our action now, in letters, phone calls, and faxes to Senators and Representatives urging protection of fair use and of the public right to information. (The best source I know of for keeping up to date on unfolding legislation regarding intellectual property is the Digital Future Coalition Website: see <<http://www.dfc.org>>. Two other helpful sites are Dennis Karjala's home page <<http://www.public.asu.edu/~dkarjala/>> and the Conference on College Composition and Communication Intellectual Property Caucus site <<http://www.ncte.org/cccc/cccc-ip>>.)

Most of the contributors to the DFC website are lawyers, and like Samuelson they have done much to raise awareness about the ways in which contemporary legislative programs tend to appropriate the Romantic "author" agent for use by major corporate interests. Another legal scholar who is helping to think through the thicket surrounding agency, ownership, and political action is Lani Guinier, professor of law at the [University of Pennsylvania](#) and one-time nominee for head of the Justice Department's civil rights division. I cannot do justice to Guinier's elegant and complex envisioning of an agency beyond liberal individualism, one based on constantly shifting alliances and realliances, always in pursuit of more inclusive democratic possibilities. But I believe that the body of Guinier's work deserves a detailed and attentive reading from feminists and rhetoricians alike, particularly in terms of her (re)definition of authority. In an ingenious argument, Guinier steers a course between the individual and the group, between libertarian individualism and identity politics, situating authority in the connections a person makes among the discourses available to her and out of which can come what Guinier celebrates as a medley of component voices that is singular and plural at the same time. These medleys or coalitions are always momentary and shifting-and powerful. Though I know of no one who has pursued the possible connections between the work Samuelson is doing to (re)envision copyright and the both/and view of authority and voice articulated by Guinier, some immediate compatibilities seem apparent to me-and both offer to help create a new public idea about what it means to own and use language, about what it means to exercise agency far beyond the sphere of the radical individual self, about what it can and should mean, in Jacqueline Jones Royster's words, to operate ethically in a common space.

Finally, I want to call attention to the many women writers who are refiguring notions of textual production and ownership. Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn, and I wrote about some of these women in a Rhetorica essay in which we attempted to trace some of the many reciprocities between rhetoric and feminism and to name some of the ways in which women are literally rewriting the "rules" of rhetoric. Many readers will be familiar with Jackie Royster's and Shirley Logan's work on the models of shared linguistic power and collaboration embodied in the writing and speaking of many nineteenth-century African American women writers, and with Anne Gere's recent study of the women's club movement, groups that often understood "property" and language use in ways far different from those enshrined in the copyright tradition. In addition, of course, we can find many examples of fiction, drama, and online writing today that call attention to collaborative writing practices, some of which may seem more transgressive of traditional rhetoric than others. In Kathy Acker's fiction, for example, the conventional crime of writing-plagiarism-is consciously deployed to call attention to what she sees as the current impossibility of "owning" language and to the need for alternative rhetorical practices for enacting multiple selves in discourse. I'm thinking here particularly of Acker's *Don Quixote: Which Was a Dream*, in which Acker interweaves shocking and intensely jarring language with word-for-word excerpts from

Cervantes's canonical text. In a dissertation-in-progress, *The Author('s) Proper(ty)*, John Logie looks carefully at Acker's appropriation of masculine discursive practices, showing how such an appropriation supplements traditional forms of authorship and resists linguistic ownership. Playwright Anna Deveare Smith represents a related challenge to traditional notions of the rhetorical practice of authorship. In a series of dramas (including *Fires in the Mirror: Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and Other Identities* and *Twilight Los Angeles 1992: On the Road: A Search for American Character*), Smith uses the techniques of journalism-interviewing, tape-recording, transcribing-to capture the words and voices of those who then become "characters" in her one-woman plays. While some accuse Smith of "ventriloquism" and "unoriginality," others argue that her plays represent a kind of midwifery, an open acknowledgment of the weaving together of others' words characteristic to some degree of all writing. In terms of online discourse, we might turn not only to groups like Spiderwoman but to sites of electronic public discourse such as *Amazon City: Where She Is the Revolution* (<www.amazoncity.com>), noting the ways in which writers at this specifically gendered site appropriate and use the words of others-most often without attribution.

