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OVERCOMING AUTHORSHIP AND THE END OF LIBERAL MEANING. TOWARD A WORLD-SYSTEMIC THEORY OF LITERARY PRODUCTION

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ABSTRACT. ***Overcoming Authorship and the End of Liberal Meaning: Toward a World-Systemic Theory of Literary Production.*** We explore the transformations of authorship in the algorithmic age, investigating literary production from a world-systems perspective in the larger context of both posthumanism and computational regimes of meaning, questioning the interpretive methods grounded on semiotics and liberal theory. Lightly drawing on various theoretical frameworks, our intervention offers a swift but comprehensive and historicist framework for conceptually understanding authorship beyond the limits of both ethico-political autonomy and poststructuralist intertextuality. Our central concept—the overcoming of authorship—describes a trans-individual, oscillatory, and eco-technological configuration of authorship shaped by affective systems, platform dynamics, and epistemological shifts located well beyond the confines of postmodernism.

Keywords: *post-authorship, world-systems, the overcoming of authorship, authorial ecologies, post-semiotic, post-novel.*

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REZUMAT. ***Depășirea autorului și sfârșitul sensului liberal: spre o teorie a producției literare din perspectiva analizei sistemelor-lume.*** Această lucrare examinează transformările auctorialității în epoca algoritmică, situând producția literară în cadrul analizei sistemelor-lume, dar și în raport cu postumanismul și regimurile computaționale ale semnificației. Punem sub semnul întrebării practicile interpretative liberale fundamentate pe semiotică argumentând necesitatea de a conceptualiza autorul atât dincolo de autonomia etico-politică, cât și de intertextualitatea poststructuralistă. Mobilizând, în mod selectiv, o serie de tradiții teoretice, intervenția noastră propune o lectură istoricistă asupra condițiilor în schimbare ale auctorialității. Centrală acestei lecturi este ideea de depășire a autorului: definim auctorialitatea ca o nouă formațiune trans-individuală, oscilantă și eco-tehnologică, produsă prin intermediul economiilor afective, a dinamicilor de platformă, dar și în urma transformărilor epistemologice ce depășesc granițele postmodernismului.

Cuvinte-cheie: *post-autor; sistem-lume; depășirea autorului; ecologii auctoriale; post-semiotic; post-roman*.

Introduction

The problem of authorship has haunted modern criticism[3]. What is interesting here is not the various positions taken over "the author's" life or death, but how the question is posed. To move beyond antimonies determined by the question, we seek here to begin rethinking the concept of authorship by engaging with the philosophical, cultural, medial, ecological, and economic transformations that inevitably redefine, from a global perspective, what is generally termed literary production, voice, and subjectivity. By adopting material, situated, embodied, and decolonial perspectives, we look to move beyond binary and centrist liberal accounts of authorship. Moving beyond the poststructuralist death of the author and the ethical or sociological return(s) of the author, our paper contends that, in the age of AI networks and posthuman productivity, authorship must be conceptualized as an emergent, distributed, and adaptive system and that, therefore, the author is nothing, but a nodal agent embedded within dynamic literary, medial, and institutional ecologies.

In his 1992 book, *The Death and Return of the Author*, Seán Burke foreshadowed his revision of the concept of authorship, which then gained full prominence in his later 2008 book, *The Ethics of Writing: Authorship and Legacy*

[3] See Alex Ciorogar, "The Pursuit of Post-Authorship: The Ascending Ecology of the World-Author," *Transilvania* no. 9 (2024): 1-13.

in Nietzsche and Plato. Yet, Burke's focus on the moral responsibilities of the writer left out other complex aspects of authorship, including empirical and theoretical dimensions, as well as social and technological aspects[4]. Despite early attempts to remove the concept of the singular author, it's resurrection has happened. Can we, however, move towards a new and significantly different critical phase surrounding the issue of authorship, one that goes beyond either the historical and conceptual thresholds of flickering, semiotic appearances or its ontological disappearances into? We will synthesize this movement under the theme of *the overcoming of authorship*[5].

Let us first consider the trajectory of the concept—from the birth of the modern author as a professional figure in the 17th century (Alain Viala), through the sacralization of authorship as a site of genius and individuality in peak Romanticism (Paul Bénichou), to the death of the author as a deconstructive critique of intentionality in the late 1960s (Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida), and, finally, the return of the author as a revaluation of its social, political, and ethical agency (in Burke, but also Pierre Bourdieu, postcolonial studies and feminism)—the next step, *the overcoming of authorship,* might involve a thorough rethinking of what authorship means in this current phase of capitalism. Through the study of authorship, literary subjectivity and cultural production in the context of ecological, technological, and economic change, we seek to displace the academic debate out of the death-and-return-of-the-author paradox, and, consequently, move beyond the discourses of Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, and Burke. Our argument is that authorship, indeed, still possesses the capacity to further address serious questions and play crucial functions in the literary field. However, what seems to have been hindering so far our ability to engage properly with this question is the institutional legacy wherein English and Comparative Literature departments (with some exceptions, of course, in the Global South and the Global East) transformed, during the second part of the 20th century, into deconstructive and therefore self-reproductive social-knowledge machines which, through iterability, have time and again critiqued and displaced the subject, and its authorial avatars, through a tale of theoretical disappearance and ideological reappearance.

[4] See Michael North, "Authorship and Autography," *PMLA* 116, no. 5 (2001): 1377–85.

[5] John Potts charts various instances of contemporary authorship: "variants of the contemporary author-function: author as factory, author as scriptor, author as processor, multimodal author, collaborative author, remix author, author for the new patronage, blockchain author, and even author as demiurge. These reflect the ways in which the contemporary author has adjusted to the changed circumstances within networked digital culture" (Potts 2022, 173).

