

ALGORITHMIC AUTHORSHIP AND ITS DISCONTENTS

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Abstract This paper examines the relationship between AI and authorship in the context of algorithmic governmentality. First, it is argued that, in order to understand recent reconfigurations of authorship, one must view the concept of the author from a post-semiotic perspective and, second, through the lens of world-systems analysis. Pivoting beyond critique and against the liberal human subject, this paper further suggests that academia ought to focus on *the cultural ecotechnics of authorship*, a global socio-cultural and economic *dispositif*, spanning across different fields, disciplines, institutions, and practices. Algorithmic capitalism, understood as the post-neoliberal phase we're presently inhabiting, requires us to mount a defence of authorship against a literary culture of self-developing and self-devouring autonomous cyber-capitalistic processes. Defining three (3) modes of authorship (ecto-authorship, mezzo-authorship, and endo-authorship), the paper ends by suggesting how AI autofiction might afford decolonial counterpublics and diffractive reading practices.

Keywords Authorship, algorithmic governmentality, world-systems, diffractive reading, AI.

Introduction

Any study of authorship should assume and be read as a mode of speculative forward thinking as it implies “working within—and on the border of—a number of loosely neighbouring academic territories [...] as we are dealing with a phenomenon that moves in and out of several interconnected yet at times also independent spheres, different disciplines and epistemologies.”¹ A banality for those working in the field of authorial studies, this *locus communis* is, indeed, becoming more and more transparent today to everyone with the rise of AI. To understand algorithmic authorship is to understand digital technology. It seems, though, that contemporary

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¹ Eva Hemmungs Wirtén, *No Trespassing. Authorship, Intellectual Property Rights, and the Boundaries of Globalization* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 12-13.

critical theory has reached some sort of limit by treating technology as either an instrument of capital, a medium of subjectivation, or an infrastructure awaiting political manipulation. So, while approaches such as left accelerationism, cognitive capitalism, surveillance capitalism, and neoliberal psychopathology offer incisive diagnoses, they remain largely intra-modern, presupposing the existence of a universal technological rationality and thus focusing on capitalism's latest configurations rather than on the conditions that make these configurations possible in the first place. This paper argues, in a neo-Kantian fashion, that technology must be theorized as a world-forming, ecologically embedded system, conceptualizing capitalism not primarily as a mode of production but as a regime of technological temporality.

To understand algorithmic authorship, I argue, we therefore need to enlist the help of what Wallerstein called 'knowledge movements' that go beyond critique and the hermeneutics of suspicion. We might extend, for instance, Maurizio Lazzarato's indictment according to which "in order to bring together the conditions for rupture and subjective reconversion, *we must move beyond both language and semiotics*."² Let's quickly recall, for instance, Bruno Latour's early impeachment of critique and, alternatively, Rita Felski's variously celebrated assessment of the "limits of critique," or the impressive panoply of alternative readings that have sprung up in the early 21st century: surface reading, reparative reading, distant reading.³ More recent and broader takes, such as Galin Tihanov's therapeutic regime⁴ or Alexander Gefen's reparative retooling of literature,⁵ for instance, have also pointed to the concrete, affective, or material functions of both reading and authoriality. Yet another area with which the post-semiotic regime might seem to align itself to is Toril Moi's "revolution of the ordinary,"⁶ wherein what is at stake is precisely the Wittgensteinian task of moving beyond the logics of linguistic representation as such and therefore recovering the role of (retrospective) authorial intentions in a post-semiotic regime.

And there's, finally, the ontological or vitalist shift in contemporary philosophy, which is post-Heideggerian, thus foregrounding a new type of realism and objectivism or what Quentin Meillassoux calls post-correlationism.⁷ Drawing on various sources, from Spinoza to Deleuze, these groups, indeed, reject social and cultural constructivism yet typically retain a decisively

² Maurizio Lazzarato, *Sign and Machines. Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity* (Semiotext(e), 2014), 17.

³ The figure of *diffraction* is relevant here because it provides a material and/or materialist mode of reading in which authorial discourses, and various other modes of cultural production, might be regarded as no longer reflective spheres but deeply entwined in an intersectional yet uneven entanglement. See Kai Merten (ed.), *Diffractional Reading: New Materialism, Theory, Critique* (Bloomsbury, 2021).

