

Genius Trouble

Gabrielle Dean

ABSTRACT

This essay assesses the contradiction between the widespread critical acceptance of the post-structuralist mortification of authorship, on one hand, and the rise and continued purchase of authorship-focused scholarship, on the other. What seems to be missing is a theory of authorship that takes into account the fact that authors themselves have had to reckon with authorship as a construction, particularly the ideological emphasis on genius as it was commercialized during the “industrial era” of print publication. Several stories by Henry James that stage author-reader relations offer glimpses of his idea of authorship and suggest that, for him, authorial self-consciousness plays out as a queer performance.

“I am no doubt not the only one who writes in order to have no face”.

Michel Foucault, from *The Archaeology of Knowledge*

THE TASK I HAVE SET MYSELF HERE BEGETS A DISTINCT “ANXIETY OF authorship” — not exactly the same as that described, over forty years ago, by that pioneering authorial team Gilbert-n-Gubar, but not entirely different, either. So I should confess at the outset that in this examination of authorship — which is also, necessarily, an examination of authorship discourse — I will tread some well-worn ground: so well-worn that it might be described as worn through.

It might be best, therefore, to begin with motives: why revisit the authorship debates at all? Very simply, I want to understand what Gertrude Stein thought she was doing when she composed, first in her little *notebooks*, small notebooks that one might use for grocery lists, and then in larger *cahiers*, often the sort of notebooks that French children used for school-work, texts that made no “sense”, in the usual sense of that term. There is a striking disjunction between the compositional labor demonstrated in the notebooks — the production of drafts in several stages — and its seemingly free-form outcomes. If the “game” was simply to play with or through the meaning-making machine that is language and its transmis-

sion systems, with its dynamic “signal” and “noise” effects, then it would not have needed rigging.¹ Even more puzzling is Stein’s sideways relationship to the most basic *desiderata* of authorship, a readership: in many of her literary texts, she puts the reader in an untenable position as the recipient of a communication — communication is constantly deflected or disappointed, at the level of the sentence and at the level of the work — but at the same time, in letters and actions, such as the establishment of her own publication house, the Plain Edition, she expresses her desire to reach a broad readership. Most poignantly, she claimed early on that she wrote “for [her]self and strangers.”² So, again, what did Gertrude Stein think she was doing? What did she think it meant to be an author?

This question in general pertains to many of the authors I tend to want to think about, although for years it remained unarticulated, invisible to me — a problem to which I will return. Authorship became increasingly professionalized, one standard story goes, in the so-called industrial era of print culture: that period from the mid-nineteenth century through the mid-twentieth century during which technologies of mechanization and expanded literacy generated not just new forms of textuality and new readerships, but also new modes of textual production, including new ideologies of authorship.³ Different authors exemplify, in their compositional prac-

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1. I take my license for the term “game” not from Stein, who might have disliked it, but from Marjorie Perloff, attentive to the “language games” of contemporary poetry, which often “makes no claim to originality” (2010, 21).
 2. Stein’s declaration of this aim, from *The Making of Americans*, composed from 1908 to 1911, occurs in a context that puts the emphasis on the “strangers”, since those she knows are resistant to the typological philosophy of her enterprise: “I am writing for myself and strangers. This is the only way that I can do it. Everyone is a real one to me, everybody is like some one else too to me. No one of them that I know can want to know it and so I write for myself and strangers” (289). It is a conception of reception that differs markedly from that of other modernist avant-garde authors who were looped into, and wrote “for”, a circle of colleagues. Given that Stein slowly moved away from psychological portraiture and into “landscape”-oriented writing, it is not certain that she would have continued to embrace this notion of her readership.
 3. I here extend the designation given by the editors to volume 3 of *A History of the Book in America, The Industrial Book, 1840–1880*, to its successor, volume 4, *Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880–1940*, and expand its geography. The second of these periods is characterized not only by more machines — linotype, monotype, etc. — but also by the “mechanization”, that is, the standardization and technicalization, of the social

tices and publishing contexts, different problems and pivot points within this historical arc, but the case of Gertrude Stein presents a quite fundamental litmus test for authorship *per se*. In what follows, however, Stein plays no part, except as a *raison d'être*. After laying out a bird's-eye view of the current state of authorship studies, I will turn instead to Henry James — Stein's queer literary uncle, we might say, sitting magisterially at the center of the time period in question — for his frequent dramatizations of authorship, especially the variety of authorship formed around “genius” as a constitutive dilemma.