In the age of AI, however, all that is solid melts into algorithm. This new phase of *authorial overcoming*[6] is better understood if we posit authorship initially as a *dispositif* and then, from a world-systems perspective, as a series of *world-apparatuses* that include specific truth-formations and particular sets of literary practices, which jointly produce the conditions that allow for what we call an *algorithmic authorial subject*. We would, nevertheless, allow the possibility of considering the presence of overlapping modes of authorial existence, since various structural systems synchronically intersect: the residual (the death of the author hypothesis), dominant (the much-touted return of the author), and emergent (the overcoming of the author).

Grounded in world-systems analysis, our intervention offers a framework for conceptually understanding authorship beyond the limits of either ethico-political autonomy or poststructuralist intertextuality. Our central concept—*the overcoming of authorship*—therefore describes a trans-individual, oscillatory, and eco-technological configuration of authorship shaped by platform dynamics and epistemological shifts far beyond the confines of earlier discussions of postmodernism, not least because 'the socio-affective qualities of the user have become the primary sources of capital abstraction, value, quantification and governmental control' (Parisi 2019, 1). Emmanuel Bouju, for instance, has similarly argued recently that "the power of current events seems to have set in motion again a mode of historical development that is linked to the circulation of information on a world scale and the contagion of political upheaval: new 'revolutions,' the resurgence and violent rivalry of religious ideologies, the crisis of the credit economy" (Bouju 2023, 2). Building on Italo Calvino's lectures on the novel of the coming century, Bouju contends that *epimodernism*, as that which described our present condition, transforms "the death of the author into a game played with the author's textual shadow and digital avatar" (Bouju 2023, 5). We should likewise swiftly note that digital media should not, however, be treated just as a form of technological infrastructure. On the contrary, digital writing technologies are here intricately woven into the production of contemporary authorship per se.

Within this broader transition to our current lifeworld, we want to further introduce the concept of *intragential authoriality*, which describes a distributed, post-individual infra-mode of authorial subjectivity, which is central to this critical phase of authorial overcoming. Dennis Yi Tenen emphasizes the omniscience of "a distributed model of authorship, one that spans not only multiple human contributors, but also includes organic, algorithmic, and chance elements of

[6] This movement of authorship is also evident in the prevailing cloud metaphor today, wherein authorship relocates into a collaborative platform. The cloud, Christian P. Haines argues, brings "together digital infrastructure, labour politics, and the capitalist production of subjectivity" (Haines 2024, 58).

composition", arguing that, in the digital age, an author is best understood as a distributed system that "engages in a continual dialog with other authors, automated editorial algorithms, and the platform itself" (Tenen 2024, 55). In this sense, there is an ecology of authorship that maps "the literal flows of information between minds (wet-ware), computer programs (software), and infrastructure (hardware)" (Tenen 2024, 56). However, what Tenen misses[7] is that subject positions, as Karen Barad (2007) (2007) and N. Katherine Hayles (2017) have both shown, are not just externally distributed but also internally assembled. This would imply, as previously mentioned, leaving behind both semiotic or language-based theories of literary production (structuralist and deconstructive) and the singular preoccupation with writers' ethical or social responsibilities, in order to move into a materialist and ecological understanding of authorship. To briefly explain what we mean by ecological in this context, we draw on the paradigm of 4E cognition (defined as embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended)[8] and complexity theory[9], to proposes a new framework of relational[10], oscillatory, and enmeshed authorship. This is an engaged and materially attuned understanding of literary voice and agency. Conceptualizing subjectivity in this way allows us to define authorship as a post-semiotic and situated mode of literary agency. The critique of global literary production through world-systems theory and intersectional theory further affords the understanding of authorship as entangled within capitalist modernity.

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7 In a different book, Tenen argues that "text that is easy to copy is easy to cite or plagiarize. The physically diminished notion of authorship makes certain ways of talking about such constructs as authorial intent and fidelity to the original difficult to sustain. Practices of collaborative and machine-assisted writing (e.g., Wikipedia, automatic news summarization) further erode notions of authorship based on individual genius […] The author is not dead, however; authors continue to live and collect royalties. Autopoiesis (literature writing or discourse speaking itself) does not displace the social institution of authorship" (Tenen 2017, 14-15).

8 See Vlad Petre Glăveanu, *Distributed Creativity: Thinking Outside the Box of the Creative Individual* (Cham: Springer, 2014); Cameron Alexander, "What Is 4E Cognitive Science?" *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 2025; Albert Newen, Leon De Bruin, and Shaun Gallagher, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of 4E Cognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); James Ladyman and Karoline Wiesner, *What Is a Complex System?* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020); Alex Williams, *Political Hegemony and Social Complexity: Mechanisms of Power after Gramsci* (Cham: Springer, 2020).

9 Yuk Hui shows that "ecological thinking […] artificial intelligence (the Dartmouth conference in 1956 was a response to the aftermath of the Macy Conferences), and complex theory (which is still very important today in various disciplines such as Earth system science and Cliodynamics) are continuations of the cybernetic project" (Hui 2024, 16). For previous application of complexity theory to literary study also see Richard Walsh and Susan Stepney, eds., *Narrating Complexity* (Cham: Springer, 2018), Marina Grishakova and Maria Poulaki, eds., *Narrative Complexity: Cognition, Embodiment, Evolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

10 Nicholas Bourriaud is, probably, the most well-known theoretician of relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002).

