

## 2 From Romantic to Posthumanist Authorship

I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear, and in such a manner that fiction and its polysemous texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint—one that will no longer be the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced [expérimenté].

—Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?”<sup>1</sup>

Authorship within academia has reached a cult status. Scholars, in the humanities at least, are increasingly assessed according to the weight of their individual, single authorial output in the form of published articles or books, and less according to the quality of their teaching, to take just one possible instance. The evaluation of a scholar’s authorial contributions to a field is considered essential for hiring purposes and for further career and tenure development, for funding and grant allocations, and for interim institutional assessments, such as the REF in the United Kingdom. Authorial productivity and, connected to this, the originality of one’s work are important factors in determining a scholar’s standing within academic value networks. This fetishization of scholarly authorship is integral to an increasingly hegemonic academic discourse related to originality and authority, to impact and responsibility, and linked to a humanist and romantic notion of the individual author-genius. This specific discourse on authorship is directly connected to a certain essentialist idea of *the human*, which one could argue the humanities—and with it, scholarship as a whole—is based upon.<sup>2</sup> This is the idea of the universal human, the sovereign human individual, and of the self as unity—which can be translated, as Gary Hall has done, into the idea of “the indivisible, individual, liberal human(ist) author.”<sup>3</sup> Although this

idea of human essence, of a unified self and an integral individual, has been interrogated by critical theorists for over a century now, the way knowledge is produced, consumed, and disseminated today remains very similar to the print-based authorship practices that were devised as part of the discourse on the humanist author. This discourse continues to shape our academic authorial practices, in conjunction with our publishing practices, even in an increasingly digital environment.

However, practices and discourses related to collaboration, networking, and the greater academic conversation have similarly fed into our notions of scholarship over the centuries, and for many scholars the internet and digital communication seem the perfect opportunity to promote these capacities further. Developments in the sciences, where multiauthorship has become common practice, also increasingly challenge ideas of individual scholarship in the humanities. Some even argue that networked science has the potential to fundamentally change the nature of scholarship and scientific discovery.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, I consider how we can explore and critique the role humanist authorship plays in academia (and more specifically in the humanities) by analyzing the way authorship currently functions within scholarly networks and how our authorial roles and practices are constructed and performed as part of these networks. I examine authorship from multiple angles, taking in historical and theoretical, as well as more concrete, perspectives (focusing on authorial *practices*) and the relationships between them. I do so in an effort to break down the discourse on the cult of individual authorship while also being critical of the in some instances almost utopian hope invested in scholarly practices of networked collaboration. By analyzing the history of authorship and the rise of a humanist authorial discourse, I show that single authorship is a very recent construct and that scholarship has in fact always been collaborative and distributed. At the same time, I explore the mostly theoretical critique of authorship provided by poststructuralist thinkers, as well as what can be seen as some of the recent concrete or practical embodiments of that critique. Although we have been proclaiming the “death of the author” for over half a century now, humanist authorship remains strongly embedded within our institutions and cultural practices. As such, I examine various practical experiments with authorship critique in different fields and contexts in what follows, including *hypertext*, which

can be seen to focus mainly on replacing the authority and responsibility of the author with that of the reader. I also look at current practices within the digital humanities, which can be seen to foreground *collaborative* notions of authorship, challenging its presumed individualistic nature. Finally, I investigate *remix practices* within academia, which mainly complicate the idea of the proprietorial author creating original works.

Following my analysis of these practical authorship critiques, I outline how, although interesting and promising, many of these recent collaborative, networked, interactive, multimodal, hypertextual, and remixed forms of authorship proposed as alternatives to the previously described humanist authorship discourse nonetheless still resort to many of the same structures and practices. At the end of this chapter, I therefore put forward two examples of what can be seen as *antihumanist authorship critique*—namely, *plagiarism* and *anonymous authorship*. My analysis of both these examples will lead into an exploration of the potential for a *posthumanist* critique of authorship and, as an extension of this, possible forms of posthumanist authorship—part of what can be seen as a burgeoning *posthumanities*. As part of this, posthumanist authorship endeavors to continuously rethink, both in theory and in practice, the way authorship functions within academia, and in its critique of the humanist notions underlying authorship, it seeks to experiment with more distributed and multiagentic authorship practices.

### Book History and the Perseverance of Liberal-Humanist Authorship

I would like to start by exploring how the figure of the liberal-humanist author developed: What is its relationship to the book (or the codex format) as a medium and object, and in what ways has authorship been narrated within the book historical discourse? What stands out here is that the relationship of book history and book historians with authorship, its historical development, and the author function has been changeable and complex. As Roger Chartier points out, book history developed within and alongside currents of literary criticism such as structuralism, analytic bibliography, and new criticism—especially dominant in Anglophone countries—which all saw the text, and thus books, as self-contained systems, objects without authors and readers. The history of the book was thus for a long time a history with neither readers nor authors.<sup>5</sup> In the French book-historical

tradition, following the influential Annales school, the situation initially was not much better, although it focused at least on the sociology of readers (but not on reading practices). In France, just as in the Anglo-Saxon bibliographic school, the author remained forgotten, even in the tradition of the social history and the material production of the book as produced by Febvre and Martin, among others. In France, Chartier claims, books thus had readers but no authors.<sup>6</sup> However, attention to the author returns in Bourdieu's sociology of cultural production, McKenzie's sociology of texts, reception history within literary criticism, and new historicism. Yet this time it is a *constrained author*—as opposed to a romantic one—that appears in these theoretical systems. The text and the book are reconnected with their author and her or his intentions, yet these intentions are no longer seen as fully determining the meaning of a text, nor its reception. In this vision, authorship is fragmented, dispersed, and plays a more contingent role. Chartier applauds this return of the author as a subject of investigation in book studies, especially and more precisely—in its constrained version—of the *author function* and its practice and techniques.<sup>7</sup>

One of the main debates around authorship and the author function as played out within the book-historical discourse relates to the dichotomy sketched in the previous chapter around the intrinsic agency of print: Is it print that established or enabled our modern notion of authorship, or does authorship predate print? For instance, scholars such as Mark Rose, but also Roger Chartier, focus on how in its connection with censorship, property, and ownership, authorship is fully inscribed within (the culture of) print. Following this argument, print extended the circulation of potentially transgressive books and established a market system in which proper roles were established (author, publisher, bookseller, etc.). At the same time, certain essential traits of authorship can be seen to predate print. Already in the manuscript age, authors such as Petrarch tried to establish control over the way their texts looked and were distributed, especially with respect to corruption through continual copying by copyists. According to Chartier, this shows an early emergence of “one of the major expressions of the author-function, the possibility of deciphering in the forms of a book the intention that lay behind the creation of the text.”<sup>8</sup>

Walter Ong similarly locates the beginning of authorship before print, with the coming of written discourse. Where he argues that oral discourse can be seen to be performative—it produces community—written discourse

on the other hand is detached from the performer; it developed into an autonomous practice, turning the writer into a subject distinct from the group. As such, as Ong puts it, “with writing, resentment at plagiarism begins to develop.”<sup>9</sup> But initially, in manuscript culture, intertextuality remained strong, especially in its connections to the commonplace tradition of the oral world, creating and adapting texts out of other texts. Therefore, as Marshall McLuhan emphasizes, written text was still authoritative only in an oral way.<sup>10</sup> Both Ong and McLuhan thus contend that it was print that truly created a sense of the private ownership of words and a new feeling for authority, where it was print and its visual organization—representing the “final form” of an author’s words and intentions, aesthetically reproducing them in multiple identical copies, and enclosing them as a result of print’s formal consistency—that encouraged a different mindset. As McLuhan states in this respect, “Scribal culture could have neither authors nor publics such as were created by typography.”<sup>11</sup> In printed form, a work becomes closed, cut off from other works, and thus unique. It was print culture that, according to Ong, finally enabled romantic notions such as originality and creativity to arise and that encouraged the development of our modern notion of authorship.<sup>12</sup>

How exactly then did authorship develop in a print environment according to this narrative? When it comes to early publishing, the modern division of labor was not yet very common. Printers were mostly printer-publishers, and many academics, such as Johannes Kepler, were themselves publishers or were very much involved in the printing process.<sup>13</sup> Early printers thus played an important role in forging definitions of property rights, shaping new concepts of authorship, and exploiting new markets. However, their labors would not have had much result in the manuscript age, Elizabeth Eisenstein argues, as it was only with the coming of print and with that of a fixed text that individual innovations and discoveries could become more explicitly recognized, and thus the distinction between copy and original could become clear.<sup>14</sup> After the advent of copyright especially, it became much easier for an author to make a profit by publicly releasing a text, as their invention rights were now firmly established in law and no longer only guaranteed by guild protection (in England, by the Stationers’ Company—consisting of printers, booksellers, and binders—for instance). Only with the coming of print, Eisenstein contends, could personal authorship really become established, as writers wanted to see their work in print—fixed and unaltered. As

she puts it, “Until it became possible to distinguish between composing a poem and reciting one, or writing a book and copying one; until books could be classified by something other than incipits; how could modern games of books and authors be played?”<sup>15</sup> She points out that new forms of authorship and property rights started to undermine older forms of collective authority, which was exposed as error-prone. Where innovation came from was hard to determine before print, when, due to drifting texts and a lack of access to manuscripts, it was difficult to establish what was already known and who was the first to know it. In other words, Eisenstein argues, there was no systematic forward movement before the coming of print.<sup>16</sup> This can be illustrated by looking at the changing meaning of the term *original*, which started to change with the coming of print. Initially, *original* meant “close or back to the sources,” yet the modern meaning of the term focuses on breaking with tradition instead. According to Eisenstein, it was print that started to change this meaning of *original*, as notions of recovery and discovery were reoriented after the coming of print technology.<sup>17</sup>

But the author was also very much a construct of printer-publishers, who started using authorship as a marketing product. New publicity techniques were explored, by printers and by authors, including marketing forms such as blurbs to publicly promote authors and sell their works. Yet again Eisenstein emphasizes that this kind of marketing could only take place successfully and promote and create new forms of authorship *after* the coming of print. Scribal culture, she points out, “could not sustain the patenting of inventions or the copyrighting of literary compositions. It worked against the concept of intellectual property rights.”<sup>18</sup>

Book historians such as Adrian Johns, on the other hand, take a different approach with respect to the development of authorship, focusing mainly on the establishment of credentiality. How did readers ensure a work was authoritative? Within a print context, this remained far from straightforward, he stresses, especially because compositors, just like modern editors, played important authorial roles. Similarly, a copy of a manuscript could never be exactly reproduced in print—due to space constraints, for instance. Copies were often amended during the printing process, with typography used to enhance authorial meaning and changes made in anticipation of a certain readership. For Johns, the changing nature of the term *original* played a role here too. Original used to refer to a particular *performance* or *reading* of a work, which meant that written records were seen as simple, fallible

transcriptions of a particular event. As Johns further points out, “Composers could thus make the changes their cultural position demanded, not only because of the prized virtue of the master printer, but also because they held in their hands no sacrosanct text at risk of desecration.”<sup>19</sup> Even more, copyright meant that a stationer had a right to *both* the manuscript and the text. Publishers thus protected their investment by turning (fallible) transcriptions into fully edited printed books.<sup>20</sup> In this way, stationers and booksellers controlled every aspect of their books’ production.