⁴ See Galin Tihanov, *The Birth and Death of Literary Theory. Regimes of Relevance in Russia and Beyond* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

⁵ Alexander Gefen, *Repair the World. French Literature in the Twenty-First Century*, translated by Tegan Raleigh, (De Gruyter Brill, 2024).

⁶ Toril Moi, *Revolution of the Ordinary. Literary Studies after Wittgenstein, Austin, and Cavell* (The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁷ See Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (Continuum, 2008).

metaphysical spin which phenomenologically brackets embodiment, situatedness, and the configuration and dynamics of actually existing power relations within the capitalist world-system.

Maybe it's worth, therefore, saying a word or two about what experts call *the cultural industries* as well, and, more specifically, about how this industry relates to literary production and authorship, since the editorial logic is entrapped by the *post-operaismo* understanding of creative/affective/immaterial/emotional labour of flexible self-exploitation, especially of those groups working within a neo-Foucauldian governmentality framework.⁸ Recalling Raymond Williams, David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker argue "that creative workers are involved [...] in the communication of experience."⁹ The processes and products of authorial labour—what I call *the cultural ecotechnics of authorship*—obviously include Williams' communication of the experience of literary creativity, wherein "individual entrepreneurship and self-realisation were presented as superficially desirable but fundamentally problematic aspects of modern labour."¹⁰

Thinking about the processes of authorial production from a world-systems perspective in the age of AI, however, allows us to understand it as a global socio-cultural and economic phenomenon, spanning across different fields, disciplines, institutions, and practices. Hesmondhalgh and Baker's intervention is revelatory and complementary to a world-systems perspective because it emphasizes and simultaneously questions the role of human creative labour in the experience of symbolic production amid the digital restructuring of literary practices and the emerging inequalities stemming from the blurring of boundaries between production and consumption enabled by generative algorithms. Indebted to the work of various poststructuralist autonomist Marxists, Hesmondhalgh and Baker additionally highlight the ways in which "certain modes of subjectivity are necessary and central to a given mode of production."¹¹

Consequently, I understand the production of authorship itself in the economic conditions of precariousness, by which I mean the conditions of labour under post-Fordist neoliberalism, with its inherent tension between the drive for capitalist accumulation and relative individual autonomy, as a type of work that undermines profitability, while simultaneously and paradoxically representing a type of potential, long-term investment capital. Foregoing logocentrism and the semiotic regime means forging a theoretical conceptualization which captures the function of *the authorial world-apparatus* and the production of *algorithmic subjectivity* as the central mode of production that is currently replacing the creative and/or Romantic liberal self.

In their critique of political economy, left accelerationists (Srnicek, Williams) conceptualize platforms, automation, and planning as central to present day capitalism, while retaining modern(ist) understandings of technology, progress, teleology, linearity, and universal rationality. Left accelerationism therefore treats technology in an instrumental way.¹² Shoshana

⁸ See David Hesmondhalgh, Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour. Media work in three cultural industries* (Routledge, 2011).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹² See Nick Srnicek, *Platform Capitalism* (Wiley & Sons, 2016) and Nick Srnicek, Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso Books, 2015).

Zuboff¹³ and Byung-Chul Han,¹⁴ by contrast, operate diagnostically and phenomenologically. Zuboff theorizes surveillance capitalism as a mutation of accumulation logics towards surplus behaviour, while Han offers a cultural-psychological critique of neoliberal subjectivation. However, all of these different approaches remain intra-modern critiques, as previously mentioned, which means they assume the existence of liberal subjectivity, human autonomy, and Enlightenment normativity as forming the baseline from which future change might occur. *Post-operaist* theories of cognitive capitalism (Lazzarato, Hardt & Negri, etc.) have centred immaterial labour, affect, and social cooperation, while privileging human labour and production as the primary ontological ground. Even when discussing machinic enslavement or debt, for instance, technology remains a mediator of capital's command over living labour.

As opposed to these rather popular takes (Shoshana Zuboff's surveillance capitalism or Nick Srnicek's platform capitalism, and even *post-operaist* theories of cognitive capitalism¹⁵), more ambitious thinkers like Yuk Hui, Benjamin H. Bratton, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Jason W. Moore, and Bernard Siegler are not simply diagnosing capitalism's newest phase(s), but fundamentally rethinking the infrastructural, cosmological, and planetary conditions under which capitalism, technology, and subjectivity currently operate. In other words, their level of abstraction and system-scale ontologies reveal a neo-Kantian ambition of reconfiguring a global metaphysical epistemology.