Contemporary Capitalism

As Todd McGowan puts it, "capitalism remolds the subject in its own image and protects the subject from confronting its own traumatic satisfaction" (McGowan 2016, 48) and, as Stephen Shapiro suggests, the Deleuzian version of control society, or what Shoshana Zuboff calls "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff 2019), is based on neoliberal individuals' disintegration within "sub-integral agents" (Shapiro 2019, 61). Our current phase of neoliberalism, therefore, and *the attending overcoming of authorship*, is based on algorithmic governmentality. While describing the transition from statistical governance to algorithmic governance, Thomas Berns and Antoinette Rouvroy describe the evolution and functioning of algorithmic governance as unfolding within three stages: 1) the collection of big data[11], 2) data processing, and 3) the usage of "statistical knowledge to anticipate individual behaviours and associate them with profiles defined on the basis of correlations discovered through datamining" (Rouvroy and Berns 2013, VIII). Interestingly, Berns and Rouvroy also show that algorithmic governmentality produces no forms of subjectification, because it simply evades human subjects, feeding on infra-individual data to build supra-individual models without ever involving the individual, and without ever asking one "to describe what they are or what they could become […] or critique […] seems to constantly become more complicated or to be postponed" (Rouvroy and Berns 2013, X). Consequently, the algorithmic subject is neither "an intentional subject" nor "one who might be addressed or interpellated in the Althusserian-Lacanian sense or normalized in the disciplinary Foucauldian one" (Shapiro 2019, 63). In this context, the disintegrated authorial subject is no longer the locus of either causes or intentions. Neither style, originality, nor signature represent valuable sources since the marketable value of literary production is located below conscious awareness, not least because every author can nowadays be translated into a data-based profile: "algorithms create what might be called a *wave-particle* subject, one that is simultaneously microscopic and a protean aggregate that is constantly changing through real-time feedback" (Shapiro 2019, 64). The algorithmic author is a concatenation, to quote Rouvroy, of "infra-individual data and supra-individual patterns" (Rouvroy 2012, 144-145). As such, we believe that it is exactly this algorithmic ecology of authorship, modelled on the "post-self […] wave-particle subjectivity" (Shapiro 2019, 68), that must therefore be supplemented through an embodied and intersectional critique of digital cybernetics and virtual subjectivity.

[11] In *Supposing the Subject*, Joan Copjec emphasized, as early as 1994, in a psychoanalytical collection which responds to Jean-Luc Nancy's more poststructuralist 1991 collection, *Who Comes after the Subject?*, that "the strong belief driving our information age – that everything can be/is recorded, that nothing exists outside this historical register - serves this capitalist logic of gain" (Copjec 1994).

The Post-Novel

The myth of "national authors" was created through the intertwining of the rigidly demarcated frontiers of so-called "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983), on the one hand, and the boundless depths of interiority, on the other. Major literary forms, such as the novel and, since the Romantic revolution, the great lyric poem, as Abrams dubbed it, promoted the corresponding ideals of autonomous authors' unique genius and stylistic signatures (Abrams 1965). This construction marginalized other forms of authorship (non-authors or contested authors), making them residual, or pushing certain professional writers[12] into forms of social relegation, obvious, for instance, in the pejorative term "hack writer". However, the critical languages games (*sensu* Wittgenstein) that were once dominant are now complicated by the fact that authors with high symbolic capital readily adopt cultural strategies and literary postures that once belonged to amateurs, as these seem better equipped to register and respond to our current moment.

Additionally, the 20th century has also seen the development of creative writing programs, especially within the neoliberal framework, in terms of capitalizing the surplus-value of certain prestigious writers who sell their labour. Writers' symbolic capital or, simply put, the value of authorship paradoxically goes down, since creative writing courses represent some sort of cultural factories that produce still (other) writers as commodities. The excess of authorship is then transformed into profit by capitalists (the hiring Universities or private firms) because they reframe the typically unpaid cultural labour of authorship (the process or the work of becoming a writer) into a partially monetized and somewhat rewarded process of production. Combining Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau's arguments with Laurent Berlant's material examination of the potentialities within the neoliberal authorial labour of survival, we should equally acknowledge the unequal possibility of political action and individuation arising in the midst of such everyday life activities (Berlant 2016).

Correspondingly, authorship has also been thought of in terms of its distribution within new media forms, like video games (Lopes, Tavares, and Marques 2018), through players, directors, and studios, or, at the opposite end of the spectrum, through so-called mediators in premodern texts (Helle 2019). Analogously, the deconstructive death of the author that motivated so much of literary studies in the last 60 years, especially in its poststructuralist guise, was based on the Saussurean binary claim that meaning is differential. Yet, today,

[12] John Potts lists "ghostwriters, part-writers, report writers, advertising copywriters, marketing and public relations writers, public information designers and writers" (2022, 17).

meaning is no longer differential, but correlative, and the semiotic models have, as such, lost their efficacy. Nowadays, we experience life in a post-truth society, not because of the postmodern appeal of relativizing claims about history and documentation, but because the academic institutions that authorized these statements have themselves become prey to the declining authority of liberalism's binary theoretical machinery. Our aim, then, is to lay out the blueprint for complex ideas and practices related to contemporary authorship (understood, roughly, as starting in the 1990s with the advent of the World Wide Web), reflecting on their conceptual density, situated embeddedness, and diversity. Indeed, the 21st century "ushered in a new era of authorship, thanks to the affordances of digital media and the Internet", concretized in the figure of *the demotic author*: "a re-emergence of oral storytellers of old […] and a figure of the future" (Skains 2019, 2-3).

Three areas of authorship ascend from our broad investigation: 1) ontological, 2) rhetorical, and 3) dialectical. We like to call our approach eco-materialist in that it signals the necessity of examining these three coeval dimensions of authorship in a richly coordinated fashion[13].

It's perhaps best to remind ourselves first that authorship, at least in Michel Foucault's view, is described as a variable discursive function that appears in certain forms and under particular sociocultural conditions and power relations, and which is consequently echoed within or throughout hermeneutic/literary processes. Moreover, the role of authorship, and of those actors or agents that occupy this function, are in turn determined by the general conditions or modes of literary production and reception, and that they, finally, inform broad definitions of literature. Last but not least, authorship, Foucault suggests, is a social construct and, as such, its value will always be determined by both mediators and intermediaries (editors, translators, critics, readers, etc.) and further influenced by fields that lay beyond the confines of culture and art. What we suggest is that perhaps a better, more rounded, approach would consider contemporary authorship from both a non-liberal humanist perspective, as a trans-individual force—whether that's a Foucauldian discourse or Bourdieu's space of possibles—, and, concurrently, an agential view: feminist, relational (as in Latour's ANT, for instance), and intersectional.