The establishment of authorship as we know it today was very difficult in these conditions; hence both Johns and Chartier argue that we should speak of forms of *distributed* authorship at that time, where authorship was allocated to a number of individuals and groups. Chartier points to Foucault’s focus on the penal background of authorship in this respect, arguing that ownership of a text has always been related to its penal appropriation. In Foucault’s vision books only really came to have authors, instead of mythical figures, when authors became subject to punishment and could be held responsible for the diffusion of texts that were seen as scandalous or as guilty of heterodoxy.<sup>21</sup> Chartier focuses on how this responsibility was initially a distributed one:

In the repression of suspect books, however, the responsibility of the author of a censored book does not seem to have been considered any greater than that of the printer who published it, the bookseller or the pedlar who sold it, or the reader who possessed it. All could be led to the stake if they were convicted of having proffered or diffused heretical opinions. What is more, the acts of conviction often mix accusations concerning the printing and sale of censored books and accusations concerning the opinions—published or unpublished—of the perpetrator.<sup>22</sup>

As part of the proprietary culture of the time, and based on their right to copy, stationers thus continued for a long time to hold the position of authors, Johns argues, specifically with respect to establishing credentiality.<sup>23</sup> In forms of collaborative book production, however, this establishment of credentiality was much harder as no one publisher was responsible for the entire book. Nonetheless, for all intents and purposes, Johns stresses that the stationer was the proprietary author of the book, the one who was responsible for the content; authors had no right to their work once it was bought and published as then the copy was vested in the publisher.<sup>24</sup> As Johns makes clear, this responsibility was connected to the state’s potential

to prosecute, which it was hoped would “eliminate unauthorized printing—the practice increasingly called ‘piracy.’”<sup>25</sup>

What kinds of options did authors have in this situation? How could they control their authorship when the publishers’ market-based conventions were so dominant? Did publishers control printed knowledge in this respect? As Johns argues, “Authorial civility was inextricably entangled with Stationers’ civility. For the modern figure of the individualized author to be constructed, this had to change.”<sup>26</sup> And the situation did change once authorship and copyright were embedded in law. With this, the notion of authorship started to change too. Johns points out that the Lockean idea of invention as the mark of property started to gain wider ground.<sup>27</sup> Martha Woodmansee stresses the role played by discourses of romantic aesthetics in this context, valorizing individuality with respect to notions of creativity, authorship, and ownership, which, together with the rise of a new class of authors (as writers making a livelihood from their profession), strongly influenced the construction of modern copyright and intellectual property protection.<sup>28</sup>

In opposition to Eisenstein and others, historians such as Johns and Chartier thus emphasize in their narratives that authorship and authority are foremost a matter of cultural practices and negotiation; they are conventions that could and can be challenged. We should see them as attributions to a book (by various groups and individuals, such as publishers, readers, etc.) instead of intrinsic attributes of a book, they argue.<sup>29</sup> As Johns claims, then, the author emerged out of the battle surrounding how and to whom a book should be attributed credit or ownership. For scholars, forms of appropriation were a natural part of publishing their book; to protect their reputation, they needed to negotiate potential hazards, such as piracy, translations, abridgements, commercial sustainability, and more, all matters that could deeply harm their intentions.<sup>30</sup> As the priority disputes in experimental philosophy, linked to publishing, grew increasingly complicated and urgent—since both the existence of a record and the identity of its contents mattered—a new proprietary culture was set up around authorship to deal with these problems, through which, Febvre and Martin point out, the profession of the author emerged.<sup>31</sup> Johns explains that fixity and authorship were thus set up together, as the establishment of a problem: “As the recognition of authorship blossomed, so, in a mutually reinforcing process, arguments demonstrating a resolved identity for printing began to win the upper



hand, and the credit of its products became more widespread. By the end of the nineteenth century, print and fixity were as firmly conjoined by culture as ever could have been achieved by machinery."<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, Chartier warns against pinpointing specific historical moments of construction or determining causes for the rise of authorship and the author function. In this respect, he stresses that book history needs to guard against a focus on univocal solutions or oversimplified causes. Book history can offer some insights into the authorship problem in all its variety—including the juridical, repressive, and material mechanisms Chartier himself focuses on—but it does not offer a definitive answer to what authorship was, is, and will be.<sup>33</sup>

What these book historical narratives do show, however, is that our modern notion of authorship is integrally linked on the one hand to the emergence of written communication and print, and on the other hand to developments in the commercial book trade, growing scholarly claims for priority and credit, and the expansion of ideas related to ownership, copyright, creativity, and originality. However, what I want to explore in this chapter is not where the agentic origin—or, as Chartier states, the specific historical moment of construction—of authorship (predominantly) lies; in other words, whether it was mainly established due to technological developments or due to changing discursive and societal practices. Instead I want to examine how these diverse agentic forces were aligned and aligned themselves around an intrinsically *humanist* authorship theory and practice, which should *itself* be seen as agentic and performative. By formulating and maintaining a discourse set up and structured around binary causations concerning the origins of authorship, the humanist characteristics that have shaped our authorial practices end up being further sustained. In the book-historical narratives described previously, authorship (or the humanist author-subject) is ultimately established as disconnected, as being separate from society, discourses, practices, and technologies, which are often too simplistically positioned as deterministic causes that enabled the emergence and rise of modern authorship. Yet authorship and/or the author-subject were materially established as hybrids through a process that incorporates multiple actors and agencies, including and as part of these position-takings, both now and in the past. In this sense, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, book history and book historians cannot take up a position that stands outside of authorship in their representations of it. Book historians materially shape the concept and practice of authorship

in specific ways through both their discursive position takings *and* their humanist authorial practices (e.g., when they sign their works as individual authoritative authors and when they write fixed, book-format commodities published by established presses).

Therefore, taking the view that authorship and the author-subject are not distinct autonomous entities, it remains important to highlight how authorship emerged together with the enlightenment and romantic ideals that structured its humanist focus. But authorship is simultaneously intricately bound up with the humanist characteristics now commonly attributed to the print-based book object (which proprietary authorship bound together tighter too, as we shall see in the next chapter). Fixed, essentialized, and bound as a book, romantic notions of authorship came to stand for a highly individualistic, authoritative, and original writer, who was to be connected to a permanent body of works. The commercial and capitalist nature of the book trade with its focus on propriety and ownership instilled the idea of copyright and property into the relationship between an author and her or his text. As such, the humanist aspects of authorship relate both to the book as object and to the social practices forged around it.

In this respect, it is useful to think further and in more detail here about how liberal humanism—through its notions of universalism and autonomy—has shaped the authorial debate, giving weight to the specific individual determinants of a text—be they its fixed form or its individual indivisible author as a specific “man of genius”—and thus determined the meaning attributed to it. Especially also in the context of academic publishing, wherein a specific mode of production has been installed, centered around individual authorship within academia, based on a unified author-subject and a fixed indivisible book object, both bound together by copyright. Yet at the same time, liberal humanism gained ground and became even more strongly established *through* mechanisms such as proprietorial (academic) authorship and the stable fixed book.

The first thing to point out here is that liberal humanism, as an ideology and practice characterized by specific social conventions, installed a universal definition of man into law, as part of which the figure of the individual proprietary author-owner of original book works was installed into copyright law. As such, humanism promoted an intrinsically normative and restrictive definition or convention of what it means to be human and, similarly, of what it means to be an author—a definition that of necessity

excludes and discriminates. As Rosi Braidotti has argued in this respect, “The human is a historical construct that became a social convention about ‘human nature,’” where the human as a standard was “posited as categorically and qualitatively distinct from the sexualized, racialized, naturalized others and also in opposition to the technological artefact.”<sup>34</sup> Liberal humanism thus relies on binary distinctions to maintain and reassure the self as part of a process of exclusion, differentiation, and othering.

What kind of distinctions were then set up between the authorial self and its others within modern authorial practices? To determine this means examining how certain practices were regulated within authorship (restricting what counted and still counts as authorship) or excluded based on a specific normative mode set up around the individual humanist author—in which the author-subject was established as a rational, self-identical, proprietary individual. What has been excluded in this process—and thus established as a binary *other*—was characterized as *nonauthorship*, from plagiarism to piracy and anonymity. This process has seen diminishing roles for the various distributed (posthuman) agencies involved in knowledge production and consumption, from publishers and booksellers and editors to the book itself. This setting up in a dialectic relationship of radical alterity, practices that no longer abided to these now hegemonic and normative forms of individual proprietary authorship, functioned to reassure the humanist author-self and at the same time to control this alterity of “that which stands outside of authorship.” The question I want to ask here is how we can then start to challenge and deconstruct this dictatorship of the human and its supposed “natural” or normative practices, in the name of an ethics and politics of alterity.

Although these humanist notions of authorship—including the connotations of reputation, individual creativity, ownership, authority, attribution, responsibility, and originality they came to carry—seem to be an integral part of the scholarly method, they are not “natural” or “normal”; even though they have been and are often critiqued, they remain normative and very hard to replace or overcome. As such, although many within academia have professed a need to challenge the universal validity of the stable author subject and the book object (as we are aware, they have none), we keep assigning meaning to the individual author in the way we produce and author books, in the way we measure impact, and in the way we assign responsibility to research.

Kathleen Fitzpatrick writes in her article “The Digital Future of Authorship: Rethinking Originality” about her personal struggle with traditional notions of authorship, a struggle not uncommon to other academic authors—including the author of this book.<sup>35</sup> As remarked upon at the beginning of this book, Fitzpatrick states that although we try to criticize the way authorship functions in academia and society at large, “our own authorship practices have remained subsumed within those institutional and ideological frameworks.”<sup>36</sup> Connected as it is with our scholarly and publishing practices, one of the biggest challenges with respect to changing our notions of authorship will therefore be, as Fitzpatrick argues, that “changing one aspect of the way we work of necessity implies change across the entirety of the way we work.”<sup>37</sup> For instance, if we want to move toward an authorship function that puts more emphasis on openness, sharing, experimentation, and collaboration, this means that we need to reconsider where scholarly authority, originality, and responsibility lie in a digital environment and whether or not we really need them (and, if so, at what specific points or moments in time). In this respect, as Derrida has pointed out, we “cannot tamper with it [the form of the book] without disturbing everything else.”<sup>38</sup>

Notwithstanding its ubiquity and engrainedness, it is important to continue to challenge these humanist concepts, discourses, institutions, and practices as they relate to authorship within academia. Not the least because these essentialized notions of authorship do not do credit to the more collaborative and networked authorial practices as they exist currently and have existed in the past, in academia and beyond. As Johns and Chartier emphasize, agency is more complex and distributed than the highly individualist narratives accompanying romantic notions of authorship argue for. In this respect, there is an ongoing clash between what Robert Merton has identified as the values of originality and communism in scholarship.<sup>39</sup>

Yet another reason to challenge humanist concepts of authorship relates to the function currently fulfilled by authors in the political economy of academia. In an effort to gain reputation and authority in a scholarly attention economy, academics are increasingly depicted as being in constant competition with each other (for positions, impact, funding, etc.); scholars are still rewarded mostly on the basis of their publication track record and on their reputation as individual authors. Academic authors on the one hand are turned into commodities while on the other they increasingly need to act as entrepreneurs and marketeers of their own “brand.”

Not the least via social research-sharing websites such as Academia.edu and ResearchGate, which are not arranged around the research that is being shared, to provide just one example, but, again, according to author profiles created around publication lists. This objectification of authorship at a time when “unoriginal” thought, depicted as plagiarism, is heavily combated and frowned upon goes against some of the more distributive and collaborative notions, practices, and discourses of authorship described previously. Yet the latter can be seen to not only be just as prevalent in contemporary academia but in many ways to be a more realistic depiction of scholarly authorial practices—although they are not the ones that necessarily push one’s academic career forward.

The strength of the humanist discourse of authorship in academia can also be seen to inhibit experimentation with different models and functions of authorship—and forms of what can be called *posthumanist authorship*, which I more fully explore at the end of this chapter—and the potential of digital media to help rethink what authorship is and can be. This does not mean that digital forms of authorship are always a critique of the humanist notions underlying more traditional and print-based forms of writing. However, I want to emphasize that, no matter how problematic they still might be, we should still experiment with digital media technologies to explore how they might help us rethink and reperform authorship and envision more ethical and inclusive forms of authorship within academia.