Yuk Hui reopens the Heideggerian question of what technology is on a cosmological scale. His notion of cosmotechnics decisively breaks with both the Marxist instrumentalism of Srnicek and the critique of Han or Zuboff by pluralising technological reason itself. Technology, for Hui, is a culturally embedded articulation of cosmos (planet earth), ethics, and technics. He is not theorizing capitalism through technology, but instead rethinking technology beyond capitalism.¹⁶ Benjamin Bratton similarly operates at a planetary level. His work describes computation as a new geopolitical architecture that reorganizes sovereignty, subjectivity, ecology, and temporality. Capitalism here appears less as a mode of production and more as a regime among many others. In this sense, Bratton's work is closer to Earth-systems theory, cybernetics, and geopolitics than to critical political economy.¹⁷ Nick Dyer-Witheford acts, I believe, as a bridge figure. Unlike Hui and Bratton, he remains explicitly Marxist, but his Marxism is ecological, cybernetic, and posthuman. Drawing on autonomism, world-systems analysis, feminist and ecological theory, he treats digital technology, logistics, AI, and extractivism as part of a single planetary labour-system, thus foregrounding technological world-ecologies rather than immaterial labour. Dyer-Witheford thus

¹³ Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile Books, 2019).

¹⁴ Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford University Press, 2016) and Byung-Chul Han, *The Transparency Society* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

¹⁵ See, for instance, Yann Moulier-Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism* (Polity, 2011).

¹⁶ See Yuk Hui, *On the Existence of Digital Objects* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Yuk Hui, *The Question Concerning Technology in China: An Essay in Cosmotechnics* (Urbanomic, 2016); Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Yuk Hui, *Art and Cosmotechnics* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

¹⁷ See Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack. On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 2016).

expands labour to include machines, energy, logistics, and ecology.¹⁸ Additionally, Jason W. Moore's world-ecology similarly reframes capitalism as a way of organizing nature, value, and life at a planetary scale.¹⁹ Hui, Bratton, Dyer-Witthford, and Moore can all be seen as performing an analogous move: they shift analysis from modes of production to modes of world-making.

Finally, then, Bernard Stiegler supplies a general theory of technics as temporal, mnemonic, and anthropogenic, and therefore as the underlying condition of subjectivity, knowledge, and politics. Stiegler's fundamental move is to radicalize technics beyond both political economy and cultural critique by arguing that the (post)human is constituted by technics (Reza Negarestani performs, I think, a similar yet contradictory movement for the concept of rationality, wherein reason is made non-anthropocentric). In a Derridean fashion, technics becomes the exteriorization of memory and temporality itself: tools, writing, media, and digital infrastructures are not supports of human activity but the very conditions under which authorship becomes possible. We can thus retain the notion of authorial labour without it being primary. Stiegler defines or better yet critiques this new type of labour as the proletarianization of attention and knowledge.²⁰ If Yuk Hui pluralizes technics through civilizational and cosmological difference, Stiegler universalizes technics as the condition of the human, but insists that it must be politicized and cared for through institutions, education, and collective forms of intelligence. Where Hui asks how many cosmotechnics are there possible, Stiegler questions how technics can be re-temporalized so that desire, care, and knowledge can persist. We have already seen Bratton's interest in mapping the architecture of planetary computation as a layered megastructure. Stiegler, on the other hand, insists on asking what kinds of subjects and temporalities this megastructure actually produces, arguing that, without a theory of attention, memory, and individuation, such architectures risk becoming politically inept. As such, Stiegler expands exploitation to include time, attention, and knowledge, bridging Marxist political economy and posthuman technics, wherein capitalism exploits not only living labour and nature but externalized memory itself.

Put together, this techno-temporal world-ecology provides an enormously complex framework that simultaneously integrates world-systems analysis, ecology, cosmotechnics, and organology (technics as the condition of subjectivity and time). It treats technology not as a simple tool, or even an infrastructure, but as a world-forming mediator that binds together energy, computation, memory, labour, culture, and desire across multiple scales. Within this framework, capitalism consequently appears to be a specific regime of technical temporality. Moreover, this techno-temporal worlding process wagers that the crisis of capitalism is neither primarily

¹⁸ See Nick Dyer-Witthford, Atle Mikkola Kjølseth, James Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2019); Nick Dyer-Witthford, Alessandra Mularoni, *Cybernetic Circulation Complex. Big Tech and Planetary Crisis* (Verso Books, 2025).