First, the ontological model is, perhaps, most clearly represented within Alain Badiou's work who argues that the subject espouses a certain fidelity to an event. The subject, he continues, "is also the artist-creator […] who opens up a new theoretical field", while the truth of an event (similar to Lacan's Real), in his view, "is solely constituted by rupturing with the order which supports it"

[13] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi proposed an early systemic model of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi 2014).

(Badiou 2007, xiii). Even though an event is not something that can be predicted, the authorial subject is nevertheless created by truth procedures. Connecting Badiou's understanding of the authorial event with what Foucault calls "the presence of certain events in a text" (Foucault 1996, 128), which is how he describes the author-function, emphasizes the value of authorship as determined by the particular positions certain agents occupy in the international literary field and the discursive rules by which these operate. In this ontological paradigm, new authorial truths are generated, Katerina Kozova argues, by means of a subject's adherence to "a singularity without linguistic content" (Kozova 2014, 3): what Rancière would call a disagreement (Rancière 1999) or, finally, a utopic enactment, in Žižek (Žižek 1999, 2014). Joan Copjec points to the possibility of an ontological relocation of the author, claiming that "the subject, eliminated from all its own statements, deconstructed, appears in the real, or: the subject discovers itself in its very effacement, in its own modern graveyard" (Copjec 1994, xi).

On the other hand, within the rhetorical mode, authorial intention is defined as "a feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response" (Phelan, Rabinowitz, Warhol, Herman and Richardson 2012, 30). A couple of years earlier, James Phelan, indeed, conceptualized such intentions as "a recursive relationship […] among authorial agency", intertextual phenomena, and readers' reception (Phelan 2007, 4). Although rooted in pragmatism and the theory of relevance, a similar rhetorical model is also at work in Richard Walsh's more recent anti-representational conceptualization of authorial creativity as contextual mediation and narrative understanding (Walsh 2007, 2018). In short, Walsh's author is a real-world communicative agent of serious fictional discourse. Nevertheless, both the ontological and rhetorical conceptualizations of authorship seem insufficient, as Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan clearly show, for instance, because they tend to reify the author as a threshold-concept: "pointing inside and out, before and after simultaneously […] both an agent responsible for the text and a position within it" (Ginsburg and Rimmon-Kenan 1999, 72). Finally, the communicative and ontological are, of course, complemented by a dialectical model of authorship, which was probably most effectively probed, yet again, in Burke's famous *Death and Return of the Author*.

Our paper tracks the changes and substitutions in the regime of the authorial apparatus, especially through our attempt to redefine the concept from a world-systems perspective. So, we are reframing authorship beyond both the liberal-humanist model and its (post)structuralist critique, by positioning it after the novel (understood as one of liberalism's key forms), after semiotics (in a correlative, computational world), and within world-systems theory and the

space of the transnational literary field, through ecocritical and posthuman concerns[14]. This allows us to both integrate and surpass the three models sketched above.

The multiply interconnected question of authorship transforms when the apparatuses that once assured its functioning—individual autonomy, national narrative, private interiority, to name just a hefty few—are destabilized by computational regimes, post-truth epistemologies, and correlative logics of AI-driven meaning-making. We consider, therefore, the reconfiguration of *digital literary power*[15] as a world-historical symptom. The notion of literary voice breaks down under conditions of epistemic and environmental crisis, entering a phase of post-expressivity.

Now, the idea of autonomous authorship has been one of the central tenets of liberal epistemologies. However, the obvious decline of authorship as a meaning-making function in the current computational and ecological conjuncture. Requires us to (re)think the function of authorship from a broader, post-semiotic, and even planetary perspective (Hui 2024). Deconstruction disembodied the author via language, while postcolonial thinkers recentred it within the ethical responsibility of agency. Nevertheless, both approaches remain insufficient if looked at through the windowpane of a world-systemic literary ecology, wherein authorship is shaped by geopolitical and infrastructural forces. From a post-anthropocentric perspective, then, tracking planetary authorship implies not only considering the coordinates of cultural geopolitics, but also locating it and extending it beyond human creativity to extra-human or more-than-human practices and entities, not least because, as Annemarie Bridy suggests, "all creativity is inherently algorithmic" (Bridy 2012, 27). It might also involve thinking about how 'prestige writers' move into platform-based algorithmic collaborations and participatory infrastructures.

In the age of platform imperialism, we are also witnessing the transformation of authorship as a brand and a form of curated identity which paradoxically reveals the unwaged and reproductive authorial work of intermediaries or brokers (translators, editors, critics, agents, proofreaders, book sellers) and legitimizing institutions (publishing houses, journals, magazines,

[14] Mengchen Lang categorizes various approaches to authorship as follows: 1. Bringing together different theories of authorship; 2. Drawing on other disciplines to conceptualize authorship; 3. Putting theories of authorship in conversation with literary texts; 4. Drawing on writers' non-fictional texts to put forth new theories of authorship (Lang 2022, 32–33).

[15] We define the overcoming of authorship, post-authorship, or non-authorship in line with Laruelle's work on non-standard philosophy: the use of this concept enables partial subscription to the tenets of a specific critical and theoretical genealogy without committing ourselves to its orthodoxies but instead, to use Said's terms, freely radicalizing both its filiations and affiliations.

book fairs, literary festivals, awards and prizes), and the power differentials inherent within[16]. A world-systems theory of authorship therefore implies an awareness of planetary embeddedness and transnational literary circulation. In short, authorship is no longer just a function, pace Foucault, but *an interrelated, algorithmic knot in a world-ecological field*.

We Have Never Been Authors

We have never been authors. To unpack this gnomic formulation, let's take a few steps back. In the last couple of years, we have been witnessing, on the one hand, the regression of democratic rule, which has only intensified, emphasizing the imbroglio of neoliberal regimes with dictatorial systems of control on a global scale. Moreover, the ongoing geopolitical conflicts and the developing environmental emergencies might altogether seem to be steering us towards complete disaster. On the other hand, though, we have also, indeed, seen the strengthening and multiplication of radical, post-party movements within the intersectional left, and equally so among queer ecologists or decolonial critics. In the context of critical theory and literary studies, these practices represent a commitment to disrupt (hetero)normative and anthropocentric configurations, revealing the entanglements of power, identity, and discourse. What these and other similar knowledge-movements teach us is that oppressive structures work together and we should consequently disrupt all binary logics and naturalized hierarchies, while favouring, instead, relational and processual forms of existence.