To analyze some of the main theoretical and practical criticisms that have been brought to the table with respect to romantic and humanist notions of authorship, it is essential to explore the authorship theories put forward by poststructuralist thinkers in the 1960s and 1970s. The by now classic anti-humanist critiques coined by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault examined and questioned romantic and humanist forms of authorship by analyzing the specific subject position and agency of the author and the relationship of authorship to text, writing, and the work. In his essay “The Death of the Author” (1967), Barthes describes how authorship kills the text by stabilizing it. It is authorship in this sense that tries to affix a definite meaning and that has been used over the centuries as a strategy to read meaning into texts. This process reaches its culmination, as we have previously established, in capitalist society, where work and author are united in a commercial product. However, in his anti-intentionalist critique of authorship, Barthes states that we cannot affix a stable meaning to a text via the authorship function

as it does not (fully) control it. He focuses instead on the multiplicity of meanings (heteroglossia) and threads that are available in language, in the relationships between texts (intertextuality), and in the act of writing, and which are extracted through the person of the reader. In Barthes's vision, then, text, and its multiple meanings, comes into existence in the act of reading, not when the author is creating it. In this respect, Barthes's critique initiated a move away from the integral connection between an author and her or his work, focusing more on the performative character of text and language and the meaning attribution by readers instead.<sup>40</sup>

Foucault has drawn further on Barthes's critique in his seminal paper "What Is an Author?" (1969). Foucault here directly relates the notion of the author to the humanist framework I described earlier—that is, to a moment of individualization in history, connected to ideas of attribution and authenticity. A move away from authorship such as that proposed by Barthes will not be enough, Foucault claims, as this has to involve a similar departure from the idea of the single, stable, and often bounded work that is still integrally connected to our notion of the author, even if we abandon authorial meaning attribution. In this respect, Foucault makes the pointed argument that a critique of authorship necessarily implies a critique of the work and, in this specific context, of the scholarly book. Where does a work end when it becomes no more than a trace of writing, disconnected from a specific author? What this implies is that both the notion of the work and of the author are problematic, and replacing the latter's authority with the former will not be very helpful. As such, Foucault stresses that we need to analyze the *functions* authorship fulfills in a society, such as the way authorship operates within a certain discursive setting to bind together a group of texts and establish a relationship among them. We need to critically reassess these functions as being the representation of certain discourses within a society, discourses focusing on ownership of research (appropriation) and related to (penal) responsibility. In Foucault's vision, authorship is thus a function of discourse. This shows the inherent material nature of discourse, where through authorship discursive structures turn from acts into things, goods, and property. And as Foucault states, criticizing Barthes in this respect, authorship is only one of the discursive practices that need to be analyzed.<sup>41</sup>

Following Foucault, I want to explore here how authorship and knowledge get to be produced in our knowledge economies and whether we need to reassess or change these discourses. In what ways do we construct an

author and how do we determine the origin of a work? How can we rethink knowledge products, authority, truth claims, and originality? In what sense is an author function introduced to regulate meaning? By questioning the author, Foucault states, we are not simply freeing the text; we are interrogating the work at the same time, the latter being the extension of certain discursive practices within a society.<sup>42</sup>

Barthes and Foucault's writings on the death of the author, the author function, and the role the author plays in capitalist knowledge production have proved to be tremendously important for literary theory and authorship studies. In particular, next to decentralizing the author as the main and only locator of meaning in a text, they have played a significant role in focusing attention away from the humanist idea of what an author *is* and instead on what an author *does*.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, they have also helped to place more attention on the discursive historicity of both authorship and the work. Nonetheless, it can be argued that both Foucault and Barthes didn't in practice do much to critique their own authorship position, status, and practices and were themselves often writing in a very authorial and traditional way, focusing on the authority and originality of their mostly individually authored and published texts. In this respect, their work at times lacked a practical or practice-based performative dimension.<sup>44</sup> However, the examples of authorship critique that I want to discuss next *can* be seen to offer a more practical critique of authorship, experimenting with and taking into consideration the potential of the digital medium while targeting specific aspects structuring the romantic, humanist authorship discourse in academia.

### **Reperforming Authorship: Hypertext, Networked Collaboration, and Remix Practices**

The three examples discussed in this section can all in different ways be seen as a practical extension of the poststructuralists' critique. These more embodied expositions target different aspects of the discourse of the liberal humanist author, from the author's authority and individuality to its originality and proprietorship. First, the specific position taken by theorists and practitioners of hypertext is analyzed with respect to networked authorship, challenging the authority of the author by focusing on the power of the reader and on the author as a node in a distributed network of meaning production and consumption. After that, some of the authorial practices that

have been developed in the sciences and increasingly in the digital humanities are explored, such as hyperauthorship, and networked and collaborative research work. These practices are challenging the individualistic nature of authorship and are promoting increasingly open-ended research and alternative (digital) views concerning creativity and invention. This section ends with an exploration of academic remix practices, which mainly critique how so-perceived original ideas are attributed to authors as their (intellectual) property; as an alternative, the trope of the remixer or curator seems to be increasingly making inroads in current scholarship on digital authorship (and the narrative of the latter seems to be replacing the former).

### Hypertext

Hypertext, defined aptly by the Electronic Labyrinth project as “the presentation of information as a linked network of nodes which readers are free to navigate in a non-linear fashion,” has been classified as a practical application of Barthes’s and Foucault’s criticism of authorship, at least to the extent that in hypertext debates the focus returns to a critique of authorship exactly from this perspective of a new (literary) practice.<sup>45</sup> For example, as literary scholar George Landow points out, hypertext can be seen as the “electronic embodiment of poststructuralist conceptions of textuality” and it thus “reconceive[s] the figure and function of authorship.”<sup>46</sup> Hypertext scholarship is among other things interested in bridging the gap between the author and the reader, where the reader increasingly becomes the author of the hypertextual work that is being consumed and interacted with, challenging and blurring the authorial role.<sup>47</sup> Here the argument is that in hypertext theory, the figures and functions of author and reader become more deeply entangled, with authorial power redirected to the reader. According to Landow, this is possible due to the read/write capabilities of the net and hypertext, for example. This offers the reader interactivity and the possibility to choose their own way through a work, via hyperlinks to other textual nodes and locations, and thus to create their own meaning based on that path. In a networked hypertext environment, the reader then becomes the *performer* of a text, with each text a unique enactment. As such, hypertext suggests a changed relationship between the reader and the text. The multiple meanings of a work and a text, as theorized by Barthes and Foucault, are thus arguably more practically embodied and visualized in the production and consumption of hypertexts. As such,



radical changes in textuality or in the material object, such as with hypertext, will cause radical changes in authorship; hypertext's lack of textual autonomy, its unboundedness, disperses ideas of authorship too.<sup>48</sup> Instead of the author-subject and the bounded text-object, we now have the network, in which both are decentered. Hypertext can thus be seen to embody a decentered textuality, open and interactive, where, due to its capacity to transform on a continuous basis, it is simultaneously dispersed, performative, and processual.<sup>49</sup>

Notwithstanding the potential of hypertext theory to decenter the author's authority, it keeps many of the other juridical and economical authorship functions in check. We see this if we look at an early practical installment of hypertext, *hypertext fiction* or *hyperliterature*, a specific hypertext-based genre of electronic literature (although hypertext fiction is not solely digital), which was seen to embody many of the possibilities the argument outlined previously focused on. Yet although hypertext fiction introduced a practical multiplicitous conception of authorship or of the prosumer (the reader as author), for example, it did not fundamentally deconstruct the various other functions that are part of the romantic, humanist notion of authorship and the way it has been embodied in our institutions and practices. For instance, hypertext fiction works continued to be mainly published as complete and finished works or commodities. In their early distribution mechanisms, using CD-ROMs or particular forms of software and/or platforms such as Storyspace and Intermedia—which were utilized by well-known hypertext authors such as Shelley Jackson and Michael Joyce—hypertext fiction also remained “bound” together (albeit in a different way than books), both in a medial sense and bound together by their authors. For hypertext fiction still very much came with a recognizable author, including a copyright disclaimer. Not only do hypertextual works thus remain recognizable by a distinct author, they also continue to function in terms of a reputation economy with clear attribution and responsibility, and in this respect the originality of the work is also still attributed to the author.

We can clearly see this at work in the Electronic Literature Directory (ELD), an influential collection of e-lit works, descriptions, and keywords/tags, which includes many works of early hypertext fiction.<sup>50</sup> The ELD, maintained by the Electronic Literature Organization, is organized around individual works and their authors, and not, for example, around specific readings of a work. Although the ELD focuses on “irreproducible reading

experiences” and on “the interventionary actions of an active reader,”<sup>51</sup> it has not organized its directory around these experiences—although it does recognize its entry authors and their specific reading experiences, and it allows you to search for their additional entries in the ELD. But these reviewers/readers/authors are not listed as a specific category in the main menu, which could have given them more authority, for example. As such, these entry authors and their reading experiences are not on par with the works of hypertext fiction and their authors when it comes to the directory’s organization.

In the dynamic between author and reader within hypertext, the author also continues to stand out as the designer of the hypertext, where the specific paths or linearities created remain prescriptive in many ways. In what sense is this authorial predescription then not already fixing possible meaning association for readers? As it is still the author who defines relationships within a hypertext, it can be argued that readers remain second-grade authors: it is an ad hoc relationship. Partly due to the complexity of many hypertext fictions, when it comes to the interactivity promised by early hypertext works, on reflection this can also be judged to have been rather low. The different paths and structures within hypertext can seem problematic and do not always create a coherent narrative for readers; on a design level, many of the interfaces were also hard to navigate.<sup>52</sup>

Instead of seeing hypertext as a radical discontinuity, which is how many of hypertext’s proponents have presented it—perceiving hypertext, as Jay David Bolter has argued, as a revolutionary break with the past, similar to the rhetoric of modernist artists and writers—such a dichotomous schism between the old and the new, and between networked or hypertext authors and print authors can be seen as overstated, as many print texts and works (from fiction to scholarly works) already functioned according to hypertext structures.<sup>53</sup> Was print reading not always already collaborative and performative too in this respect? And does the author function really undergo a practical critique in a setting where artistic creativity and ownership and the authorial acknowledgement of works still remains an important aspect of the networked environment?

### **Collaborative Authorship**

Initially, hypertext structures were mostly experimented with in a specialized literary-academic context, but increasingly aspects of hypertextual structures

(especially its hyperlinking capacity) have become more common in digital academic communication, and many of the elements of hypertext practice and theory are being experimented with in both formal and informal digital publishing. In this respect, developments in digital tools and media, from blogs to wikis to online collaborative writing, annotation, and commenting systems, have made readerly interaction with and prosumption of academic texts easier and more convenient. Indeed, experiments currently taking place within the field of digital humanities—which has been defined as “not a unified field but an array of convergent practices”—can be seen to try to move beyond some of the issues with readerly interaction that hypertext faced.<sup>54</sup> As Fitzpatrick has argued in this respect, experiments in hypertext “may have pointed in the general direction of a digital publishing future, but were finally hampered by difficulties in readerly engagement, as well as . . . by having awakened in readers a desire for fuller participation that hypertext could not itself satisfy.”<sup>55</sup> Within academia, however, a practical authorship critique of its own had started to develop, one which has been mainly based upon two developments: the rise of digital tools, media, platforms, and networked environments in scholarly research, which has led to new forms of networked collaboration; and the growth, especially in a scientific context, of massively collaborative projects, following the principles of networked science.<sup>56</sup> These developments have led to an enhanced questioning of the romantic humanist discourse of single authorship, especially within those fields in the sciences and the humanities in which the adoption of digital tools has been the most apparent.