¹⁹ Jason W. Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (Verso Books, 2015).

²⁰ See Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford University Press, 1998) and his more recent works on *pharmacology* to *caring*.

economic nor cultural, but chronological and ecological: a crisis of how worlds are technically composed, sustained, and transmitted.

My argument is that authorship needs to be conceptualized beyond capitalism's current logic of cultural production. Hui, Bratton, Dyer-Witheford, Moore, and Stiegler allows us to do precisely that because they theorize the conditions of possibility of contemporary world-systems themselves, whether technological, planetary, epistemic, or cosmological. This not only avoids determinism but equally allows us to understand authorial subjectivity beyond both liberalism and psychologism.

Algorithmic Capitalism

Harbouring seemingly transhumanist goals and a raging accelerationist agenda within this larger framework, algorithmic capitalism, as the period describing the contemporary/emergent period, might be understood, first of all, through the "analysis of AI [...] in terms of labour exploitation, inter-capitalist competition, and capitalism's techno-induced crisis tendencies."²¹ In their recently published and wide-ranging book, *Inhuman Power*, Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsén, and James Steinhoff examine various literary forms that correspond to three different perspectives on AI: **1) Sceptical:** cyberpunk AI/Sci-Fi (*Blade Runner*, Judd Trichter's *Love in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Andromeda Romano-Lax's *Plum Rains*), **2) Accelerationist:** socialist utopianism AI/Sci-Fi (Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312*, Ian Bank's *The Hydrogen Sonata*), and **3) Abyssal:** 'bad novum' AI (Charles Stross's *Accelerando*, Zachary Mason's *Void Star*).²² Building on the work of Espen Aarseth's famous definition of the cybertext, Noah Waldrup-Fruin lists the elements of digital writing: 1) the database, 2) the algorithmic processes set up by the author, and 3) the interaction of these algorithms with the database (Waldrup-Fruin also mentions the importance of surface and context).²³

If AI is quickly yet questionably becoming part and parcel of the general conditions and means of production, authorship itself is algorithmically enhanced and digitally automated as part of capital's current technical fix, or what Bernard Stiegler would describe as grammatization.²⁴ Consequently, a certain amount of *inhuman labour-power* associated with and enabled by AI,

²¹ Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsén, James Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power. Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2019), 15.

²² Nick Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsén, James Steinhoff, *Inhuman Power*, 17.

²³ Noah Waldrup-Fruin, 'Five Elements of Digital Literature', in Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer, Peter Gendolla (eds.), *Reading Moving Letters. Digital Literature in Research and Teaching. A Handbook* (Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010), 47-48.

²⁴ Bernard Stiegler, *For a New Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Daniel Ross (Polity, 2010), 31–33: 'With the industrial revolution the process of grammatization constituting the history of mnemotechnics suddenly surpasses the sphere of language that is, also, the sphere of logos [...] The process of grammatization invests bodies. And in the first place, it discretizes the gestures of producers with the aim of making possible their automatic reproduction—while at the very same moment there also appear those machines and apparatuses for reproducing the visible and the audible that so caught the attention of Walter Benjamin, machines and apparatuses which grammatized perception and, through that, the affective activity of the nervous system' (32-33).

especially the Machine Learning type, is now simply graphed onto *human authorship*, which also infuses, complements, and accelerates the production of literature, while also changing its nature, value, and mode of functioning within a posthuman form of capitalism.²⁵

These generative models function as non-human agents and, consequently, as forms of posthuman authorialities, redefining intention and literary voice, and ultimately taking up positions and becoming players in the literary field. Mercedes Bunz interestingly argues that LLM-generated writing, while resembling human-produced texts, are based on ontologically different underlying computational processes. Algorithmic authorship functions on pattern recognition in statistical relationships between words.²⁶ It seems, as such, that the death/disappearance of the human author becomes, in fact, a condition of literary pre-production, while its ethical return remains largely a question of cultural post-production. It is no coincidence, therefore, that Jack Andersen has recently developed a phenomenological “hermeneutics of algorithms.”²⁷ Nevertheless, this paper does not extend into the problematics of reading and interpretation.