What We Talk About When We Talk About Authorship

One reason that the question of what Stein and others during the industrial era thought about authorship might have remained invisible to me for some time has to do with an interesting feature of the history of the critical discourse about authorship. To get at this feature, I should first describe the discourse, perhaps in terms used when its current outlines were settling into place. Paul Eggert's perceptions in a 1995 review, in *TEXT*, this journal's predecessor, of Jack Stillinger's book *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, serve this purpose admirably. Since Roland Barthes's theatrical proclamation of “the death of the author” in 1967 and Michel Foucault's sequel-retort in 1969 that the author serves a mere administrative “function,” Eggert observes, literary theorists and editors (and, I would add, other hands-on readers) have been caught in a “stalemate over authorship” (1995, 308).⁴

Almost as much time has passed since 1995 as had elapsed between 1967 and 1995, and while Eggert's diagnosis does bear the marks of its own moment (about which I'll say more below), the stalemate has become, if anything, more fixed — but also, paradoxically, less important, if we judge

wheels of textual production, circulation, and consumption. It is this expanded sense of “industry” that informs my use of the term “author industrial complex” below.

4. Eggert's review functions here as a convenient summation and pivot, but in truth it is part of a series of publications in which he analyzes authorship in relation to other slippery concepts like “work,” “text,” “document,” and “reader”: see, for example, EGGERT 1994, 1997, 1999, 2005, 2009, 2012, and 2019. I am indebted to all of these, and even more so, to Eggert's model of intrepid, meticulous, inventive, and yet straightforward sallying-forth into deep waters, which has emboldened me here.

by the steady growth of the discourse. In 2019, there were 127 entries in the MLA bibliography indexed with the subject terms “author” or “authorship”, compared to 41 in 1980, and guides to and surveys of authorship have grown in quantity and scope, from Donald Pease’s “Author” in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, edited by Frank Letriccia and Thomas McLaughlin (1990), to *Authorship from Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader*, edited by Seán Burke (1995), to Andrew Bennett’s *The Author*, in the Routledge *New Critical Idiom Series* (2005a), to the recent *Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* (2019).⁵ In fields like textual studies, book history, digital humanities, and media archaeology, we routinely acknowledge now canonical theoretical constructs about the author’s demise, but at the same time doggedly, and with increasing purchase, proceed with the practical labors of authorship-focused scholarship: producing print and digital editions of authored texts, pursuing attributions, identifying the social and technological networks that authors relied upon, carrying out stylometric analyses, digging in to the nuances and repercussions of copyright, assembling new author archives, and so on — a *de facto* defiance of the conditions described, and recommendations insinuated, by *de jure* theory.

What gives?

To illustrate, here is a schematic representation of the two fundamental approaches showing their different responses to some key questions, as well as some points of consensus, since the post-structuralist mortification of authorship authorship (see Fig. 1). Of course, while a table gives us a big picture, it also requires radical reduction from multiple long-form arguments to a few tabular data points; this one is further distorted by its reliance on my own partial and inevitably flawed survey of available texts. Still, a stark depiction can help us understand how passages between the opposing

5. Items in the MLA bibliography indexed with the subject terms “author” or “authorship” were actually slightly greater in number in the 1990s than today, which seems, from a glance at titles, to reflect the state of the response to the Barthes-Foucault disruption. As examples of the discourse beyond Barthes and Foucault, see also ADAMS 2014, BENJAMIN 1978, BENNETT 2005b and 2005c, BERNESMEYER, BUELENS, and DEMOOR 2019, BOOTH 1983, BRACHA 2016, BUURMA 2007, DOWLING 2009, FABIAN 2007, GARCIA 1996, GILBERT and GUBAR 2000 (1976), HOCHMAN 2001, IRWIN 2002, LEARY and NASH 2009, NEHAMAS 1987, ROHRBACH 2020, WEST III 1988, WILLIAMS 2007 and 2012, and WOODMANSEE 1994a and 1994b. Interestingly, “author” is not a term taken up in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (WILLIAMS 2014 [1976]) nor is it in the revised *New Keywords* (BENNETT, GROSSBERG, and MORRIS 2005) — although the latter does contain an entry for “audience”.

parties have been imagined and implemented over recent decades. Note that (a)uthorship with a small “a” represents that which tends to preoccupy editors, bibliographers, book historians, et al., while (A)uthorship with a