One example of a discipline in which the humanist discourse on authorship as it normally functions within academia has become a serious problem is high-energy physics (HEP). As we have seen, from the seventeenth century onward, the appropriation of credit and the allocation of accountability developed as simultaneous processes, based on the idea of a work written by an individual author.<sup>57</sup> Jeremy Birnholtz argues, however, that even though authorship is the accepted method in science to assess contributions of researchers to their specific discipline—playing an important role in the reputation economy and as a measurement of symbolic capital—it can be difficult to recognize an individual’s contributions to a research article, something that becomes increasingly problematic on highly collaborative projects. For example, in HEP, the authorship model has not been functioning very well in the traditional sense as the number of people working on a collaborative

project can run into the hundreds. It is therefore not uncommon that every article authored by a research team member lists *all* the participating physicists on that particular project, a phenomenon known as *hyperauthorship*.<sup>58</sup> In 2015, a physics paper by the team at the Large Hadron Collider at CERN with 5,154 authors broke the record for the largest number of contributors to a single research article. Published in *Physical Review Letters*, twenty-four pages of the thirty-three-page article are taken up by a list of the authors and their institutions.<sup>59</sup> The problem within such a regime of hyperauthorship is that it leads to *diffusion of responsibility* as it becomes impossible to determine where ultimately authority, credit, and accountability reside. Authorship without responsibility becomes literally meaningless, Blaise Cronin points out, as responsibility, in the form of affixing authority, credit, and accountability, is an essential part of the standard “rights and responsibilities” model of authorship in the current scholarly communication model. For instance, I have the right to claim credit and symbolic capital for my authorship but also the responsibility to defend and stand behind my claims and take the blame if they are flawed.<sup>60</sup>

This has led to a situation where, in HEP, the reputation economy no longer works on the basis of authorship or formal records of contribution, but increasingly runs via informal means of assessment and evaluation.<sup>61</sup> This informal system of recognition relies on word-of-mouth recommendations and the ability to get noticed within large group collaborations. Credit here does not come from publications but from establishing a reputation within the work group. Although traditional authorship has therefore become problematic within this environment, and the idea of individual responsibility seems to be bestowed upon the group and on collaborative notions of authorship within HEP publishing practices, the rights and recognition part of the standard model of authorship continues to run via individual recognition. In addition to this, to address the issue of (the lack of) responsibility within group authorship, there have been experiments with appointing guarantors to articles (accepting full responsibility for the work) and, with digital badges, denoting a contributor’s specific individual research contribution on a project.<sup>62</sup>

Although hyperauthorship is not particularly common in the humanities and social sciences to date, where the single author still dominates most fields, the example of HEP does raise some problems that can be related to accepted notions of authorship in these contexts too. First, it shows that

different research cultures have different approaches to authorship and to issues of social trust, as well as various ways of awarding responsibility and recognition for research findings. This emphasizes that there exists no standard concept or definition of authorship that traverses the various research communities. There are different definitions of authorship, and these tend to change too within fields, making them contingent. These examples all seem to underscore that authorship is a social construct, not a natural fact, and that these constructs, and the way authorship “functions,” differs between epistemic communities, both within the life sciences and in contrast to the humanities and social sciences.<sup>63</sup> Second, the examples from HEP show that what we perceive as the standard romantic discourse of authorship has a problem when it comes to distinguishing different kinds of research contributions and collaborations. It only works within certain limits, limits that HEP and biomedicine seem to be exceeding and that are also increasingly being challenged in the humanities and social sciences.

Collaboration and coauthorship practices, combined with a discourse that encourages collaboration, have been on the rise in the humanities and social sciences too, especially in the digital humanities and adjacent fields, in which digital tools and increasingly also scientific methods for conducting research are being applied to humanities research.<sup>64</sup> Collaboration is seen as an essential aspect of the research culture here.<sup>65</sup> As digital humanist Lisa Spiro puts it, “Work in many areas of the digital humanities seems to both depend upon collaboration and aim to support it.”<sup>66</sup> Someone et al. explain this in more detail with the example of data mining: “With computational tools, digital archives can reveal more than they obscure by providing organizational frameworks and tools for analysis. However, these tools—in the guise of metadata organization, indexing, searching, and analytics—are not self-generated. They require the combined work of humanists with their interdisciplinary questions and computer scientists with their disciplinary approaches to partner with one another to produce viable research methodologies and pedagogies.”<sup>67</sup>

Digital humanities research needs collaboration but also depends on reliable infrastructures and platforms to make collaborations possible. In this context, digital humanities research tends to situate itself in laboratories or “labs” and is often organized around “projects” to emphasize its collaborative nature.<sup>68</sup> Collaboration is visible in the valuable support received from, among others, librarians, IT departments, and computer scientists, which

are only slowly being acknowledged as full-fledged contributors to digital humanities projects.<sup>69</sup> There is thus a continued call within this environment to give credit to the various alternative academic (alt-ac) collaborators in digital projects, following nonstandard academic careers such as the ones mentioned earlier, in which efforts are made to “establish computing practitioners and non-technical scholars as equals in research,” for example.<sup>70</sup>

Collaboration is also visible in the “nondigital” humanities—if only by taking part in the “great conversation” of scholarship. In the process of preparing a publication, we rely on others in multiple ways, both online and offline—for instance, via comments at conferences, in blogs, and on social media, via peer reviews, and via support from editors, proofreaders, copy editors, book designers, printers, and so forth.<sup>71</sup> There is also a growing amount of interest, in both the “traditional” and the digital humanities, in environments and platforms for online collaborative work—in the case of international or cross-institutional research projects involving multiple project members, for instance. This has led to the rise of informal collaboration online (e.g., with the aid of software such as Google Docs and Dropbox, document annotation on platforms such as Academia.edu, Medium, and PubPub, and via a wide variety of online project-management tools) and more formal collaboration through what have been termed *collaboratories*, *virtual research environments* (VREs), digital research infrastructures (such as DARIAH in the EU), and other instantiations of collaborative teams and technologies within the humanities.<sup>72</sup> As Simeone et al. show in their discussion of one of these collaborative projects, with the rise of large-scale, multiparticipant collaborative research projects, the authorship of articles, papers, and books written by project team members becomes problematic as it is hard to establish individual and collective contributions—similar to the situation in HEP.<sup>73</sup> The romanticizing of the sole author in science and scholarship leads to a notion of science as a stream of *geniuses* and inventors, intrinsically connected to a cultural and historical context that privileges individual creativity.<sup>74</sup> This narrative stands in strong contrast to the community aspect of networked scholarship that can similarly be perceived to be at the basis of our scholarly practices and seems to be increasingly so—especially if we take into consideration the importance assigned to it within digital humanities discourses.

However, within the digital humanities, further reasons have been developed that we need to be critical of our standard notions of authorship, as some have argued that they are becoming increasingly hard to sustain in a

digital environment that can be seen as privileging *process* over product. As Fitzpatrick explains, online texts, such as blogs, tend to work via a logic of commenting, linking, and versioning, stimulating the open-ended nature of networked writing and producing texts that “are no longer discrete or static, but that live and develop as part of a network of other such texts, among which ideas flow.”<sup>75</sup> Research in blogs especially—which, among social media use, are becoming more common in academic scholarship—but also in other forms of online publications, from wikis to e-books, can be updated and changed—not only by the author(s), but increasingly by the community at large too.<sup>76</sup>

Various publishing projects, platforms, and software within the (digital) humanities have over the last years started to explore processual and collaborative forms of publishing and reviewing, from Open Humanities Press’s Living Books series (mentioned in the introduction and explored in more depth in chapter 5), which were published in wikis open for others to edit after publication, to the processual books recently initiated by the University of Minnesota Press on its Manifold platform, which enable readers to follow and comment on research as it evolves online. But we also see this in platforms and technologies such as MediaCommons Press, CommentPress, PubPub, and Hypothesis, which all enable online commenting on and annotation of research documents, often both before and after they have been (in)formally published.<sup>77</sup>

This challenges the notion of a fixed text and with it the author’s authority based on that fixed text, which, as Cronin has argued, is an essential aspect of the traditional rights and responsibilities model of authorship. As Susan Brown et al. state with regard to the open-endedness of digital humanities research: “Scholars will increasingly be able to build on existing electronic texts, restructuring or adding to them, or recombining them with new content to produce new texts. In a radical extension of earlier forms of textuality, the possibility that an electronic text will continue to morph, be reproduced, and live on in ways quite unforeseen by its producers makes ‘done’ to an extent always provisional.”<sup>78</sup> In this respect, traditional authorship, similar to what we discussed previously with respect to hypertext, is judged as having a hard time accommodating rival claims of authority from a reader or community perspective.

In practice, however, ideas based on the processual and unbound potential of digital works are still facing difficulty. Discourses building on print-based

authorship, with its notions of individual ownership and authority, have functioned within academia as solidifying processes, where scholarship is from its inception already being created to function as a product to exchange on the reputation market. This process is institutionalized and enforced within the professional publishing system. David Sewell, editor at the University of Virginia Press, explains how under economic external constraints, the open-ended or processual character of both digital and traditional publications can be sacrificed once they become part of the formal publishing process:

But completely extrinsic factors such as the desire to include the book in a particular season's list will often lead a press to veto an author's wish to continue tinkering with a manuscript. Similarly, an author may not consider a monograph on Chinese art formally complete without the inclusion of several dozen full-page color reproductions on glossy inserts, but a publisher may omit them for the wholly extrinsic reason that the profit-and-loss sheet doesn't budget for them. Once a book is in print, decisions about its subsequent "done-ness" (i.e., whether to reprint, revise, issue in paperback, etc.) are based almost entirely on economic factors. In the case of digital publications, I will suggest, extrinsic factors become important at an earlier stage and are proportionately more important at every stage of composition and publication.<sup>79</sup>

But this insistence on creating a finished marketable object, favoring product over process, cannot only be blamed on publishers. Fitzpatrick emphasizes the "distinctly Fordist functionalist mode of working" of scholars as writers, where in the reputation economy surrounding academia, the ultimate goal of research projects is final completion, the moment when a new item can be added to one's CV as evidence of scholarly productivity.<sup>80</sup> We can similarly see how this reputational pressure plays out in authorship practices within the digital humanities, where, contrary to its celebration of collaboration and group work, scholars continue to mainly publish single-authored articles. Research by Nyhan and Duke-Williams shows that, notwithstanding efforts within the digital humanities community to enable and promote collaborative authorship through statements such as the Collaborators' Bill of Rights, single authorship remains predominant in the sample that Nyhan and Duke-Williams took from some of the core journals within the digital humanities.<sup>81</sup> As they state, this does not necessarily indicate an absence of collaboration on the research that has contributed to these single-authored articles—but it does exemplify the continued conformity



with publishing according to established print-based authorship practices, even within the digital humanities.<sup>82</sup>

The narratives and institutional customs mentioned thus far all in different ways argue for a revision of our discourses on, and practices of, individual authorship. Rethinking and reperforming authorship might aid in promoting the discourse of collaboration that similarly accompanies authorship, as well as the newly developing digital research practices and their potential underlying values of scholarly openness, experimentation, and sharing. However, in these narratives, collaborative authorship still seems to focus mainly on *extending* (e.g., to include alt-ac contributors) forms of individual authorship to a larger group, instead of critiquing fundamentally the notions that individual humanist authorship is based upon. We can find an example of this in Fitzpatrick's book *Planned Obsolescence*, in which she makes a passionate plea for the need for community and collaboration in (digital) humanist and experimental research and publishing projects. Yet when Fitzpatrick talks about forms of collaborative authorship in *Planned Obsolescence*, her focus seems to be primarily on stimulating interaction and conversation and on getting the collaborative aspects of scholarship acknowledged more widely. Fitzpatrick's can be seen as a reformist stance in this respect, rather than a disruptive one: her critique of authorship focuses mostly on fostering individual authors' sense of community in order to stimulate their writing practices and to find more pleasure (as opposed to anxiety) in their writing process.<sup>83</sup> As she states, her aim is "less to disrupt all our conventional notions of authorship than to demonstrate why thinking about authorship from a different perspective—one that's always been embedded, if dormant, in many of our authorship practices—could result in a more productive, and hopefully less anxious, relationship to our work."<sup>84</sup> As Gary Hall has pointed out in this respect, Fitzpatrick "does not really offer a profound challenge to ideas of the human, subjectivity, or the associated concept of the author at all," nor is she "radically questioning the notion of the human that underpins [quoting Stanley Fish] 'the "myth" of the stand-alone, masterful author.'"<sup>85</sup> Her notion of collaborative authorship thus seems to be mainly based on the idea of a group of "'unique,' stable, centered authors . . . now involved in a 'social' conversation 'composed of individuals.'"<sup>86</sup>