Yet acknowledging the replacement within authorship of human work by AI technologies affords similar types of responses: we could argue, for instance, that a communist degrowth²⁸ and an ecological decomposition of authorship²⁹ represent viable solutions to fending against a literary culture of self-developing and self-devouring autonomous cyber-capitalistic processes by slowing down and decelerating literary production. This form of authorship would correspond to Nick

²⁵ As a side note, I will swiftly note how the logics of LLMs paradoxically resonate while simultaneously clash with Derrida’s *différance*, since textual meaning is always deferred and probabilistically generated in both domains.

²⁵ Derrida’s *différance* shows how meaning is never fully present since it is always deferred across various chains of signifiers. For Derrida, therefore, meaning is produced relationally. LLMs, on the other hand, similarly retrieve meaning through relationally comparing tokens across various informational patterns. Meaning is not contained within the tokens themselves but likewise produced relationally. There is no central transcendental signified, signification is always emergent. Consequently, both LLMs and *différance* effect a destabilization of the author: textual production is just a form of repetition with a difference. However, LLMs have no intention and do not conceptualize meaning. If Derrida was producing a critique of metaphysics and a theory of writing, LLMs are cybernetic systems indifferent to philosophical problems. AI generates conditional probabilities: it is always thinking about what token should come next based on all previous situations and combinations. Consequently, we may assert that LLMs operate through differential relations among textual traces, which does resemble Derrida’s concept of *différance*, since algorithmic meaning, like deconstructive meaning, is never fully present. Nevertheless, LLMs do not understand the workings of meaning, it just simulates its logic.

²⁶ Mercedes Bunz, “Thinking Through Generated Writing,” in Hannes Bajohr (ed.), *Thinking With AI. Machine Learning the Humanities* (Open Humanities Press, 2025), 58-85.

²⁷ Andersen, J., Understanding and interpreting algorithms: toward a hermeneutics of algorithms,’ in *Media, Culture & Society*, 42(7-8), 2020, 1479-1494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443720919373>.

²⁸ See K. Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

²⁹ See Anselm Jappe, *The Writing on the Wall. On the Decomposition of Capitalism and Its Critics*, trans. By Alastair Hemmens (Zero Books, 2017); Anselm Jappe, *The Adventures of the Commodity: For a Critique of Value* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

Dyer-Witheford, Atle Mikkola Kjøsen, and James Steinhoff's **sceptical** position. An alternative response, located beyond or at the opposite end of communist degrowth and ecological decomposition, to the replacement of human authorship by AI-driven literary production is represented, of course, by the **accelerationist** intensification of authoriality. Accelerating the dissolution of the Romantic author through AI might certainly create an entirely new form of subjectivity. This would be a fully integrated Landian version of algorithmic authorship: in this scenario, the author will be completely automated and, thus, become a distributed machinic assemblage, wherein subjectivity is utterly posthuman and post-individualized. In this context, then, human writers are no longer masters, sovereigns, or curators. Instead, cybernetic authorship would describe a form of hyper-productive reiteration, analogous to Baudrillard's generation of hyperreality. Radical intensity, whether as described poetically by Keats or philosophically by Deleuze, is here nothing but machinic intensity.

Finally, we can also easily imagine an abyssal or **neo-primitive** response to AI textuality. Authorship might be equally reclaimed as nothing but human: authentic, embodied, spiritual. This anti-Derridean, neo-Romantic response understands authorship as a form of presence, locality, and finitude: handwriting, minimalism, vitality. However, by highlighting the imbricated, posthuman nature of authorship, AI-produced autofiction might complicate this endeavour by blurring the boundaries between its component parts: 1) **bio-fiction** or human-generated text and 2) **AI-fiction** or machine-generated text. Even though autofictional experiments (of which more below) may disrupt or impede the formation of multitudes or other collective subjects, potentially inimical to whatever shape the cyber-Empire loops or stacks itself into,³⁰ I nevertheless claim that autofiction is more finely tuned into acknowledging "anti-racist, decolonial, feminist, queer and anarchic struggles,"³¹ not least because autofiction might contribute to producing new forms of cultural memory.