	(a)uthorship	(A)uthorship	A/authorship
What is authorship?	An act constituted by the publication in some form of a text in some form. Its operations are “outside” the text but perceptible as textual effects. Treated as an empirical expression.	The god-like presence haunting a text; a marked absence; a narrative instability. It is a phenomenon that operates “inside” the text. Treated as an ideal expression.	
What is an author?	A form of textual agency assumed by a historical person, to which a (published) text is attributed. A socially and technologically bounded role. ⁶	A persona in contested relation to a historical person. A myth. A socially prescribed role.	An A/author is/has a function.
What is originality?	Original content is intellectual property governed by a variety of copyright laws, threatened by piracy, etc. In practice, the texts that are mostly of interest also have a stake in the other kinds of originality: stylistic, thematic, historical, or topical.	Stylistic, thematic, historical, or topical innovation in relation to tradition, which at its most profound is genius, the ideal, exceptional, and yet characteristic mode of authorship.	
Where does authorship take place?	In theory, in all kinds of publications, governed by opportunities, technologies, norms, values. But in practice, critical interest tends to settle on literary and adjacent texts.	In literary or philosophical writing.	[Practical agreement here, but there is an interesting residue of difference.]
Who transmits and receives the products of authorship?	Writers work with editors, printers, collaborators and others to produce texts that are, via publication, directed towards concrete intermediaries and readerships: printers, booksellers, book owners, subscribers, libraries.	Writers produce texts that are enabled, hampered, etc. by ideologies, biography, history, and handed over to critical, skeptical, or naïve readers.	A/authorship is social and in dynamic relation to readers.
What is the history of authorship?	The history of literary professions (e.g., editor, journalist, novelist) tied up with the history of publication sociology and technology, and with the history of formats and genres that are understood to be legible to readers.	The history of genres that are understood to be contested and in flux; the history of subjectivity; the history of criticism.	A/authorship is historically contingent.

Figure 1. Authorship in practice and theory: fifty years of discourse.

capital “A” represents that which we have inherited from the fathers of post-structuralism. The third column points to common ground.⁷

There are two ways to interpret this state of affairs. Interpretation 1: there is more consensus — or, rather, a larger precipitate of consensus seems to have been generated, as by a long chemical reaction — than we might have expected twenty-five years ago. The three main points of agreement (there might be others) I would gloss as follows:

- Foucault’s articulation of the author-function has created an especially productive passage-way between copyright as juridical control and *écriture*, perhaps cracked open by his doubt about the deployment of the Derridean term.⁸ Certain areas of investigation illu-

6. Again, regarding the nomenclature issue, I have struggled with the naming of the entity responsible for an authored text. Embodied person? Living person? Biographical person? Authorial agent? I have settled on “historical person” to evoke the “historical Jesus”: that is, the person thus designated did exist, either as a living human being or as a construction by a living human being or group of people (in the case of anonymous, pseudonymous, multiple, or corporate authorship, or a programmer responsible for a machine-generated text). But in almost all cases, biographical knowledge about that person is incomplete, because of an absence of data, or because of contested data, and/or because even robust biographical knowledge does not supply some of the most important data about that person’s practice of authorship.

7. I realize that this terminology opens the gates to the sub-divisions of authorial nomenclature: not just the Derridean scriptor and the Foucauldian author-function, but the discriminating vocabularies invented by BOOTH 1983, NEHAMAS 1987, GARCIA 1996, and so on. Yet it seems important to give a nod to theory’s signature mechanics: e.g. Lacan’s “objet petit a”, Barthes’s “S/Z”, and all those late twentieth-century critical plays on punctuation. To avoid confusion, I will use the mechanically standard forms of author and authorship when the specific distinctions addressed in the table are not at stake, or when looser terminology is called for.

8. In his original lecture at the Collège de France, as published a few months later in 1969, Foucault’s warning about *écriture* is slightly more provisional than it seems to be in the best-known English translation. As published in 1969, the wording is, “Je me demande si, réduite parfois à un usage courant, cette notion ne transpose que, dans un anonymat transcendantal, les caractères empiriques de l’auteur” (80). Translated literally, the sentence would be something like, “I wonder if, at times reduced in current usage, this concept does not but transpose onto a transcendental anonymity the empirical characteristics of an author”. Brouchard and Simon translate this sentence instead as, “It appears, however,

minated by the author-function argument, especially symbolic and practical questions prompted by copyright — the political uses of intellectual property, the regulation of artistic production, and the parameters of legal personhood, for example — have been strengthened through affiliation with law and literature studies.

- The convolution of the author-text-reader dynamic has been validated by a variety of approaches, with special attention to the sociality that permeates and surrounds it. The post-structuralist displacement of *livre* by *écriture*, articulated manifesto-style, “n’y a pas de hors-texte”, could have served as an indictment of the new empiricist field of the *histoire du livre*, which, some might say, examines everything about the text except the text itself (DERRIDA 1967, 227). Perhaps it did.⁹ Nevertheless, the pursuit of problems native to both *livre* and *écriture* has alighted on the reader — always a factor in the text of critical theory but also, more recently, a concern in the history of the book, such that, cross-fertilized with other theories of reading, it has opened up a new field, the history of reading.
- Finally, the historicism that took hold in many humanities disciplines in the 1980s, although it might initially have been seen as a relief from the exospheric register of post-structuralist theory, or even as a backlash against it, has proved in practice to be assimilable to it — as, indeed, its origins portended. There is a broad recognition, now, that any of the fields or series into which we might place a contested notion like authorship do have histories, even if the fields or series themselves might vary according to methodological priorities — even if the paradigm of “history” itself presents an unresolved problem.