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* Michel Foucault reflected on the ruins of institutions, systems of thought, and power structures, showing how ideas and discourses emerge, change, and disappear, while also foreshadowing the idea according to which epistemological shifts will produce, in their turn, a collective type of imaginary consciousness about cultural hegemony or, to be more precise, about why and how subjectivities might be controlled or govern themselves. He consequently anticipated his own work on governmentality,

[16] We might also note, in the words of Sophus Helle, that "authorship, as it is currently studied in literary history, can refer to two things: the production of a text and the depiction of how that production took place. In the first sense, authorship refers to the collection of people and practices that create a given text. Studying authorship in this sense may involve tracing the author's biography, determining the exact identity of an anonymous writer, studying the circumstances of the text's composition or its sources of inspiration and input, the co-authorship or editorial intervention that shaped its final form, and so on. In the second sense, authorship refers to how readers have since imagined this act of textual creation" (Helle 2024, 225).

biopolitics (or the turning away from structuralism and poststructuralism alike), and the technologies of the self. A few years prior to this, in *The Order of Things* (1966), Foucault also suggested that an episteme is a kind of knowledge structure that (re)produces the conditions of possibility for certain truths and facts to gain scientific plausibility. Indeed, this Kantian critique allowed Foucault to trace the development of ideas as discursive arrangements that materialize, transform, and eventually retreat into a state of ruinous decay. These works, along with his equally famous *What is an Author?*, cast light on the notion of human subjectivity as a historical construction but also on the technologies that organize and shape different aspects of it.

The rhetoric of tangential apocalypse prevalent in specialized critical debates, as illustrated in the author's circular death and rebirth, might be persuasively countered, we argue, by transversally employing a complex series of interdisciplinary methodologies. Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida all came to realize that authorship, at least in its 19th century instantiations and prolongments, were in some sense damaging to literary study. The author failed to serve theory well. Then there's the fact that it had some seriously compromising qualities: forever white, certainly not coloured, always masculine, never feminine, ever master, never slave. Indeed, authorship is intrinsically tied to authority, power, hierarchies, and exclusions, and the modern world-system has been reproducing and reifying authors to the detriment of readers or, even worse, against disadvantaged public audiences for hundreds of years now.

So, what we're saying is that authors have never truly existed as such. Sure, there were writers and lots of other techno-cultural systems that propped them up as *real*, but authorship has always already been a premodern thing: collective, relational, embedded, entangled, dynamic, and what have you[17]. The modern world-system simply obscured this reality through legal formulations, philosophical conceptualizations, and economic interests. Authorship is, we argue, a conglomerate of *world-apparatuses*. The sciences and humanities, though, in their post-eighteenth century restructuring of the University, have nevertheless proceeded through segregations, eliminations, isolations, omissions, and exclusions, so much so that, historically speaking, the only form of legitimate authorial subject-positionality was discursively made to be that of the white, male, imperial, heterosexual, Eurocentric, and nationalist writer, better known as the solitary genius. Technologies are naturally entangled and mutually constitutive of subjectivity and authoriality and they structure both power and opposition, registering and shaping socioeconomic structures.

[17] A pioneering work in the field is Pierre Lévy's writings on collective intelligence (Lévy 1997).

The question of subjectivity has been also recently addressed by Timothy Morton and Dominic Boyer who refashioned the posthuman nomad as a *hyposubject*. The hyposubject, they argue, is a reaction to the overwhelming presence of *hyperobjects* in the context of the Anthropocene. Deleuzian becoming is in-built within the constitution of the hyposubject, since it is non-linear and non-teleological and its transformations only occur through difference, encounters, and relationality. Here is their working definition: "hyposubjects are also multiphasic and plural, not-yet, neither here nor there, less than the sum of their parts. They are in other words subscendent rather than transcendent" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 14). The hyposubject is one that enjoys or thrives in the process of transformation itself rather than any form of essentialism. What's more, becoming only happens through situated and non-transcendental assemblages or encounters that dissolve any immanent boundaries of the hyposubject. Becoming a hyposubject (or, better yet, becoming-hyposubject) is, thus, a political affair and represents a tactical resistance to hypersubjects (molar identities). Conversely, hyposubjectivity is a continuous process of molecular and rhizomatic transformations defined by affective intensities and relational entanglements.

Now, this shift within subjectivity is admittedly evanescent or even flimsy because, as Stephen Shapiro argues, for any successful attempt to handle global changes within subjectivity will further need to be articulated with "the insights that Michel Foucault produced through his work of the 1970s" (Shapiro 2024, 18). Moreover, Shapiro continues, "Williams's term—*structure of feeling*—might be replaced with that of *experience-system* to […] indicate the world-system's framework in shaping subjectivity within capitalism" (Shapiro 2024, 19). Morton and Boyer also show that hyposubjects are "feminist, antiracist, colourful, queer, ecological, transhuman and intrahuman" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 15), which sounds and looks a lot like intersectionality, at least at first. But the two concepts stem from different intellectual traditions: object-oriented ontology/posthumanism, on the one hand, and critical race/feminist theory, on the other. Nevertheless, there are some points of overlap in how they both challenge dominant understandings of subjectivity, identity, and power: hyposubjects "do not recognize the rule of androleukoheteropetromodernity and the apex species behavior it epitomizes and reinforces" (Morton and Boyer 2021, 15). They are decentred, incoherent, and often entangled within systems larger than themselves, so therefore distributed and ecologically embedded. Intersectionality, via Crenshaw, describes, indeed, a type of multiplicity but one dealing with various forms of oppression and marginalization, or what Laurent Berlant would have called "the female complaint": the job here is that of disclosing a form of unobscured political agency (Berlant 2008). One that does challenge universalist, molar identities by emphasizing situatedness, layering, and relationality. The

key difference, however, is that, while both models foster emancipatory outlooks, the definition of the hyposubject moves away from a socially constructed understanding of identity, which remains central within intersectionality, and therefore gravitates towards an anti-metaphysical critique of being. To sum up, then, destabilizing fixed identities and highlighting the entanglements of the human subject within larger systems is where they overlap.