These are, nevertheless, extreme responses and certainly not the only ones. A moderate conceptualization of authorship in the age of algorithmic capitalism would be, I contend, that of a **world-ecological posthumanism**, wherein we could argue for the co-generation of human-machinic textuality. The hyphen stands for a world-systems perspective on ecological posthumanism, which bypasses both degrowth (or deactivation, a refusal of capitalist production), on the one hand, and acceleration, on the other, allowing us to reconsider **authorship as a multi-agential process**. Building on the work of Matt Kirschenbaum, Johanna Drucker demonstrated, in a critical *tour de force*, how a distributed and "performative materiality suggests that what something *is* has to be understood in terms of what it *does*, how it works within machinic, systemic, and cultural domains."³² A similar diagrammatic move is likewise found within Karen Barad's work on agential realism which might suggest, for our purposes, that authorial agency is, first, non-

³⁰ See Benjamin Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (MIT Press, 2015).

³¹ Jonathan Beller, *The World Computer: Derivative Conditions of Racial Capitalism* (Duke University Press, 2021), 70.

³² Johanna Drucker, 'Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface', in *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2013, 2.

subjective and, second, non-intentional. Materially constituted, an agential realist view on authorship would define it, *tout court*, as post-anthropocentric and, more importantly, as a process or a form of “*intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency [...] a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity.*”³³ Consequently, I would argue that authorship is a world-dispositif. This automatically implies that I am adopting a world-systems perspective on the current mode of literary production. And it further suggests that authorship is an assemblage of individuals, instruments, techniques, procedures, strategies, and technologies, as well as institutions and political epistemologies.³⁴

Autofiction

Let’s come back now to autofiction. Couched in narrative transgression, autofiction is best understood less as a genre but rather a mode, element, or quality of texts (or particular elements within a text). Adopting a holistic perspective, Alexandra Effe produces a conceptually substantial hypothesis about the functions and forms of contemporary autofiction described by ontological ambiguation, medium foregrounding, self-conscious genre signalling, meta-fictional commentaries, the presence of ego-documents (emails, diaries, etc.), pseudo-disguises, explicit displacements, authorial self-marketing, non-committed speaking positions, self-inventions, the in-progress book project(s), and performative masquerading.³⁵ Hywel Dix complementary indicates the potential of Ervin Gofmann’s work on the presentation of self and subjectivity in everyday life when he calls for a “cognitive shift in how autofiction can be understood.”³⁶ Drawing on Butler, Foucault, and Gofmann, M. J. Johnson has also argued that, in digitally social spaces,

³³ Karen Barad, “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter,” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 2003, vol. 28, no. 3, DOI: 10.1086/345321, 822.

³⁴ Bernard Dionysus Geoghegan, *The Cybernetic Apparatus: Media, Liberalism, and the Reform of the Human Sciences*, 2012, 99-101: “The positing of an apparatus calls attention to the various components—conceptual, discursive, practical, institutional, experimental—that fabricate modern sciences [...] The concept of an ‘apparatus’ [...] calls attention to how a diversity of elements are articulated around a unifying action or goal.” Geoghegan also distinguishes between apparatus (*appareil*), as specific instruments and concrete technologies, including machines, procedures, and techniques that represent an epistemological ideal, and a strategic or political apparatus (as *dispositif*) of individuals. Refashioning authorship as a world-apparatus suggests I include both senses of this Foucauldian term.

³⁵ See Alexandra Effe, “From Masking to Masquerade: Autofictional Forms and Effects in Diachronic Perspective,” 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4tdvIPnCa6Y>; Alexandra Effe, Arnaud Schmitt, *Autofiction, Emotions, and Humour: A Playfully Serious Affective Mode, Life Writing*, 19:1, 1-11, DOI: 10.1080/14484528.2021.2010594; Alexandra Effe, Hanniw Lawlor (eds.), *The Autofictional. Approaches, Affordances, Forms* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022); Alexandra Effe, “Autofictional Books in Times of Digital Self-Performance and Post-Truth Sentiments,” in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Volume 23, Number 2, June 2025, 203-228.