that this concept, as currently employed, has merely transposed the empirical characteristics of an author to a transcendental anonymity” (FOUCAULT 1977, 119–20). “Je me demande”, “I wonder”, is idiomatic and it is not incorrect to render it more positively as “It appears”. But “I wonder” might be more than merely idiomatic in this instance, as it suggests a circumspection and a subjectivity that are evident in Foucault’s preliminary remarks, not reproduced in the 1977 collection. More on the setting of this text’s first appearance below.

9. I can find no evidence of a comparative analysis of the almost simultaneous evolution of post-structuralism and *histoire du livre*, each with its distinct journals, political commitments, signature careers, and *hautes écoles* footholds. It would be fascinating to know, for instance, if the young Derrida, conducting archival research on Edmund Husserl in the mid 1950s, ever encountered the young Henri-Jean Martin, then a curator at the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

These areas of consensus seem to have provided more than enough ground on which to build our current critical practices.

Nevertheless, there are blank spaces in column three. Perhaps I am overlooking some important convergences, but it seems that the stalemate persists in key areas. Indeed, heeding the call just described to “always historicize”, it becomes clear that there at least two different phases within the larger period under examination — with the date of Eggert’s review, 1995, marking the approximate transition. Although the “death of the author” and “author-function” provocations date from the incendiary late 1960s, critical interest in authorship within the Anglophone academy surged in the early 1980s, as post-structuralist theories of the text, absorbed over the previous decade via translation, conjoined and collided with feminist, anti-racist, and post-colonialist critiques of the universal subject — and with new forms of textual scholarship and bibliography.¹⁰ In this phase, within the latter fields, an understanding of textual production as a social affair grew ascendant: from Robert Darnton’s “communications circuit” to Jerome McGann’s notion of the “socialization of text” to the many responses to and revisions of Darnton’s diagram, such as that provided by Thomas R. Adams and Nicholas Barker in “A New Model for the Study of the Book”. From the mid-1990s through the present, scholars have debated, refined, populated, and extended the terrain thus outlined, forging the connections described above. Persistent questions about textuality are among those that have driven a recent “material turn” across a variety of disciplines (e.g., “thing theory”, “actor-network theory”, and the “new materialism”) as well as the explosion in the study of reading.¹¹

But do you see what happened there in my survey? Eggert’s review, at the turning point between these two phases, stages it in a nutshell:

10. Milestones along this timeline surely include the establishment of the Society for Textual Scholarship in 1981 and the founding of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reception, and Publication in 1991. The publication in 2005 of Andrew Bennett’s *The Author* in Routledge’s “New Critical Idiom” series and, in 2019, of the *Cambridge Handbook of Literary Authorship* are signs that the authorship discourse has grown prolix enough to require cribbing.

11. As indices of this explosion, I would point to the addition of an entire section on “Readers and Reading” in *Print in Motion* (KAESTLE and RADWAY, eds. 2009, 411–535) and *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (PRICE 2012), which suggests that our interest in reading is so far advanced that we also care to know about what was not read.

Part of the problem in getting the two interests — the editorial and the literary theoretical — to meet is the slipperiness of the term “text”: are texts inscribed discursively — i.e., by socially circulating discourses — or, physically, by actual historical authors? Commitment to one level of inscription has usually shouldered aside consideration of the other.

(1995, 305)

Despite the overtures towards authorship — the book under review is, after all, about multiple authorship — it is “text” that ultimately bears the weight; indeed, *TEXT* was the title of this journal at the time. Considerations of authorship attuned to theoretical conditions often, like Eggert’s, transform into accounts of textuality, in keeping with precedents established both by New Critical tenets and post-structuralist theories. The same impetus, it seems, has directed attention towards reading as a textual effect and away from an authorial agent.