From this perspective, one can question whether the collaborative authorship practices promoted in networked science and the digital humanities are

really an embodiment of the antihumanist critique put forward by thinkers such as Barthes and Foucault. Especially when, to provide yet another example, in the instrumentalist rhetoric of Michael Nielsen, networked science is foremost focused on aiding discovery, more than it is on challenging the problems individual authorship has created for the way our institutions, practices, and political economies of research production currently operate.<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, following Foucault's plea to rethink the way authorship *functions*—in this context within academia—experimenting practically with new forms of collaborative authorship might be seen as a way of beginning to reperform and recut authorship in a more ethical way. However, in this process, as scholars we have to remain wary of simply replicating our liberal humanist authorship discourses and practices as part of our notions of collaborative authorship, which means that we should remain critical toward these alternative forms of authorship in a continued fashion too. For example, replacing individual authorship with forms of community knowledge production can still promote liberal hegemonic forms of control and, as I have written elsewhere, runs the risk of creating “problems of conformity, groupthink and bias in online communal knowledge production.”<sup>88</sup> How can we in this respect continue to critique the potentially “oppressive aspects of the consensus model of community,” as Fitzpatrick calls it?<sup>89</sup>

### Remix Practices

Questioning the individual notions of authorship that we have adopted within academia and exploring how different forms of agency are involved in our authoring practices also leads us to explore how our writing is always a cowriting, how it always builds on the writing of others. In many ways, remix can be seen as an essential notion underlying our academic writing practices, where our research is embedded within a larger conversation that we draw upon, cite, analyze, synthesize, and juxtapose in various ways: from reworking arguments and citations into a new work to drafting and redrafting scholarship from and out of notebooks and reconfigured index cards. We also version and reuse content for different types of publications (where it occurs in different guises in anything from blog posts and reports to abstracts, papers, announcements, funding applications, etc.). What I want to explore here is how remix practices within academia—from combining different media in innovative ways to collaboratively (re)mixing fragments of texts in new contexts—not only offer an alternative vision of

collaborative authorship but also challenge one of the other main aspects of romantic, humanist authorship: its discourse of originality and, related to that, of ownership of original works.

Yet at the same time, remix practices have also been critiqued in a variety of ways from a scholarly perspective. For instance, they have been attacked from a viewpoint declaring that in a digital environment, these practices take on a “wide democratic approach,” in which everyone is able to update, reuse, and remix online content. Critics such as Andrew Keen and Sven Birkerts see this as a threat to expert knowledge and as diluting the distinction between amateur and professional content.<sup>90</sup> Others have criticized Wikipedia, which is based on the online collaborative editing and re-editing of encyclopedic or topical entries, for its perceived failure as a reliable source due to the lack of credentials of its editors.<sup>91</sup> Remix practices also have the potential to challenge the idea of a stable scholarly work and pose a problem for the idea of the integrity of the scholarly object. They thus question the idea that fixed scholarly objects exist and should even be preserved as discrete entities.<sup>92</sup> Remix practices are therefore seen as posing a challenge to our traditional conception of authorship while presenting a problem for responsibility and attribution in the scholarly reputation economy.

However, many contemporary scholarly remix practices are in essence much less radical and less of a threat than they are sometimes perceived to be to the practices, institutions, and discourses that surround the fixed-print regime that continues to structure academia. I am thinking, for example, of remix practices such as the use of Creative Commons licenses for scholarly publications, which in many cases (such as the CC BY attribution license) allow for the reuse of material, or those practices associated with Wikipedia. But I am also thinking of strands within remix theory, including arguments put forward by theorists such as Lev Manovich, Eduardo Navas, and Lawrence Lessig, that focus mainly on finding a place for humanist and essentialist notions of attribution and authorship *within* remix practice and scholarship. As I outline in the next section, although remix practices in academia, including the notion of the selector or curator, wikis as a research method, and Creative Commons licenses, have the potential to shake up the authorship function, until now they have not managed to dethrone the traditional academic author-god—and in some cases, they even end up reinforcing her or him.

### The Selector or Curator

One of the proposals offered in discussions on remix to grapple with the problem of authorship in an increasingly online networked setting is to shift the focus from the author to the selector, the moderator, or the curator. This is one of the suggested solutions explored by remix theorist Eduardo Navas, especially in the realm of music. In music, authorship, as Navas states, is increasingly being replaced by sampling, and “sampling . . . allows for the death of the author,” where it is hard to trace the origin of a tiny fragment of a musical composition.<sup>93</sup> This makes authorship and writing into something distinct from an original work; it becomes an act of resampling, selecting, and reinterpreting previous material. As Navas points out, with the death of the author as the one who creates a new and original work, the author function in the Foucauldian sense of selectivity takes over. Navas argues in this respect that s/he who selects the sources to be remixed takes on the critical position or the needed distance to the material used in remix, and with that takes on a new author function.<sup>94</sup>

One of the problems with replacing the idea of authorship with the idea of the selector, however, is that this move only shifts the locus of authority from the author to the selector. Selection, although incorporating a broader appreciation for other forms of authorship or for an extension of the author function, can all too easily be just another form of humanist and individualistic *agency*, and so does not necessarily offer a fundamental challenge to the idea of authorship or authorial intention. Along with not inherently confronting the idea of authorial authority and intentionality, the selector also cannot be seen as automatically critiquing or rethinking *authority*, as authority is frequently just shifted from the author onto s/he who selects or curates, who still carries responsibility for the selections s/he makes. What happens when the author function is further decentered and agency is distributed within the system? And what do we do with forms of nonhuman authorship? It becomes increasingly hard to establish authority in an environment where the contributions of a single author are hard to trace back or where content is created by anonymous users or avatars, for example. Or, indeed, in situations in which there is no human author and the content is machine-generated based on certain tags, algorithms, or protocols, such as is the case with data feeds, where users receive updated data from a large variety of sources in a single feed. As such, the role of the selector as an

authoritative figure is diminished when selections can be made redundant and choices can be altered and undone by mass-collaborative, multiuser remixes and mash-ups. At what point then does it become necessary to let go of our established notions of responsibility and authority as they become impossible to uphold? What alternative cuts can we make that start to move in directions beyond individualistic forms of authority and toward distributed and posthumanist forms of authorship?

Another difficulty associated with replacing the author with s/he who selects is that this doesn't really offer a critique of the profit- and object-based aspects of the system of individual authorship and therefore doesn't form a challenge to the traditional idea of *ownership* as it is connected to authorship.<sup>95</sup> As Bill Herman shows in his excellent article on the DJ as an author, the DJ is *made* an author, not by what they do, but by the representation of their practices in a capitalist system. As Herman points out, the DJ was instilled with authorship by the music industry by marketing them as a brand name and promoting the sale of commodities related to the DJ. In this sense, the DJ is a tool; the author as selector becomes an object from which commodities can be derived. Herman argues that initially in remix culture we could see the disappearance of traditional forms of authorship. As he explains: "The authorship that was traditionally invested in the performers of songs was deteriorated as the songs' individuality disappeared into the mix."<sup>96</sup> The DJ started out playing a background role, foregrounding the artists and numbers that were being remixed; they themselves were just another member of the party. This situation didn't last long, however. Following the logic of profit and capitalism, authorship was soon reestablished on an even stronger basis. The DJ became a superstar to fill a commercial void, eventually leading to the DJ being instilled by music producers as another Barthesian author-god.

Herman makes a compelling argument for seeing the commodification of music via the DJ figure as a crucial part of the author function in the music industry.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, he offers additional weight to the idea that the author function is a sociological construct, instilled upon the author—for instance, by cultural businesspersons within the music industry. The author is created as an integral part of a larger set of social relations, a system of exchange that is governed by the logic of capital. As Herman states: "The DJ's authorship becomes the discursive solution to an economic problem."<sup>98</sup>

## Wikis

Where the selector or curator in many ways can be seen to further instill liberal humanist forms of authorship, taking on the authority and ownership functions connected to the idea of the individual author-owner, forms of communal writing might further disturb this connection to individuality. For example, wikis, web applications that allow users to directly edit and modify content online in a collaborative manner, can be seen as an important experiment in cultivating new understandings of what it means to be an author based on ideas of collective authorship.<sup>99</sup> By being open to anyone while maintaining the relative anonymity of their authors, wikis have the potential to break down the authority of the specialist and replace it with forms of crowd-sourced authority. Wikipedia is the most famous example here; its peer-production potential was seen to compete with traditional sources of expert knowledge such as the *Encyclopedia Britannica*.<sup>100</sup> Whereas in early hypertexts the potential for user interaction was still arguably low, with the implementation of hypertextual elements into a wiki environment, the distinction between readers and authors in practice seems to almost disappear.

However, wikis are envisaged and structured in such a way that authorship and clear attribution—and therefore responsibility, as well as version control—remain an essential part of their functioning. The structure behind most wikis is still based on an identifiable author—or at least an identifiable IP address—and on a version history that lets you check all changes and modifications if needed. Wikipedia, the largest public wiki and one of the most well-known examples of a wiki functioning via the structure described previously, also encourages authors to sign their articles. As it states on Wikipedia's Etiquette page: "Unless you have an excellent reason not to do so, sign and date your posts to talk pages (not articles)."<sup>101</sup> Wikipedia is also increasingly moderated, and some of its moderators have more power than others, thus in a way becoming not unlike curators.<sup>102</sup> In reality, the authority of the author is therefore not fundamentally challenged in Wikipedia; nor does its authority really come to terms with the element of continual updating that wikis evoke. In this way, Wikipedia can be seen to struggle between traditional notions of authorship and credibility and the more communal crowd-surfed ideologies of openness it is said to support; the prevalence of print-based authorship notions still seems to be strong here. Juridical researcher Ayelet Oz argues that there is "a conflict between

the aspirational and organizational goals” within Wikipedia. As she points out: “The enforcement mechanisms on Wikipedia enact an internal conflict between Wikipedia’s open, inclusive ethos and its organizational reliance on power, hierarchy and punishment.”<sup>103</sup>

Yet even though wikis are still largely structured according to print-based notions of authorship and version control, the relative anonymity they offer to authors might explain why their uptake hasn’t been really significant within academia. It might also explain why collaborative work on documents within the humanities predominantly seems to take the form of comments in the margins of a source or draft text. This becomes clear from the uptake of popular collaboration and annotation software and platforms such as Google Docs,<sup>104</sup> shared Dropbox files, Hypothesis, and Comment-Press. This specific form of collaborative text editing and commenting in the margins has also been incorporated in large platforms such as Academia .edu and Medium (and it forms a core aspect of the University of Minnesota Press’s Manifold platform for processual monographs, for example), all of which are regularly used by academics in the humanities for research purposes and collaborative work. This preference for commenting or suggesting, instead of direct editing, might be related to a reluctance among authors to directly edit a text that is seen as the original work of another author or group of authors.<sup>105</sup> Hence margin comments can be considered as less disruptive to both the integrity of a text and the authority of an author. Yet in addition to this, comments in the margins, as we have discussed with the example of Fitzpatrick’s *Planned Obsolescence*, also offer a mechanism to clearly distinguish author(s) from commenter(s), and in this process establish the authority and individuality of the commenter as a separate named contributor to a text (albeit on a different level than the authority instilled in the author)—a relationship that would be much more obscured within wiki authorship. This clearly plays into specific author functions within academia focused on promoting one’s standing and reputation (and one’s brand) as a commenter or reviewer within a community. Now that it is increasingly possible to link to and reference specific comments made, these functions might become more important, potentially leading to a system of assessment and recognition that recognizes the contributions made by reviewers, annotators, commenters, and other contributors to a document. As such, even though wikis offer the opportunity to identify authorial contributions, the fact that they still obscure them might

explain why other “reputation-enhancing” forms of collaborative authorship have seen more uptake within academia.