³⁶ See Hywel Dix, “Autofiction: The Forgotten Face of French Theory,” in *Word and Text: A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics*, vol. 7, 2017, 83.

authors perform a role “where a fundamental tension lies between how they feel as an author and how they project this sense of authorship to their audiences,” whilst emphasizing that the algorithmic elements of platforms, which feature a mix of human-driven and AI-driven moderation, actually structure and limit authors’ engagements and authenticity.³⁷

It would be naïve, however, to think that algorithmic authors, even within autofictional experiments, do not engage in power relations, especially since we have already witnessed a shattering change within “the enunciative apparatus of the digital.”³⁸ Seb Franklin reveals how digital technologies help capitalism enforce racialized and gendered dispossession and exploitation.³⁹ Although it should be noted that distant reading has had a distinct genealogy stretching back to the conversations between literary studies and the social sciences without being completely subsumed to the field of digital humanities, as Ted Underwood rightly indicates,⁴⁰ it has also been suggested that there is a political unconscious which drives the authorial code behind digital literature.⁴¹ Moreover, with the help of the poetics of computation, we might question the ways in which we conceptualize writing, wherein the entanglement of human and non-human modes of production register, as Dennis Yi Tenen shows, specific modes of Foucauldian governance and authorial/machinic subjectivity.⁴²

Autofiction has been generally grasped as a form of individual *Bildungs*, but postcolonial narratives, as Hywel Dix argues, engage with public or collective developments oriented against liberal and imperialist notions of private property and authorship.⁴³ If cultural systems are grounded on issues of authorial veridiction, then authorial *alethurgy* found within most autofictional productions is what affords dynamic and transformative counter-conducts directed against cultural hegemony. Within this framework, then, we might point, for instance, towards experimental novelettes such as K. Allado-McDowell’s *Amor Cringe* (2022), a “deepfake autofiction” that is half written, half-AI-generated, wherein one might engage with computational systems to study the processes through which the indeterminacy of literary algorithms is determined, as M. Beatrice Fazi puts it,⁴⁴ or to even more provocative investigations, such as Mark Amerika’s *My Life as an Artificial Creative Intelligence* (2022).

One solution to keep this type of authorial complexity in check is by employing, for instance, Yuk Hui’s approach to technological ecologies based on recursivity and contingency.⁴⁵

³⁷ Miriam J. Johnson, *The Digital Pen. Navigating the Performance of Authorship in the Digital Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 67-68.

³⁸ Johanna Drucker, ‘Performative Materiality and Theoretical Approaches to Interface’, 8.

³⁹ Seb Franklin, *The Digitally Disposed: Racial Capitalism and the Informatics of Value* (University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

⁴⁰ Ted Underwood, “A Genealogy of Distant Reading in DHQ,” *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2017).

⁴¹ See Sandy Baldwin, *The Internet Unconscious. On the Subject of Electronic Literature* (Bloomsbury, 2015).

⁴² Dennis Tenen, *Plain Text. The Poetics of Computation* (Stanford University Press, 2017).

⁴³ See Hywel Dix, *Autofiction and Cultural Memory* (Routledge, 2024).

⁴⁴ See M. Beatrice Fazi, *Contingent Computation. Abstraction, Experience, and Indeterminacy in Computational Aesthetics* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

⁴⁵ See Yuk Hui, *Recursivity and Contingency* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2019).

However, in this paper I want to explore a different route. Through the concept of the extended phenotype, Richard Dawkins explained that some effects spread beyond an organism's body. The genotype refers to the genetic makeup of an organism, while the phenotype is the observable expression of the genotype, influenced by both genetic and environmental factors. Dawkins famously argued that genes can influence not only physical traits but also impact the environment and even other organisms. His examples notably include the construction of beaver dams.⁴⁶ My idea here is that we might profitably understand authorship as a genotype that includes various illustrations of both intended (or contracted) and extended phenotypes, which is, indeed, quite the opposite of thinking about authorship as an entity being invaded or not by AI technologies, as we've previously seen in our discussion of sceptical declinations, accelerationist inclinations, and abyssal articulations.

Therefore, what I propose is the use of ecto- (from the Greek *ektos*, meaning 'outside'), meso- (from the Greek *mesos*, meaning 'middle'), and endo- (from the Greek *endon*, meaning 'within'), which are to be extended beyond their original scientific fields of inquiry, from psychology or psychosomatics, for instance, into literary study because they convey a sense of locality or situatedness within a world-system. What I claim here is that, if we understand authorship as a world-ecological network, especially within a posthuman, intersectional, and decolonial framework, we might be able to understand how different modes of authoriality are available on a spectrum rather than fixed positions.