Interpretation 2, then, settles on the other side of the fence: despite an incredibly prolix discourse, there are ways in which we talk around or through authorship, but not about it. There are some oddly important blanks in the table above, and they are connected. One’s answer to “what is authorship?” relies in large part on one’s answers to “what is originality?” and, implicitly, to “where does authorship take place?” If the kinds of texts that matter most to the discourse are literary or philosophical, then the metric that determines their ultimate value — the metric, I should specify, that has mattered most to European and colonial elites in the past two hundred and some years — is formal, topical, historical, and/or ideational originality, a hybrid of innovation and tradition.¹² Thus we find ourselves in familiar territory: the trouble that lies behind these disjunctions has to

12. “Originality” is itself a much-debated question that is beyond my scope here. It is taken up directly by Foucault and historicized by Woodmansee, who notes, for example, that “writing derived its value and authority from its affiliation with the texts that preceded it, its derivation rather than its deviation from prior texts”, for many hundreds of years, and only began to transform in the late eighteenth century into “the modern myth that genuine authorship consists in individual acts of origination” — a myth because “the collective, corporate, or collaborative element in writing” continued (1994b, 17, 21). But it seems safe to say that the “myth” of originality, its association with genius, and its contribution to general notions of authorship have shaped the authorship discourse that is my subject here. Indeed, were it not for the expectation (if not the actual practice) that authorship consists of “individual acts of origination”, then there would be no Author to dismantle.

do with genius — its persistence as a metonym for the (A)uthor, and even the (a)uthor, despite the broad embrace of the counter-argument of author-as-function and the editorial and bibliographic interests in textual tactics and professional strategies.

Genius has a history, not to mention, in practice, a body. Perhaps it is thus redundant to say so, but it seems important to note that conceptions of genius can also vary within this history — that multiple conceptions might co-exist at a single time — and these tend to have implications for the historical persons working at authorship. Consider these four different basic models: genius can be an ideal against which actual authors cannot ever hope to measure up; it can be extraordinary and rare, but present in the world; it can designate a top-of-the-line model, as it were — a craftsman [sic] whose skill gives him a mastery of conventions or makes him available as a vessel for inspiration that produces originality; or, it can be a singular but prevalent quality, a personal genius native to every aspirant.¹³ In other words, geniuses may be non-existent, or very uncommon and exceptional, or somewhat common, perhaps equivalent to the population of a canon, or omnipresent.

Polysemy is to be expected in these circumstances — when a word is under great cultural pressure over the course of a long history of use — but in the relationship of genius to authorship, the multiple potential meanings on both sides makes for a tricky mix-n-match. The multi-valence of genius assumes ideological force in the authorship discourse because of the tendency to examine authorship as such mainly in terms of rare but acknowledged geniuses, thus giving what is customarily understood to be unusual or ideal the explanatory power of the usual or representative. While this tendency might be motivated by practical considerations — everyone recognizes Shakespeare, so let's use Shakespeare as an example — it manifests a logical error and an epistemological one, since it reproduces only the

13. This last derives from the sense of *genius loci*, the spirit of the place, which we can see expanding beyond geography and into persons in, for example, the admonition “ne te quaesiveris extra”, which Ralph Waldo Emerson uses as an epigraph to “Self-Reliance” (an essay in which the word “genius” occurs ten times). Literally, the Latin phrase means, “Do not seek outside yourself”, so, in other words, “Look within”. Please note that here and below I use and draw attention to masculine pronouns for authors, not to prefer them, but to show that they have been preferred. On the history and gender of genius, see BATTERSBY 1989, BENTLEY 2005, GILBERT and GUBAR 2000 (1976), JEFFERSON 2009 and 2015, McMAHON 2013, PALIYENKO 2016, PERLOFF 2010, WEBER 2012 and WILLIAMS 2012.

most atypical genius roles and unquestioningly reinforces the equivalence between authorship and rare genius. What could be called the “exemplary genius” move also constitutes, usually, an ethical bet on the status quo, since it reifies raced and gendered conventions and beliefs about the actual bodies that genius might inhabit.

In sum, the (A)uthor at stake in theory is closely associated with a narrow conception of genius, perhaps with canonicity as its threshold condition. At the very least, the (A)uthor is one who is understood to have successfully deployed some kind of originality. Such an understanding is not necessary to the definition of (a)uthorship: (a)uthorship-as-textual-and-professional-practice is undertaken by almost anyone who participates in the publication of a text in some form. That said, editorial and bibliographic analysis is generally not focused on texts that are not significant (that is, texts about which an argument regarding significance cannot be made), and this assessment often redounds to authors, such that most of the authors referenced in the (a)uthorship discourse possess genius in the broadest sense, at least. Perhaps publication itself is understood as a primary manifestation of this broad form of genius, in which case, even “distant reading” analyses might be said to rely on genius-driven notions of authorship.

More fundamentally, the trouble with genius as a metonym for authorship is that genius as it is used is a perception or an evaluation by someone who is not the author. In short, it is not an experience. In the tropic preoccupation with textuality and readers, we have forgotten to ask at least one very basic question about authorship.

What Is It Like to Be an Author?