### Creative Commons

The remix practices related to the selector or curator, and the wiki editor, rely on the texts or sources that are remixed being openly available to edit and reuse. Creative Commons licenses are a type of copyright license that have become the default in an open access environment to promote the free distribution of research by granting permission to others to share it and/or reuse it. Within academia, it is not only books and articles but also blogs and wikis that stimulate such academic reuse by using the CC BY license, or any other of its seven license variants that allows free reuse. Lawrence Lessig, one of the founders of the Creative Commons organization, explains part of the reasoning behind these licenses in his book *Remix*. Taking a pragmatic position, Lessig’s specific kind of copyright reform focuses on ending the “copyright wars” while at the same time promising artists and authors the necessary copyright protection—which Lessig claims authors need as an incentive to create.<sup>106</sup> The argument Lessig makes pro remix culture and against the current severe copyright law focuses on the latter’s restriction of creative freedom, evolution, and development. He emphasizes that the law should not be too rigid and as such should not criminalize an entire generation of downloaders and remixers by designating them as illegal pirates. However, at no point does Lessig go so far as to dispute copyright altogether, as this would go against “creative evolution,” following his argument that authors and producers need an incentive to create. This incentive, in Lessig’s vision, is at the very minimum *attribution*, which ensures the reputation economy still functions. Here, Lessig can be seen to still abide by liberal humanist notions of individual ownership and responsibility, based on privatized capital and individuated resources.<sup>107</sup> In its initial form, Creative Commons and its licenses, set up to stimulate creativity and promote remix practices, thus strongly holds on to the authorship function: CC BY still requires attribution, for example, despite being one of its most liberal licenses. Even with more recent licenses, such as CC0, which releases a work directly into the public domain, copyright still needs to be granted (or waived) *by the author*.<sup>108</sup> It could therefore be said that Creative Commons makes copyright less rigid and more open while also placing an extra burden on the authorship function. The author becomes more



powerful in determining under which exact conditions their work can be shared and distributed. Instead of seeing cultural works and information as something people are always allowed to share, we are still operating here with a system in which sharing (of individuated creative objects) needs to be authorized and in which any work created by an author is automatically their property upon creation.

Law professor Niva Elkin-Koren offers a compelling argument in her supportive but at the same time critical review of Creative Commons. She regrets that the strategy of Creative Commons is not aimed at creating a public domain in the legal sense, free of exclusive proprietary rights. Those behind Creative Commons believe free culture will arise by a different exercise of copyright on the part of owners, where contracts are used to liberate creative works and make them more accessible.<sup>109</sup> As Elkin-Koren argues, however, “in the absence of commitment to a single (even if minimal) standard of *freedom in information*, Creative Commons’ strategy is left with the single unifying principle which empowers authors to govern their own work.”<sup>110</sup> The focus point of Elkin-Koren’s critique is that by maintaining the idea of copyright, Creative Commons keeps on seeing cultural goods as consumable products; it treats creative works as commodities. This only strengthens the proprietary regime in information and culture and with that the practice and discourse of proprietorial authorship within academia.

### Antiauthorship Critique: Plagiarism and Anonymity

In the previous section, I examined some of the more recent practical strategies to reperform authorship as developed within hypertext theory, the digital humanities, and as part of various remix practices. What I want to conclude based on this analysis is that although these fields, theories, and practices try to rethink specific aspects of the romantic, liberal humanist authorship discourse in academia (such as authority, individuality, originality, ownership), these notions continue to be strongly ingrained. Furthermore, targeting one of these aspects (such as authority) often only strengthens the others. As such, these examples of authorship critique all in some way or another continue to adhere to humanist authorship discourses and practices. What kinds of strategies and analyses of authorship and the way it currently functions can we then devise to try and rethink the various aspects of the romantic and humanist notion of authorship in

a perhaps more comprehensive, critical, and consistent fashion? Could one strategy involve paying more attention to the institutions and structures in which our authorship practices are embedded, as well as to the hegemonic discourse of the liberal autonomous author that continues to structure and inform these practices? Would this perhaps also involve exploring what a *posthumanist critique of authorship* could look like in this respect?

In this section, I want to do exactly that, to offer some suggestions as to what such a posthumanist critique and practice of authorship might encompass. I first look at two practices, *plagiarism* and *anonymous authorship*, that can be identified as forms of antiauthorship critique. I have chosen to examine plagiarism and anonymous authorship in particular due to the fact that, as practices, they are potentially less focused on accommodating new forms of authorship in a digital environment or on making authorship more inclusive. In other words, these practices are less focused on extending individual authorship to include new liberal and autonomous subjects (such as many of the practices I have previously discussed ended up doing) and are aimed more at directly undermining our current humanist notions of authorship, along with the political economy that surrounds them.

### Plagiarism

Even if scholarly research is shared without having to pay to access it, as is the case with certain open access publications using a CC BY or similar license, these publications remain objects within a reputation economy that will be exchanged to create more value in the form of citations, for example. In this sense, it can be argued that it is *plagiarism* (understood here as not citing someone) that becomes the biggest taboo in the academic exchange economy—next to threatening core academic values. Yet following Lessig's reasoning, as plagiarism is perceived to be increasingly prevalent in academic culture today, is it worth "criminalizing" a whole generation?<sup>11</sup> Could plagiarism even be seen as a strategy to stimulate creativity and promote the creative freedom and development of students? We could think of examples in which borrowing the words of others can be used as a method to learn to write, for example. As such, could plagiarism be the next battle after copyright reform to be fought and addressed in order to stimulate (new) forms of creativity that are less focused on the main elements of humanist authorship: ownership, originality, and authority?

*Plagiarism* as a term evokes mostly negative connotations, especially within academia. It is most often defined here as taking someone else's work and presenting it as one's own original work. Following this definition to the letter, plagiarism doesn't really critique or question authorship in any way, as the plagiarist's intent is to elevate her or his own authorship standing and status. In addition, the plagiarist in this account still seeks to claim something as an original work of authorship within the academic reputation economy—it's just that they are doing so falsely. However, there is a more interesting aspect to using someone else's work and representing it as one's own. For within a different discourse or framework, including, as I will argue, a discourse of authorship critique, this is perceived as appropriation. *Appropriation* is used here instead of plagiarism; as a term, it is more commonly used and accepted as a creative strategy within the artistic realm, albeit one in which the source is acknowledged in an implicit way as a form of cultural citation.<sup>112</sup> Here the difference is one of *intent*—but also, as I will show, one of cultural difference, such as the difference between art and academia—and this becomes interesting when we discuss the work of conceptual poet Kenneth Goldsmith, for instance.

Rebecca Moore Howard argues that *patchwriting*, a form of copying and collating different sources without any fundamental alterations, can be a part of a pedagogy of writing as appropriation and indeed a fundamental aspect of language learning and use.<sup>113</sup> Goldsmith has a similar vision, pointing out that appropriation is creative and that he uses it as a pedagogical method in his Uncreative Writing classes (he defines *uncreative writing* as “the art of managing information and representing it as writing”) at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>114</sup> As Goldsmith suggests, following his method, the author won't die, but we might start viewing authorship in a more conceptual way, stating that “perhaps the best authors of the future will be ones who can write the best programs with which to manipulate, parse, and distribute language-based practices.”<sup>115</sup> His argument in support of appropriation criticizes the idea of originality as it is traditionally connected to authorship. However, in making his plea for uncreative writing, Goldsmith does not fundamentally critique authorship (nor what it means to be creative); he again just elevates the role of the copier or remixer to that of the author, saying that: “the simple act of retyping a text is enough to constitute a work of literature, thereby raising the craft of the copyist to the same

level as the author.”<sup>116</sup> Although his is an interesting attempt to challenge the continued emphasis on originality and creativity in writing, if we look closer at what Goldsmith argues, it seems that he is mainly interested in broadening the categories of what counts as original and creative, as well as writing, instead of fundamentally troubling them, for example. For him, the digital environment actually adds more functions to authorship, helping to produce a situation in which, besides originality and creativity, skills such as manipulation and management will become increasingly important.

Nonetheless, in his practical work as a conceptual poet, Goldsmith does try to push the appropriation discourse further by deliberately juxtaposing it against and playing with the blurred lines that exist between this discourse and plagiarism. In the works of Goldsmith and in those of fellow conceptual poets, including Vanessa Place and Kent Johnson, this flirtation with the boundaries between appropriation and plagiarism clearly functions as a way to undermine discourses of liberal authorship.<sup>117</sup> For example, in *Day*, Goldsmith has retyped word by word a whole daily issue of the *New York Times* and published it as his own work.<sup>118</sup> Goldsmith doesn't label this as plagiarism but as a practice of uncreativity (challenging originality) and of constrained writing. A few years later, conceptual poet Kent Johnson republished *Day*, keeping the book entirely intact, while just replacing his own name on the dust cover.<sup>119</sup> In this sense Johnson was extending Goldsmith's uncreativity discourse even further.

In her *Factory* series, conceptual poet Vanessa Place targets both the originality and the authority that reside in our discourses on authorship. Inspired by Andy Warhol's "factory model" of creative production, she commissioned ten writers and artists, or *art-workers*, to make chapbooks for her, which she subsequently published under her own name, taking on the author function. As Place explains: "I, being the one they call 'Vanessa Place,' am the (immaterial) public author function."<sup>120</sup> By appropriating/plagiarizing other artists as well as her own work in an ongoing fashion, Place thus seeks to challenge the authority that underlies the "referent" or "signature" of the author: "I authorize works not authored by me or by those I authorize to author my work—copies of copies of absent authority. Like citation, the referent betrays a fundamental lack of authority on the part of the citing author. Unlike citation, there is no authoritative source. It's a rank imitation of 'Vanessa Place' as 'Vanessa Place' is rank imitation."<sup>121</sup>

These practices of extending what would previously perhaps be seen as plagiarism into an appropriation discourse, of challenging the boundaries between the two, goes beyond what is commonly seen as appropriation or remix practices. They clearly intend to actively disturb or undermine the system of authorship and the notions of originality and authority that come with it by “hollowing” out or putting to the test those notions. In this respect, we can see the preceding examples as an illustration of how practices and concepts of appropriation and plagiarism exist on a spectrum, where appropriation practices in an art context might be judged as plagiarism within an academic publishing context. This might have to do with the fact that the boundaries between plagiarism and appropriation aren’t always clear. When is “cultural citation” sufficiently acknowledged, for example? Therefore, appropriation that takes place within an academic publishing context that does not adhere to a citation or referencing context runs the risk of being condemned. In this respect, Goldsmith’s strategy can be seen as more subversive when he argues for extending forms of appropriation that are accepted within the artistic field—but are still predominantly perceived as plagiarism within a literary or academic context—into scholarship or academic knowledge production.