In this essay, however, I wish to focus on one particular woman, Gloria Anzaldua, especially since I had a chance to conduct a lengthy interview with her. Let me begin with Anzaldua's response to a question I asked about metaphors for writing. Without a pause, she said, "So, my composition theme. . . *Compustura* used to mean being a seamstress. [To me] *compustura* means seaming together fragments to make a garment you wear, which represents you, your identity in the world" (Lunsford 9). It is stitched together from "what's out there," what the culture and others give you, what you can take and use. This notion of writing, of language use, as a stitching, a seaming together of a garment (which echoes Anzaldua's intricate discussions of making face/making soul) that is taken from "what is out there" and that is thus both yours and not yours seems to me to be very much in the spirit of what scholars like Guinier and Samuelson-and sometimes groups like Spiderwoman and AmazonCity-are after. The result of such a refiguration would be to open up what Susan West calls the "authorodoxy" to multiple voices, not just to those who are authorized to speak/write/be heard, and thus to enlarge and enrich the conversation for all and, incidentally, to refigure literacy as the ability to respond to a conversation already and always ongoing in a way that "invites the participation of others" (West 190). Anzaldua's stinging critique of traditional literacy education and her own commitment to giving voice to multiple positionalities as well as to women's voices that have been muted or ignored indicates that she sees herself as already participating in such a refiguration.

Certainly much if not all of Anzaldua's work seems to me to be highly collaborative, shared and stitched together in various ways, and so I asked her about this aspect of her knowledge-making and writing. She talked first about the children's books she has written and about her collaboration with artists:

Well, at first it wasn't quite a straight collaboration, because I did the text first and then I gave it to the artist. But now I am doing a project for a middle-school girl readership, and there I will be working with the artist. But I also think that there is no such thing as a single author. I write my texts, but I borrow the ideas and images from other people. Sometimes I forget that I've borrowed them. I might read some phrase from a poem or fiction, and I like the way it describes the cold. Years and years go by, and I do something similar with my description, but I've forgotten that I've gotten it somewhere else. Then I show my text in draft form to a lot of people for feed-back:

that's another level of co-creating with somebody. Then my readers do the same thing. They put all of their experience into the text and they change Borderlands into many different texts. It's different for every reader. It's not mine anymore. (19-20)

"Does that feel OK to you?" I couldn't help asking. "You don't feel possessive about your writing as your "property?" "No, I don't," was her response:

I've always felt that way about writing. I do the composing, but it's taken from little mosaics of other people's lives, other people's perceptions. I take all of these pieces and rearrange them. When I'm writing I always have the company of the reader. Sometimes I'm writing with my friends in mind, and sometimes for people like you who teach writing. In writing, I'm just talking with you without your being here. This is where style comes in. Style is my relationship with you, how I decide what register of language to use, how much Spanglish, how much vernacular. It's all done in the company of others, while in solitude-which is a contradiction. (20)

Later in the conversation, Anzaldua shifted the topic to "authority," saying, "When you get into reading and writing the 'other,' into assuming some kind of authority for the 'other'-whether you are the 'other' or you are the subject-there's a community involved. There's a responsibility that comes with invoking cultural and critical authority, and I think you could call that responsibility being open to activism and being responsible for your actions. No?" (26). In this last statement, Anzaldua sums up for me the challenge facing rhetoricians, and particularly, feminist rhetoricians and compositionists today. How can we help to create a model of writing and ownership that encompasses both the subject and the larger community Anzaldua speaks of? How can we best help to create a new public idea about intellectual property and the "ownership" of language? In short, how can we act in the face of the bitter battle already under way to control the future of all knowledge and all knowledge production, one that could lead us into a twenty-first century thoroughly imbued with destructive radical individualism and hypercompetition, with definitions of knowledge and language as commodities to be owned, bought, and sold, and with representations of human agency as limited and narrow?

In spite of the many forces at work, I am not entirely pessimistic about working for change, because of some of the encouraging work toward a new public idea described here, and especially because of the potential for new alliances among scholars and teachers committed to the kind of responsible activism Anzaldua calls for. The first step of such activism, for those in English studies today, might be to lead the way in creating a contemporary grammar and vocabulary capable of recognizing-and re-valuing-rhetorical practices that until very recently have been defined, if not as writing "crimes," then certainly as suspiciously collaborative misdemeanors. Scholars of rhetoric and composition need to identify, theorize, and begin systematically practicing and teaching alternative forms of subjectivity and alternative modes of ownership.

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