By invoking Thomas Nagel’s classic thought-experiment about “the subjective character of experience” and the limitations of one’s own experience of consciousness as the basis for imagining an other’s, I exaggerate the problem: anyone who has written with the aim of publishing a text knows what it is like to be an author.¹⁴ But I present the problem in this exaggerated form to suggest the degree to which authorship discourse has neglected authorial experience. Given the afore-mentioned range of conceptions of authorship, I should begin by eliminating some possibilities.

I do not mean, “what is it like to be an (a)uthor”, an historical person who, in writing and in addition to writing, negotiates opportunities, mar-

14. The question Nagel famously asks is, “What Is It Like to Be a Bat?” (1974, 436).

kets, technologies, patrons, readers, collaborators, editors, publishers, and other conditions and people — activities that could be designated “professional” or “trade-related”. That question is the one that has been answered, at least in many of its permutations, by book history and textual studies scholars.

Nor do I mean, “what is it like to be an (A)uthor”, as in, “what is it like to be a genius”, if it is public recognition that confers genius. If an author is deploying his [sic] reputation as a genius, or angling for that reputation, then such activities again fall into the category of (a)uthorship, as another sort of professional negotiation.

I also do not mean, “what is it like to be a writer”, at least not in the naïve sense of a person who writes. One sign of the “death of the author”, it has been noted, is the “birth of the reader”; another is the rise of the “writer”, a term that is used, it seems, to reject the presumed arrogance of (A)uthorship but also, it must be said, to collect much of its cultural capital. In current usage, “writer” has come to occupy almost the exact same range of meanings as “author”, although it also encompasses non-authorial writing. So, to the extent that they are coincident, I do mean “writer” as well as “author”.¹⁵ It would seem that the distinction between the label of “writer” and that of “author” depends on the degree to which authorial agents acknowledge the text’s destination as some kind of publication. For someone who takes the title of “writer”, the emphasis is placed on textual creation and the question of a reader is suspended or forestalled, although such deferral may only be a useful self-deception. For someone who takes the title of “author”, the question of a reader is conceded — a gaze the author imagines upon the text.

Indeed, it is this question — the question of a reader — that is at the heart of the matter. In asking about the first-person experience of authorship, I am really wondering about the effect on authors of this awareness of

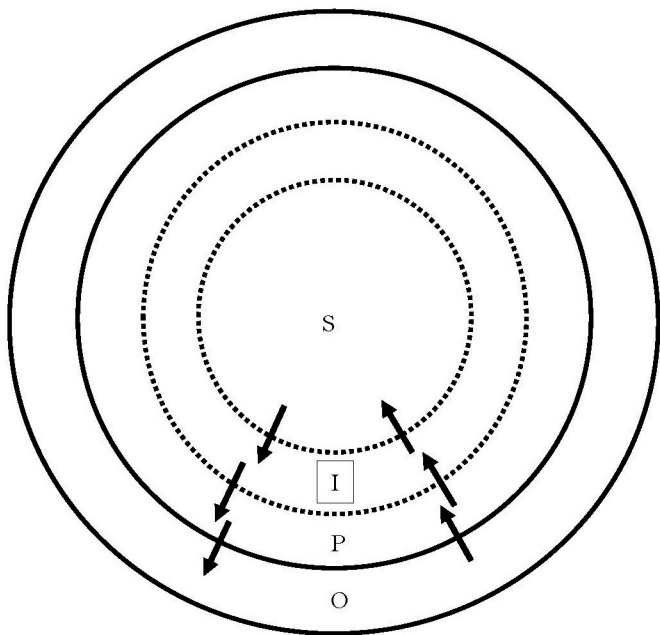
15. The first definition for “writer” in Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary is “author”, whereas the first definition for “author” is “the writer of a literary work (such as a book)”. In current American usage, “writer” is associated with a broad range of literary and non-literary genres, with a focus on professional activity or self-declared identity, e.g., “staff writer”, “contributing writer”, “blog writer”, “sports writer”, “ghost writer”, “lead writer”, “full-time writer”, “freelance writer”, “writer and editor”, “writer and novelist”, “writer and designer”, “writer and activist”, “I’m a writer”, “as a writer”, and so on. See the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) for additional examples. Possibly because of this range of meanings and less explicit relationship to publication, the descriptor “writer” sounds less pretentious, to my ear, than “author”.

potential readers. Such awareness is not equivalent to authorial intention for the text. Rather, a potential reader is a spectral presence that must, presumably, catalyze some degree of authorial self-consciousness. A historical person, writing for possible publication, fantasizes during successive phases of composition that “the text is being read”: this awareness of an imminent or possible reader exists in various states, from the intentional (the wish to win a publisher’s approval) to the habitual (the practice of writing in complete sentences) to the subliminal (the fear of receiving a wounding criticism).¹⁶

Let me retrace the stakes. It seems important, when we carry out authorship studies, to consider how a particular author understood authorship, not simply as a set of job-related strategies and decisions, and not just as a question of individual style and subject matter, made up of subconscious motivations and aesthetic, ideological, etc. commitments guiding artistic and intellectual choices, but as a specific activity poised in between, while partaking of, these two conditions. I suppose the real question is, what did *anyone* think it meant to be an author? In the time-honored tradition of the bibliographic diagram, I submit one here to better designate the zone of activity in question (see Fig. 2).