As such, a focus on different forms and notions of creativity and originality might already be a significant change for those within academia who still adhere more to the print-based discourse of authorship. As Howard notes in this respect, patchwriting does not sit well with our common notions of authorship (and ideas of originality most of all). Although patchwriting was a normal part of writing and scholarship in the Middle Ages, authorship as we now practice it, including ideas of literary individualism and ownership, is a modern invention. These humanist notions are currently seen as natural facts in relation to authorship even though, as Howard rightly argues, our views of what authorship entails keeps shifting. She states that “their historical emergence demonstrates them to be cultural arbitraries, textual corollaries to the technological and economic conditions of the society that instated them.”<sup>122</sup> Although new digital practices like hypertext and wikis, as well as remix and collaborative writing endeavors, make it increasingly hard to uphold a stable category of authorship, and in the process make it difficult to establish what merits plagiarism, academia nevertheless needs authorship and its plagiarizing counterpart as a taboo to sustain traditional

forms of authority. As Howard puts it, “The prosecution of plagiarism . . . is the last line of defense for academic standards.”<sup>123</sup>

Nonetheless, although the forms of strategic plagiarism or appropriation discussed here constitute an interesting critique of authorship, by definition plagiarism and appropriation also involve reinstating certain aspects of the liberal authorship function—albeit a different, uncreative, or unoriginal one. In addition, the way this specific form of authorship critique is “read” risks installing the authorship function even further. As Bill Freind shows, the latter has partly to do with the lack of “meaning” in conceptual projects like the ones I discussed earlier, in which the deconstruction of the work object often leads to the fetishization of the author instead: “The assault on the fetishized status of the artwork in (for example), Dada, language writing, or uncreative writing has not led to a similar interrogation of the status of the author. If anything, the questioning of the artwork has often led to a re-inscription of the author function, as readers look for a locus of meaning in texts that resist traditional explication.”<sup>124</sup>

Similarly, Place has pointed out that when there is no meaning to be found within the text, the author, or thinker, again becomes more important: “There is nothing to be mined from these texts, no points of constellation or dilation, no subject within which to squat. The text object simply is. The reader is, but is irrelevant. But the thinker becomes quite important.”<sup>125</sup>

At this point, then, I would like to look at a further antiauthorship critique and practice (and to also return more squarely to the academic realm) in order to discuss examples of anonymous authorship in academic writing.

### **Anonymous Authorship**

Anonymous authorship has a long history in academic writing, most famously as a strategy to avoid censorship or for authors to shield themselves from political or religious prosecution. This is related to what Foucault has called *penal appropriation*, in which “texts, books, and discourses really began to have authors (other than mythical, ‘sacralised’ and ‘sacralising’ figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive.”<sup>126</sup> Anonymous authorship can therefore be seen to function in a tradition of *escaping responsibility*, but it is also triggered by a critique of the individual ownership of a work. For example, anonymous authorship was quite normal in medieval and early modern times, whereas with the coming of print a new model came

into prominence based on proclaiming individual authorship, as now the author was in a position to profit from these works.<sup>127</sup>

Anonymous authorship's long history extends into current scholarly and literary practices. In 2013, Duke University Press published *Speculate This!* (see figure 2.1), a manifesto in book form to promote “affirmative speculation.” This manifesto has been written collaboratively by an anonymous collective, going by the name *uncertain commons*, in line with a more contemporary tradition of anonymous writing—exemplified by initiatives in the literary field such as Luther Blissett and Wu Ming, and by the collective pseudonym Nicolas Bourbaki that was used by a group of mathematicians in the twentieth century. The uncertain commons collective define themselves as “an open and non-finite group,” their main reasons for choosing anonymous authorship being to “challenge the current norms of evaluating, commodifying, and institutionalizing intellectual labor.”<sup>128</sup> As such, they specifically refer to academic labor and to a situation of growing corporatization of academia, which increasingly demands “quantifiable outcomes for merit and promotion.” Their protest is thus focused on the “proprietary enclosure of knowledge, imagination, and communication.” The collective point out that they “do not claim authorship” nor control

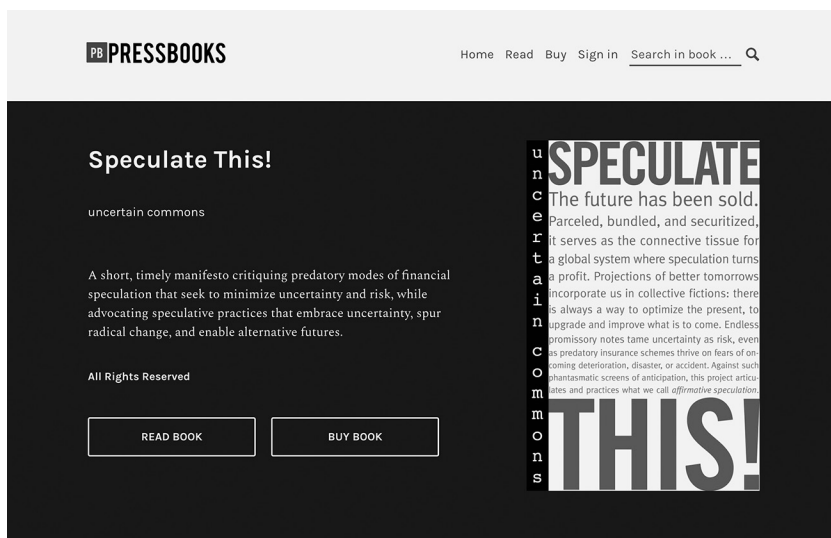


Figure 2.1

*Speculate This!* on the Pressbooks platform

over *Speculate This!*, which they characterize not as an object but as an “emergence.” However, they do not see their actions as a “true resistance” or as standing outside the system, but more as “playfully inhabiting” the various forms of discourse that are already available, which include the exploration of collective intellectual labor and the potentialities of the common.<sup>129</sup> This focus on resistance from within might explain why they chose to publish *Speculate This!* as a coherent and bound book-object with an established university press, although their manifesto is also available for free online. Here the question arises in what sense the publisher ends up taking on some of the authorship functions that the collective tries to dispute and how, in its final published form, this book can then still count as an emergence.

In this specific case, as with the case of other writing collectives such as Wu Ming, it could be argued that the name and brand of the collective can come to stand in for the author due to the lack of other signifiers. This is why critics such as Scott Drake argue that from a proprietary perspective, not much changes: “While [it] may seem obvious given the fact that the name refers to a collective rather than an individual, on its own this does not prevent the name from being taken up into the economic-juridical order as a single name that protects the work as a literary property.”<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, as I made clear previously with respect to collaborative authorship practices in the digital humanities, a celebration of collaborative authorship can also lead to new hegemonic discourses. That said, uncertain commons do try to evade this narrative when they write that they “do not intend to romanticize this form of communal authorship,” which is also apparent in various commercial writing practices and genres and in the example of the *team* as a specific postindustrial form of collaborative labor. From their perspective, collaborative writing practices don’t rely on consensus but on “collaborative modes that instead embrace dissensus.”<sup>131</sup>

It is interesting to go back to the idea of *intent* here, in relationship to what Drake has called *self-reflexive anonymous authorship*, where the intent to question authorship, as he puts it, “acts as a dissident form of cultural production in the economic-juridical order of neoliberalism.”<sup>132</sup> The problem here lies in the idea of self-reflexivity, where, as in the case of Creative Commons licenses discussed earlier, it needs to be the direct intent of the author to publish work anonymously, as authorship is otherwise granted automatically. It is the author who instills the command not to read any



meanings into the work related to the authorship function, thus already shaping it from the outset. This act of renunciation is nevertheless interesting, notwithstanding the paradoxical nature of this situation. To actively renounce itself, authorship needs to be self-reflexive first.

Still, the notion of intent in anonymous authorship can also be directed to create more open-ended meanings in (scholarly) works. This is exactly why anonymous authorship can be a potent alternative to the current neo-liberal system of cultural reproduction and literary property. For example, Drake points out—referring to the literary collective Wu Ming—that by using an open name, it is the intent of this collective to conceptualize their work as “material for further expansion.” This openness creates possibilities for seeing anonymous work as functioning within and reproducing an open public domain, or a commons, instead of promoting individual property.<sup>133</sup> Nick Thoburn argues similarly when he writes about the use of a multiple name (where anyone is free to take up this moniker to author their texts). Thoburn states that these communal works and forms of writing, although in a way extending the author function, also fragment it, expanding its openness:

Luther Blissett was an “open reputation” that conferred a certain authority and capacity to speak—the authority of the author, no less—on an open multiplicity of unnamed writers, activists, and cultural workers, whose work in turn contributed to and extended the open reputation. In this sense, the author-function is magnified and writ large. But it is such in breach of the structures that generate a concentrated and unified point of rarity and authority, because the author becomes a potential available to anyone, and each manifestation of the name is as original as any other. In this fashion, a different kind of individuation emerges, the individuation of the multiple single: Luther Blissett is at once collective, a “co-dividual” shared by many, and singular or fragmented, a “dividual,” an infinitely divisible entity composed of multiple situations and personalities simultaneously.<sup>134</sup>

In what sense can we then speak of, as Thoburn does, a “desubjectifying politics of anonymity?” Can anonymity function as a communist or collective alternative to the cult of personality and individual genius, where this discourse, Thoburn points out, is both misguided and also seen as perpetuating “an essentially capitalist structure of identity?”<sup>135</sup> How can the politics of collaborative writing offer a critique of capitalism and help to shape an alternative in this respect? As no one *owns* the collaborative name of Luther Blissett, Wu Ming, or uncertain commons, for example, nor of the “anonymous author,” the commodity form of the work is indeed being

challenged in these anonymous practices, Thoburn argues: the *author name* is not connected to the ownership of the product. However, the *publication* of a novel or of a scholarly book or manifesto, as in the case of the uncertain commons collective, complicates this, as *Speculate This!*, in its printed format, for sale through the usual academic publication channels, functions as a clear commodity, of course. Nonetheless, in its published form, *Speculate This!* is also available for free online. Thoburn therefore argues with respect to openly available anonymous works that “in their published form, these books at the least indicate and allow for circuits of distribution not constrained by commercial exchange.”<sup>136</sup> Yet one wonders whether this applies to the context of scholarly publishing, where increasingly a certain kind of open access model is being adopted, as part of which (commercial) publishers charge article and book processing charges upfront to authors, their institutions, or their funders, to pay for their publication’s open availability (or to cover their commercial losses). In addition, libraries, the main purchasers of academic books, do not always have (automatic) mechanisms in place to accommodate free or open access publications and tend to follow a strategy, in particular for books, where they obtain both an online/electronic *and* a printed version in order to fulfill users’ continued demand for printed books.<sup>137</sup>

As we have seen from these examples, the role played by publishers in the way anonymous works are published and distributed remains very important. In many ways, they can be seen to take over some authorship functions (authority, responsibility, etc.). How, then, can we start to truly acknowledge the multiple agencies involved in knowledge production, while at the same time questioning and breaking down our ongoing reliance on liberal humanist notions of authorship and, with that, our inherited ways of being and acting as academic authors?

### The Emergence of Posthumanist Forms of Authorship

Now that we have examined two practices, plagiarism and anonymous authorship, that can be identified as forms of antiauthorship critique, I would like to explore how these relate to the form of authorship critique I want to investigate and promote in this chapter—namely, a posthumanist one. What could a posthumanist critique and practice of authorship potentially look like? Especially in a context in which a questioning of

authorship's humanist legacy does not necessarily need to be a *distancing* of humanism as such. For authorship's humanist history already provides the seed for a radical self-critique, where an inherent *posthumanist* authorship has, as can be argued, always already been a part of its proclaimed otherness. The question is then how we can aid in a practical posthumanist critique of authorship's humanist notions, if we see posthumanism as "humanism's ongoing deconstruction."<sup>138</sup> In this sense, posthumanist authorship is not a form of antihumanism (as, in setting up an absolute opposition between humanism and its other, antihumanism remains humanist); it similarly does not go *beyond* humanism, but intends to deconstruct its assertions in a continuous manner.

One possible starting point from which to answer this question—What would a posthumanist authorship look like?—and from which to rethink the humanist notions underlying individualist liberal authorship, including ideas such as originality, ownership, authority, and responsibility—would be to focus on challenging the *integrity of the subject* and the *priority of the human* that continues to underlie knowledge production in the humanities. The posthuman subject—or author, I would argue—can then be seen, in the words of Hayles, "as an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction."<sup>139</sup> This means that a critique of the essentialisms underlying authorship would need to be continuous and would, as Mark Fisher argues with respect to the "dismissal of the self-present, conscious subject," need to be focused on a reformulation of agency.<sup>140</sup> Breaking down the barriers between human and nonhuman agency and acknowledging the agency of nonhumans, of material objects—among others, in scientific practices—while also refusing to take this human/nonhuman division for granted, would be a valuable starting point. This issue has been explored in depth in feminist new materialist and actor network theories, which both tend to emphasize nonhuman and distributed forms of agency.