Nevertheless, these movements are part of a broader crusade: Vincent B. Leitch calls it "the renaissance of twenty-first-century theory" (Leitch 2014, 144), centred around the *derealization* of subjectivity, to use Judith Butler's term, which is, in short, trying to rethink "alternative organizations of thought, agency, and practice", whether this happens in the form of new materialisms, the abandonment of "both liberal and socialist treatments of the collective-individual opposition in favour of more complex processes of individuation", or, finally, "in the advent of queer theory and […] the autonomy of affect", as well as the advent of posthumanism, ecocriticism, and global discourses (Haines and Grattan 2017, 3-5). Indeed, Fredric Jameson similarly argued that contemporary theory is engulfed in thinking subjectivity beyond the individual and into the collective (Jameson 2004). With Haines and Grattan, we also contend that "the biopolitical turn is not a negation of the linguistic turn; it is, instead, a re-turn of language to the corporeality that has always inhabited it" (Haines and Grattan 2017, 10).

Indeed, as Daniel Hartley has recently shown, "capitalist impersonal domination, then, both at the level of the economy and of culture, is best understood as a combined and uneven process of depersonalization and (re-)personalization" (Hartley 2019, 136). Christopher Breu similarly showed that the contemporary landscape of theoretical practices is currently structured by an antinomy between the effacement of the subject, on the one hand, and the voluntaristic assertion of the subject's actuality, on the other (Breu 2017). Challenging such grand dialectic narratives and other conventional associations of authorial deconstruction with countercultural movements, for instance, and replacing them with multiply nested forms of conceptualization allows us to further argue that innovative deployments of contemporary authorship—theoretical or otherwise—can only be properly understood as forms of anti-modern and anti-capitalist engagement or resistance, even though we agree that the infringement of copyright might present serious problems for the contemporary author (Potts 2022, 172).

Our paper highlights, therefore, the ways in which authorship navigates the tensions between these cultural, social, economic, and political extremes. It further foregrounds how a contemporary conceptualization of authorship might potentially undermine both data-driven neoliberal logics and new

versions of fascism through its siding with both post-Lacanian conceptualizations of subjectivity and the decolonizing tactics of the hyposubject/queer/intersectional/decolonial left. What we are dealing with, then, is a new form of *authoriality without the Author*, a sort of counter-effect, wherein *the post-author* is now governed by the algorithmic technologies of power. As with all current theories of subjectivity and agency, authorship is best rethought, we believe, as a form of *authorialization*, that is, as a process or a vital force on the move.

We have also highlighted the differences between three defining moments of authorship: the late 1960s (mainly poststructuralist), the late 1980s (postcolonial, feminist, etc.), and our current moment. We have emphasized the hybrid nature of the term, as it intersects various fields and serves as a heuristic device to understand recent literary phenomena. Consequently, a materialist and, hence, post-semiotic understanding of the economic and social relationships of the author requires conceptual frameworks that decipher the elements or, better yet, the ecology (*i.e.* the coexistence and interdependent functioning) of technological mediation and ideological refraction. Approaching the question of authorship in a global and digital world demands moving beyond the post-semiotic mindset or the structuralist/poststructuralist frameworks of Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and S. Burke, who were mainly concerned either with the death of the author, the decentralization of meaning, or, conversely, the ethics of localized authorship. In the digital age, however, where media, communication, and production are increasingly collaborative, fluid, and distributed, authorship takes on new dimensions. By conceptualizing authors "as mediating, nonbinary, and partial" agents, Sophus Helle emphasizes, indeed, that authorship is co-created between multiple participants (Helle 2019, 115).

The Algorithmic Author[18]

We think it's therefore high time to either forgo and render useless the constructivist and postmodernist navel-gazing strategies, Barthesian demystifying semiotics, or, alternatively, to systematically and patiently decolonize these techno-cultural constellations of subjectivity and reshape them within a new (and probably still emerging and self-configuring) *longue durée* of posthuman, materialist, affective, and ecological perspectives of the current capitalist world-system in an age of VUCA-world polycrisis and platform capitalism. As Sharae

[18] John Potts argues we "[…] have moved beyond the "death of the author" to a reconstituted author-as-algorithm" (2022, 8).

Deckard and Stephen Shapiro argue, one central feature of neoliberalism includes "the redefinition of individuals as quantums of human capital rather than subjects of interior development or political representation […] and the emergence of new algorithmic technologies […] that have penetrated everyday life" (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 2). The material processes and technologies of AI capitalism, understood as the current/ emerging phase of neoliberalism, have, indeed, laid out a new regime of algorithmic governmentality and, consequently, a particular authorial model fraught, nevertheless, with inner tensions and contradictions, and not least with broader "analogical similarities in chronically contiguous moments within capitalism's long spiral" (Deckard and Shapiro 2019, 29), wherein older authorial postures might be reactivated and refashioned to provide fresh conceptional frameworks for accurately grasping the contours of contemporary literary production.

Nonetheless, we need also remember that, especially viewed from a culturally materialist perspective, the emerging algorithmic capitalism coexists with both dominant and residual modes or conditions of general production, consequently generating instances of what we might call combined and uneven authorial subjectivities. Philosophically exploring, à la Badiou, the mathematical substrate behind the Bayesian revolution in statistics and probability, Justin Joque helps in extrapolating what we would call the intimacy between current technological metamorphosis of AI capitalism and literary production, and the attendant production of symbolic/cultural capital which is now foregrounded by/through algorithms (Joque 2022). However, as Matteo Pasquinelli argues in his 2023 book, *The Eye of the Master*, we might also acknowledge that AI has always only imitated the abstraction of forms of labour and social relations transforming them into pure automation without any proof of actually existing sentient autonomy (Pasquinelli 2023). Authorial subjectivity is mathematically reconfigured in accordance with this machinic epistemology, overseen by the political ontology and attention economy of contemporary capitalism (neoliberal or otherwise). Unfortunately, as Safiya Noble underlines in her work on racism and search engines, even the process of encrypting algorithmic authorship might reproduce oppressive categories, maintaining previous power relations and existing hierarchies (Noble 2017).