As authorship became, in the industrial era, more and more available to potential practitioners as specialized labor (professional, artistic, volunteer, etc.), distinguished by different markers of cultural status (“genius”, “hack”, “amateur”, etc.), which would require certain efforts to undertake (find publishing opportunities, seek or reject a public role), it seems that historical persons must have had initial and evolving ideas about authorship itself. An individual style (S) must have reflected these ideas (I) in some manner, but perhaps not consciously; likewise, an author would have deliberately oriented professional strategies (P) to that idea of authorship (I) — perhaps not consciously — even as those strategies were also deliberately oriented

16. I am using here the syntax of the classic Freudian fantasy scenario, “A child is being beaten”, to invoke the spectatorial relationship to the activity in question that authorial self-consciousness produces and requires (FREUD 1919, 179). Indeed, as Laplanche and Pontalis have suggested, the passive voice might be integral to fantasy itself: “the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a de-subjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question” (1968, 16). However, one need not be a partisan of psychoanalytic theory to see that the expectation of being read would lead the person composing a text to imagine that text’s reader and, from there, to imagine the text’s reader imagining the composition of the text and the text’s author — an imaginary reflexivity but one that would still have an effect.






S	style and subject matter
I	ideas about authorship
P	professional strategies
O	publishing opportunities, prejudices, genres, technologies, norms
	influence
	"border" through which influences can be consciously regulated
	"border" through which subconscious influences pass

Figure 2. "Ideas of authorship" in relation to other authorial activities.

to the available opportunities, fashions, and technological capacities, as well as prejudices related to race, gender, and sexuality, for example (O).

Ideas about authorship must be somewhat idiosyncratic, but they too must have their history — a history formed by, for example, publication norms and technologies, celebrity, and the growth of the “author industrial complex”, as discourse about books, periodicals, and authors proliferated and was gathered up into increasingly sophisticated marketing schemes in the industrial era. Indeed, as these public reflections multiplied, any par-

ticular idea of authorship had to be apprehended in a fantastical hall of mirrors: the author imagined by readers, the readers imagined by a historical person who writes, and the author that a historical person who writes imagines that readers imagine.

Queer Performance

Author-reader psycho-dynamics must be, by definition, variable, fleeting, and inadequately articulated. How could we possibly hope to document them, much less well enough to describe them? The narrative voice in fiction is one textual setting where these interactions take place. Barbara Hochman, for example, finds in the narrational styles adopted by Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Frank Norris evidence of a deliberate policy about the relationship to readers. Abandoning narrative stances that allowed readers to identify the narrator with the author, they moved towards a “self-consciously impersonal” narrator instead, and in the process they “alienated numerous readers for whom the sense of writer-reader interchange was a primary pleasure of fiction reading” (2001, 2–3). However, because narrational choices are conscious formal choices, they may also cover up or distort the author’s engagement with readers; they cannot convey the whole story.

Beyond his narrational choices, James devoted an important set of texts to author-reader relations, indirectly illuminating his authorial self-consciousness and idea of authorship. Most famously, questions of authorial control motivated the entire project of the *New York Edition*, for which James reshaped his oeuvre for the ages, in part through the pedagogical framing of his fictions in the Prefaces. In a less commanding mode, these concerns also play out in ten tales of the 1880s and 1890s that treat authors and readers. “The Aspern Papers” and “The Figure in the Carpet” might be the best known of these, but others are no less overt in their interest: “The Author of Beltraffio”, “The Lesson of the Master”, “The Private Life”, “The Middle Years”, “The Death of the Lion”, “The Coxon Fund”, “The Next Time”, and “John Delavoy”.¹⁷ These tales, with their unusual fictional focus on author-reader relations, illustrate the tangle of intimate connections, identifications, and eroticisms that characterize those relations for James, displayed through and by in each case a narrator-protagonist who is

17. One could also designate James’s destruction of some of his own correspondence as a kind of “anti-text” in this same domain. I’m not including in this group the many works that examine visual artists and artists more generally.