First, *endo-authorship* will be defined as that mode of cultural production which typically stems from one single subjective core or expressive perspective, deeply embedded within an author's identity and experience (Romantic authorship, autobiographical writing, or psychological explorations of consciousness, to name just a few examples, are all rooted in this definition). Secondly, then, *meso-authorship* refers to a rather hybrid type of literary production that exists in a medial position between the internal (personal, solitary) and external (collaborative, contextual) aspects of writing and it includes co-authorship, adaptation, and intermedial writing, such as writing for videogames, for instance, or specific genre and styles, like autofiction. Indeed, many theories in literary, cultural, or media studies explore similar ideas, such as Andy Clark's now famous remark on "multiple mergers and coalitions."⁴⁷

Finally, then, the concept of *ecto-authorship* could refer to post-individual or relational forms of agential authorship that exist outside the conventional boundaries of a writer's identity or personal control, such as collaborative or collective authorship, where writing is produced by a group or by various human and non-human agents. I would also further posit that AI-generated texts might belong to the category of ecto-authorship since, in this case, literary production is posthuman and machine-generate, the boundaries between human and technology, author and reader being thoroughly blurred.⁴⁸ Raine Koskimaa defined *the cyborg author* as the complex

⁴⁶ See Richard Dawkins, *The Extended Phenotype: The Long Reach of The Gene* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁴⁷ Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs: Minds, Technologies, and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 7.

⁴⁸ Some academics plainly and reductively argue that "ChatGPT is not an author. ChatGPT fails to meet the

combination of human and machine, jointly producing texts with literary qualities.⁴⁹ Although engrossed within the logics of a gift economy, fanfiction, transformative works, and even posthumous publication should also feature under the label of ecto-authorialism.⁵⁰ In short, the concept of ecto-authorship includes any context, element, process or agency that actively shapes or influences networked productions of texts and is therefore distributed or no longer centred on a single individual.

Lev Manovich, for instance, acknowledges that “AI now plays an equally important role in our cultural lives and behaviours, increasingly automating the processes of aesthetic creation.”⁵¹ His example, the television series *Game of Thrones*, is used to show that cultural products are suitable for automation: the computer suggested plot ideas, but the actual writing and the shows’ development, Manovich continues, was done by humans. Nevertheless, automation might also be accelerated through deep learning, which leads Manovich to argue that AI acts as an author-researcher in that it studies “many works created in particular places and historical periods to find *common patterns*. Their findings become part of the *history and theory* of this area.”⁵²

However, what I have tried to suggest is that, if viewed from a historical perspective, authorship has always been performed on this very same spectrum. Authorship works on a scale and its ambit—and its extreme varieties—encompasses, as we’ve seen, a wide range of orbital productions. My argument sounds similar to but is nevertheless different from the recent medial understanding of authorship, which argues that writing is always medial and collaborative and that there are simply various modes within which authorship was ideologically conceptualized in different times and places. My position, however, allows authorship itself to exist on a scale which may then be reflected or not within a (Marxist) superstructure. This position also bypasses historicist formulations, according to which a certain type of once-existing authorship has now dissolved and even the more radical poststructuralist position for which the author never really existed as such but simply instituted a type of ideological illusion.

criteria of authorship because it lacks the ability to perform illocutionary speech acts such as promising or asserting, lacks the fitting mental states like knowledge, belief, or intention, and cannot take responsibility for the texts it produces.” See René van Woudenberg, Chris Ranalli, Daniel Bracker, “Authorship and ChatGPT: a Conservative View,” *Philosophy & Technology* 37, no. 34 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-024-00715-1>.

⁴⁹ Raine Koskimaa, “Approaches to Digital Literature Temporal Dynamics and Cyborg Authors,” in Roberto Simanowski, Jörgen Schäfer, Peter Gendolla (eds.), *Reading Moving Letters. Digital Literature in Research and Teaching. A Handbook* (Transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 2010), 129.

⁵⁰ Abigail De Kosnik impressively shows how, melded within the logics of performance, rogue media users, or fans, archive and remix genres and become queer cultural producers themselves. See Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (The MIT Press, 2016).

⁵¹ Lev Manovich, *AI Aesthetics* (Strelka Press, 2019), 3.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12.