"Economic neoliberalism, free market ideology, and late capitalist individualism can no longer be separated from the various technological and cultural posthumanization processes" (Herbrechter 2013, 55), Stefan Herbrechter argues. He shows how these processes of posthumanization command new forms of subjectivity and the existence of alternative technologies of the self (Herbrechter 2013, 85-95). Foucault's technologies of power and of the self both reflect this imbrication. While the former "determine[s] the conduct of individuals and

submit[s] them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject," the latter "permit[s] individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and soul, thought, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality" (Foucault 1988, 18). Dynamic and embodied, authorship is the product of multiple technologies, fields, institutions, epistemologies, and practices. Indeed, Herbrechter further argues that authorial subjects transform themselves by means of technical interactions and adaptations. Global neoliberal conditions have led to "intensified mediation between humans and their individuation […] via information technologies, which are in the process of transforming the […] liberal humanist subject into a new, namely posthumanist understanding of individuation" (Herbrechter 2013, 154). The transformation of the dominant subject position of liberal humanism into the posthumanist or algorithmic subject of informational code logically extends the definition of authorship in that it includes non-human actors and forces.

To be sure, Yuk Hui also argues that the generalization of recursive algorithms transforms capitalism into an organismic model realized by informational machines (Hui 2024, 55). And, of course, we also know, in the words of Maurizio Lazzarato, that "the subjectivity and subjectivations capitalism produces are meant for the machine" (Lazzarato 2014, 14). Foucault also famously argued that the author's function serves as a regulatory construct within society rather than a source of originality. Though revolutionary, Foucault did not anticipate the advent of global digital networks where authorship is increasingly fragmented, collaborative, and often non-human. What distinguishes authorship, therefore, under the neoliberal, globalized, contemporary regime is the synchronous accretion of several *world-apparatuses* (*dispositifs*, policies, instruments, strategies) which, as a cluster-concept, require specific investigative methodologies (technological, ideological, economic, and legal).

First, digital platforms challenge the notion of authorship in that they highlight its collective dimension, where clear-cut boundaries between writers, editors, and readers slowly disappear. Moreover, Daniel Punday, for instance, shows that authors use the framing concept of the platform as a self-imposed, voluntary constraint (Punday, 2020, 118-131). Without any one agent assuming full responsibility, authorship presupposes a shifting and temporary function. Furthermore, it has also become obvious that different cultural forms which might be grouped under the notion of the post-novel (Leitch 2014, 148), such as fanfiction and open-source projects, disrupt traditional models of authorship by distributing agency not only across a post-digital network, but also transnationally throughout the globe. Mixing narratology and literary sociology,

Ingo Berensmeyer has recently shown how literature itself produces authors through the mediation of different novelistic genres and consequently defines *author fictions* as stories that both materialistically address the conditions of cultural production and concoct radical models of authorship (Berensmeyer 2023). In a similar sociological vein, Rebecca Braun conceptualizes literary production through identifying four modes of authorship that have governed the 20th century German literary field (celebratory, commemorative, satiric, and utopian), while also pointing to the coming into being of an inclusive and collaborative mode of authorship (Braun 2022).

Authorship can therefore be traded, shared, or split across intercultural networks. The author becomes a node in a dynamic system of anonymous and iterative processes and interrelations. Digital technologies and their algorithms currently curate content and decide, in Rancière's terms, what is visible and shared, and therefore actively shape the consumption and production of literary works. Bernard Lahire's unique sociological work and his notion of *l'homme pluriel* might also be leveraged to show how algorithmic authorship is often multiple: a writer might be a professional writer on Medium, a satirical meme-maker on Instagram, a DJ in her spare time, and an activist on Twitter/X (Lahire 1998).

Second, AI has further decentred anthropocentric understandings of authorship. Viewed from a decolonial and world-systems perspective, this posthumanization and hybridization associated with algorithmic authorship also highlights the power relations and global inequalities that structure literary production, for example, in the Global South. As an expression of systemic inequalities, transnational flows, and the material conditions shaping creative production, the author is consequently part of a digital ecosystem where further questions of gender, race, class, and other intersecting factors mingle, thus allowing marginalized/subaltern voices to assert their authorship against cultural hegemony, on the one hand, while exposing them to new forms of oppression, censorship, or accumulation by appropriation, on the other.

In this algorithmic age, authorship might be viewed as a position shaped by unequal access to resources within a hierarchical world-economy. Authors from peripheries and semiperipheries often face structural barriers to global circulation, constrained by access to digital tools, publishing networks, and symbolic capital. Their works are frequently marginalized or commodified for global audiences, while authors in the core (Global North) benefit from broader visibility and institutional support. Some authors, like Rushdie, Franzen, or McEwan are privileged as celebrities, while others remain provincial. Social media platforms themselves, such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok, act as

what literary sociologists call *cultural intermediaries*, determining who gets visibility and who is consequently excluded from public view.

This combined yet uneven development of authorship registers the systemic differences between various regions of the world. It is not surprising, then, that the digital environment aggravates these inequalities, as access to the digital tools of literary production and the institutions that distribute symbolic capital remain unequal. In the framework of capitalist realism, the digital divide decides access to authorship. As such, authorial labour, especially in the periphery and semiperiphery, is a form of precarious labour. Conversely, however, we might also emphasize that, caught between global pressures and cosmopolitan outbursts, digital authorship functions as or is, at least, embedded in a transnational commodity chain of cultural production, wherein semiperipheral authors, for instance, might negotiate and register in their work both wordly trends and local traditions. Here, we might even paraphrase Pasquinelli in saying that, within a Luhmannian autopoietic framework, the author is not entirely replaced by an AI system but becomes a meta-author, or a cyborg-author that provides synthesis to a score of microtasks (Pasquinelli 2024, 108). Book historians, such as Robert Darnton, for instance, have long pointed out that the entire discipline is based on examining "a communications circuit that runs from the author to the publisher, the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader" (Darnton 1982, 67). By examining each node in this circuit, or the supply chain of authorship, we might also get an idea of how the author is transmitted through its technological and medial apparatuses.