For example, as part of her posthumanist performative practice, Karen Barad actively explores, via a Foucauldian genealogical analysis, how these kinds of distinctions (between human and nonhuman, self and object) are created.<sup>141</sup> What are the practices that stabilize the categories of human and nonhuman—but also, I would add, of the author, the work, and the reader? As shown in the previous chapter (and I will continue to develop

this in chapter 5), specific book-objects and author-subjects have emerged and solidified out of the cuts into the book as apparatus that we have created and that are created for us as part of our scholarly practices, discourses, and institutions. How can we reconsider these boundaries while at the same time acknowledging the various distributed and interwoven agencies involved in the creation of scholarly works—from the material we work with, the media and technology we use, to the various material forms and practices (paper, editors, print on demand, peer reviewers, software, ink) that accompany a scholarly work's production? But how can we also reconsider, as Hanna Kuusela has shown, our sociocultural practices, consisting of “hybrid networks of both human and non-human actors, technologies and texts” that shape how a work is subsequently received and consumed?<sup>142</sup>

As part of the process of continuously questioning these humanist incisions and boundaries, would a posthumanist (critique of) authorship not also have to include both a theoretical *and* a practical critique? As Gary Hall and I have previously argued in this respect, a digital posthumanities, which entails a radical critique of the humanist notions underlying our idea of the university and of the humanities, should involve a critical theoretical investment from scholars; but it should just as much be part of our scholarly publishing and authoring practices (especially because theory, as a form of discourse, is also materially enacted: it is a form of practice and vice versa).<sup>143</sup>

Hall has provided several examples in his research related to the uptake among critical theorists of the posthuman, of their ideas and politics as part of their own research practices. His critique focuses among others on thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti, Bernard Stiegler, and Cary Wolfe (and in a self-reflexive move, he does not exclude himself from this critique). For example, Braidotti, in her book *The Posthuman* (2013), specifically calls for an affirmative, practical, and situated critique of the humanism that underpins much of our scholarship in the humanities.<sup>144</sup> But Hall shows that in her own writing and research practices (and thus in the way she *acts* as a theorist), Braidotti continues to adhere to liberal humanist authorship functions, to such an extent that “*The Posthuman* also helps sustain the not unrelated sense of Braidotti as an identifiable, self-contained, individual human, whose subjectivity is static and stable enough for her to be able to sign a contract giving her the legal right to assert her identity as the ‘Author of the Work (. . . ) in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs

and Patents Act 1988,' and to claim this original, fixed and final version of the text as her isolable intellectual property—not least via an 'all rights reserved' copyright notice."<sup>145</sup>

Besides providing a practical, alternative, and affirmative authorship critique, a posthumanist critique of authorship, as part its criticism of essentialisms, would also have to target the relationship between the individual author and the book as a commodity. Related to what we saw Drake and Thoburn argue in the previous section, a posthumanist critique of authorship would need to continuously challenge the idea of the *ownership* of a scholarly work, especially as our scholarly authorship practices continue to function within an object-based neoliberal capitalist system—a system that is fed and sustained by the idea of autonomous ownership of a work, copyright, and a reputation economy based on individualized authors. In this respect, an exploration of more distributed and collaborative notions of authorship, as well as of forms of (practical) antiauthorship critique, might help us take attention away from the scholarly work as a fixed and bound product and the book as an academic commodity. This could further stimulate reuse and more processual forms of research, for example. Similarly, a move toward envisioning the production of research as an ongoing and fluid process might promote our awareness of the variety of actants and relations that play a role in the production, dissemination, and consumption of that research, complicating any simplistic notions of ownership.

This entangled relationship between the author-subject and the book-object reflects the need for a wider reconsideration within forms of posthumanist authorship of the relationship between authorship and the *technologies* involved in authoring and communicating scholarly content. Informed by actor-network theory (ANT) and posthumanism, Lesley Gourlay has explored this relationship in depth in her research on textual practices, which, being complex and distributed, take place across a multitude of domains, networked devices, and technologies of inscription.<sup>146</sup> Gourlay argues, building on Latour's assertion that objects are not normally perceived as part of "the social" (which tends to be seen as exclusively human), that similarly within literacy studies, objects are perceived simply and instrumentally as tools, set up in a binary relationship with authorship. Instead she argues for the need to recognize their agentic role in how we make meaning around texts; that is, they are not *intermediators*, but agentic *mediators*.<sup>147</sup> As such, her research outlines how "material objects play

a central role in meaning-making practice, co-constituting texts and authorial subjectivities.”<sup>148</sup>

But even in an environment where we start to acknowledge these multiple human and nonhuman, material and discursive agencies, there remains a need to question notions of control and oppression, which continue to exist in more collaborative authorship practices. Within the digital humanities, a growing critical awareness of our *becoming with* technologies (from material objects to infrastructures) has started to develop, especially in the works of authors such as Johanna Drucker, Federica Frabetti, Alan Liu, and Tara McPherson. Julia Flanders has started to address this issue head-on, starting from digital humanities’ ongoing infatuation with collaboration. In relation to what we previously discussed with respect to the potentially “oppressive aspects of the consensus model of community,” as Fitzpatrick calls it, this is also reflected in, and can become normative and performative through, technical standards and infrastructures.<sup>149</sup> Flanders is acutely aware of this and sets out how an acknowledgement of the agency of these diverse material-discursive entities within knowledge production has to involve an assessment of the ways in which they impose uniformity and become dogmatic through their creation of standards—especially as many digital humanists perceive uniformity and technical standards as essential to collaboration and interoperability (and, as Flanders argues, abiding by them is framed as good citizenship within this community). Flanders outlines how digital humanities projects take place in an digital environment “constrained by a set of technical norms” (i.e., XML documents, the TEI [Text Encoding Initiative] guidelines, markup languages) and material objects, which both mediate and “govern the informational and operational behavior” of that environment and which can be quite exacting and uncompromising.<sup>150</sup> The digital humanities has been instrumental in showing how these technical and disciplinary standards are, as Flanders argues, “tightly interwoven and mutually consequential.”<sup>151</sup> Yet these software tools and data standards are integrally entangled with disciplinary norms, methods, and practices, which tend to be similarly based on some form of consensus or agreement.

How then can we enable dissent and alterity within our collaborative ecologies? Flanders argues in this respect that it is essential that we think closely about “mechanisms for negotiating dissent,” especially to enable “longitudinal collaboration” with future posthumanist collaborators and

for our standards and tools to “be founded on debate rather than on straightforward agreement.” This is especially important in a context of processual and living publications, in which we will not know who (or what) our future collaborators will be or through which media and technologies our differential publications will be mediated. As such, as Flanders argues, “to collaborate effectively under these circumstances is thus a matter not of enforcing an artificial uniformity through which vital distinctions are elided but rather of supporting the real and accurate exchange of the data in which we have a strong stake.”<sup>152</sup> Related to this, I want to examine how we can enable different and agonistic practices to emerge within and through collaborative, multidistributed posthumanist authorial practices, both now and in the future. Any form of posthumanist communal authorship should in this respect remain aware of how it enables the diversity of authorial agencies to be distributed within collaborative ecologies, as a certain amount of antagonism is what “makes both the common and community possible,” as Hall has argued.<sup>153</sup> Following the practice of the uncertain commons collective, posthumanist authorship would thus involve “collaborative modes that instead embrace dissensus.”<sup>154</sup>

Finally, as part of its practical critique of liberal humanist authorship, *experimenting* with alternative forms of authorship or knowledge production, or with discourses of originality and ownership, should also be an important aspect of any kind of posthumanist authorship. As an ongoing, emerging, and multiplicitous critique and practice of rethinking authorship in an experimental way, posthumanist authorship questions the boundaries of authorship, the authorship function, and antiauthorship critique for our current medial and cultural-economic condition. What is important in this experimental exploration of authorship is again a continuous engagement with expanded concepts of *agency*, such as those brought forward by posthumanist and feminist new materialist theories, as well as by the practices (collaboration, remix, and hypertext) described previously. These experiments enable us to examine closely the interactions that take place among authors, readers, texts, institutions, and technologies in the production of knowledge and the creation of meaning. Here the focus should be on questioning and reperforming the distinctions that are made between the author-subject and the work-object and the other agencies at play, and the ways these incisions are enacted and by whom. What kind of power relations are at stake in these demarcations, and how can we potentially

disturb these? Can we, as part of our publishing practices, experiment with more distributed forms of authorship? For example, in the specific context of academic book publishing, and as I have started to do here to some extent, it might be useful to explore the authorial function of publishers in contemporary scholarly publishing: What is their role in establishing authorship, and in marketing and branding it, in taking responsibility for a work and for turning it into a publishable object? In which ways do they acknowledge and enable more diverse and distributed agencies involved in academic knowledge production? (I will discuss in depth the experiments done by Mattering Press in this context in chapter 4.)

Furthermore, how are we to devise our authorial practices in a world in which the stable objects they supposedly belong to are constantly changing? This emphasizes again that neither authorship nor the authorial I is or has ever been a stable category itself.<sup>155</sup> How do we revise and rethink our authorship practices to take this into account? What would a *processual and emergent*—rather than an object-based—authorship look like in this respect? Finally, how do we relate to the role played by these fluid media objects when increasingly they are writing themselves? For example, as Christian Bök stated while referring to RACTER, an automated algorithm written in the 1980s that randomly generated poems: “Why hire a poet to write a poem when the poem can in fact write itself?”<sup>156</sup> A lot of our authorship is automated these days, or machinic, seemingly without any intent. In this respect, it would be interesting, as part of a posthumanist critique of authorship, to focus on forms of what Bök has called *robopoetics*,<sup>157</sup> defined by Goldsmith as a “condition whereby machines write literature meant to be read by other machines, bypassing a human readership entirely.”<sup>158</sup> What do we do with machine-generated content, gathered in feeds, collected through tags and hashtags, sourced from a variety of locations? What about the authorial actions that are being made by computers and software? How do we assess or respond to the authorship related to automatically generated prose, Flarf poetry, Google poetics, or the Postmodernism Generator?<sup>159</sup>

A posthumanist critique of authorship, as an emergent and continuous practice and theory, can of course potentially consist of a variety of strategies to reperform the humanist notions underlying our current scholarly authoring practices. However, as part of these strategies, it will be essential to continue to actively explore the consequences of the alternative incisions we make as part of our performances. For instance, and as discussed



previously in this chapter, in what sense might we, while critiquing certain aspects of the authorship function (such as individuality), reproduce or reinstall other functions of authorship again (such as originality)? In what ways do anonymous authorship practices run the risk of installing more authority in the publisher's author function, for example? One way we might try to overcome this problem is by analyzing closely how humanist discourses and practices of authorship continue to function within academia so that our posthumanist critique might at least try to address these forms of authorship in their ongoing complexity.

When we start to look closely at authorship, and at texts and books (as we, I would like to think, have always been doing), at how their fluidity or open-endedness has been marginalized in favor of a print-based discourse and practice that privileges a more stable identity, this might mean making more rigorous choices toward what constitutes authority in our scholarly practices—but also toward, as Hall states, the “meaning, importance, value and quality” of texts, something we need to be involved in as authors, as readers, and as communities of scholars.<sup>160</sup> This would entail taking more responsibility for the entanglements of which we are a part and for how agency is distributed and authors and works are mediated throughout our academic system. However, experimenting with remix, collaboration, openness, and wikis as such is not enough, not if we invariably end up replicating many of the features associated with print—for reasons of stability, quality, and so on—we want to reexamine. Therefore, we should see these experiments as critical practices, as a way of challenging humanist notions of authorship by intervening practically in and with them on a *continuous* basis.



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# Living Books

## Experiments in the Posthumanities

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