Certain authorial practices might therefore also function as counter-narratives of resistance to neoliberal logics, challenging the dominant paradigms of creativity and literary production. Authorship itself could be staged as a performative critique of neoliberalism's ideological and cultural formations. Nevertheless, peripheral and semiperipheral cultures' access to core markets depends on translation and adaptations as forms of cultural gatekeeping performed within hegemonic literary languages, such as English, French, or German. Digital platforms are not politically neutral spaces but embedded within what might be called neo-colonial or neo-imperialistic systems of exploitation, surveillance, and control, particularly in the Global South. Which is why our intervention is not only explanatory but also decolonial in nature, addressing the unequal distribution of cultural capital within which algorithmic authorship is entangled in the material realities of global capitalism, offering new avenues for both critique and creative resistance.

Conclusions

Part human, part machine, part community, algorithmic authorship and its post-novelistic deployments, whether autofictional or autotheoretical, are multimodal, fluid, inter-distributed, and trans-participatory: powered by the global cybernetic circulation complex (CCC) which is speeding up its turnover time (Dyer-Whiteford and Mularoni 2025, 71), we therefore understand the post-author as a multiply dynamic constellation or assemblage wedged within a hybrid ecology of co-production, marketization, and financialization[19]. With multiple locations or institutions (authorial hubs), authorship might also be understood, especially in its current materially composite digital fabric, as a constantly reassembling socio-cultural phenomenon. We need to acknowledge, nevertheless, that there is also a dangerous potential of authorial usurpation lurking ahead, wherein AI might be "deployed by capital to oversee and manage processes where humans, though still integral, are subservient to an opaque, market-driven machine logic", transforming AI tools into "requisite instruments for workers, enhancing productivity under heightened surveillance" (Dyer-Whiteford and Mularoni 2025, 189).

However, even if "the subject today is being configured by the automated architecture of a computational sovereignty" (Parisi 2019, 1), it does not preclude the possibility of counter-hegemonic or transformatory authorial positions. Caught between what Lazzarato terms social subjection and machinic enslavement, and the further possibility of political emancipation, Luciana Parisi attests that "the alien subject of AI coincides with the argument that instrumentality is not a resignation to the network image of the subject", while "re-configuring the everyday activities of computational processing in the formation of multilogical modes of reason" (Parisi 2019, 21). Justin Joque has poignantly argued that, even if rendered as a mere network effects, cybertechnologies also enable new forms of digital subjects to turn against the state and other structures of power, emphasizing that "it becomes vital to theorize the positive possibilities of the cybernetic subjects we have become" (Joque 2018, 149). More recently, though, in his turn towards a revolutionary mathematics (and a metaphysics of objectification), Joque also sustains that, in Bayesian terms, the subject constantly collects data. Bayesian methods, he adds, are "ascendant, and the machine learning models built upon them are now used to regulate everything from high-frequency trading to global supply chains" (Joque 2022). With this in

[19] N. Katherine Hayles defines cognitive assemblages as "collectivities, not exclusively human, not exclusively organic, through which information, interpretations, and meanings circulate" (2024, 95).

view, Joque seems to have become more of a pessimist about the coming into being of an effective political subject and, thus, he ambivalently surmises that "the revolutionary subject is beset simultaneously by an algorithmically fragmented reality and an intensely managed digital control" (Joque 2022).

On the one hand, Matthew Eatough showed how the concept of *genre-system* might be fit for examining the ways in which the literary field disperses economic processes and ideologies through the allegorizing of certain phases of literary production within the capitalist world-system (Eatough 2012). One bridge connecting the novelization of platform capitalism and authorship is, as J.-H. Coste and V. Dussol argue, their mutual tendency or "inclination to the counterfactual" and their shared interest in "deciphering change and envisioning the future" (Coste and Dussol 2020, 13). Stephen Shapiro, on the other hand, has suggested that a more recursive logic lies behind literary innovation, namely that genres embody a form of relative fixed labour-power, as they ensure the long-term reproduction of class relations (Shapiro 2020, 100). To both perspectives we might now simply add that, in the age of algorithmic capital, authors themselves might be conceptualized as representing or, better yet, registering the fluid dimension of labour-power being in a constant yet flexible relation with AI means of production. The effects of capitalism are global but are unequally and discontinuously revealed within discrete social and cultural areas within the world-system currently shaped by non-human actors such as AI technologies. It is only natural, then, that, in a post-semiotic framework, narratives themselves might register or even actively shape this new world-ecology of posthuman cohabitation, sprawling, as it does, entangled and situated authorial algorithms, not least because, as David McNally claims, liberal ideology typically denies it, the monstrosity of the market tends to "find refuge in folklore, literature, video and film" (McNally 2011, 4). Deployments of post-authorial narratives critically stimulate and register the unhinged exploitation of digital capitalism to better uncover and deterritorialize its mechanism.

By instrumentalizing world-systems analysis as a general framework, our paper has responded to the polycrisis we are confronted with and discussed the contemporary ruinous state of literary authorship and other theoretical institutions, such as liberal humanism itself, in the age of digital/algorithmic capitalism from a variety of perspectives: materialist, ecological, or posthuman, and, more importantly, post-semiotic. We reconsidered the notion of authorship by drawing from conceptualization of agency in related disciplines, as well as from literary theories that have been previously ignored. Post-authorship, we contend, is algorithmic authorship. To restore the future of the novel, we must reverse its myth: the ascension of the AI-author must be ransomed by the birth of post-writing.

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