simultaneously a sophisticated, suspicious analyst and a participant, often manipulative but also, in some ways, guileless, unaware of his role. James's presentation and enactment of authorship in these stories is thus what we might call — again with recourse to the language of the mid 1990s — a very queer performance.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, responding in 1993 to what was then the brand new idea of gender performativity as articulated by Judith Butler, saw the “queer performativity” in James's *New York Edition* Prefaces as “a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma” (1993, 11). The complex staging of authorship in these ten short fictions also qualifies in many ways as a “strategy for the production of meaning and being” (1993, 11). While shame and its antipodean partner, pride, are not the obvious drivers of this authorial strategy, a technique related to the open-secret operation of shame does come into play: these stories repeatedly inspect the porous divide between public and private such that the queerness of the authorial position momentarily flashes into view.¹⁸

This author-reader “dectet” relies on a common set of elements: a male author (often older or established) who dies or disappears or is dead; a male reader (often younger) who is the narrator; a mediating female figure (often another reader and/or a representation of extra-authorial responsibilities); and a plot in which the male reader's desired connection with the male author is stymied, eroded, or eliminated, often because of a work-in-progress or a publication. There is some mobility between these roles: readers serve as authors, especially as critics or editors; sometimes the reader-narrator character is doubled, so that another male figure carries out certain functions; authors “read” readers and sometimes serve as editors; and the reader-narrator himself is ultimately the “author” of his tale. The older James in dialogue with the younger James in the *New York Edition* Prefaces, as Sedgwick observes, is perhaps the ultimate expression of this role-switching twist.¹⁹

18. On the centrality of publicity versus privacy more generally to James's thinking, and the duplicity this opposition entails, see AUERBACH 1989, McWHIRTER 1995, RUBERY 2006–2012, SALMON 1997, STOUGAARD-NIELSEN 2012, and TREDY, DUPERRAY, and HARDING 2013.

19. The observation that James's stories about authorship rely on dead, dying, or disappearing authors has been made by several critics; see, for example, DAROSA 1997 and HOCHMAN 1996. On the homo-erotic structure of these relationships, see PERSON 1999, SALMON 1997, and SEDGWICK 1993. “The Coxon Fund” is the most tentative member of this group, in terms of its adherence to the basic

Homo-erotic desire, sometimes channeled through auto- or hetero-erotic desire, is not the only kind of queerness in these stories; author-reader relations writ large, in the marketplace, also queer the Jamesian author's self-consciousness. For reasons of space, three brief examples will have to carry the point.

In "John Delavoy", the matter concerns different modes of authorial representation and memorialization in a journal called *The Cynosure*. The narrator, a younger critic, writes an insightful essay on the works of the recently deceased John Delavoy, an unappreciated genius; it meets with the enthusiastic approval of Delavoy's younger sister, who is also the creator of the only extant visual portrait of the author. The *Cynosure's* editor, a "strikingly handsome" man whose appearance the narrator mentions several times, promises to publish the essay but then, when he actually reads it, reneges, sure that it would offend the middlebrow sensibilities of his readers by too accurately describing the works in question. While we never learn what the offensive content is, leading us as readers to speculate about its potential sexuality or even homosexuality, the editor is confident that it would prompt thousands of readers to cancel their subscriptions. These thousands (the number of nameless subscribers at stake keeps growing throughout the story) would welcome, however, a reproduction of the sketch and a "nice familiar chat about the sweet homelife" by Miss Delavoy (1986a, 440). These contradictions of the "author industrial complex" — that the readership is presumed to want to participate in the construction of the author's celebrity through access to his private life and visual appearance, but would refuse the author's actual productions or an elucidation of them — are compounded by an almost "Who's on first" misunderstanding about the referent of the word "portrait": it is applied to the essay that describes the work, the proposed "familiar chat", and the pencil sketch. The conflict over what to publish destroys romantic developments between the editor and Miss Delavoy; while the narrator takes the editor's place, his success on that front is portrayed as inadequately compensatory for the rejection of his essay: "there was consolation of a sort in our having out together the question of literary circles. The great orb of *The Cynosure*, wasn't that a literary circle? By the time we had fairly to face this question we had achieved the union that—at least for resistance or endur-

format, but I think it warrants inclusion because of the way James sets it up as an examination of verbal genius in its purest form, without material expression and unencumbered by other virtues. Saltram is not capable of actual textual production; he himself is, arguably, the work in progress.

ance—is supposed to be strength” (1986a, 443). The narrator’s perspicacity as a reader, though he wins through it the favor of the living person with the closest ties to the dead author he adores, is exactly the wrong sort of discernment for consummating a connection with the handsome editor. What he needs to become an author himself is not acuity regarding the author about whom he writes, but a better sense of the publication’s aims in the marketplace; his idea of authorship falls short because he fails to read the readership.

What happens when authors do properly read the readership? In “The Death of the Lion”, James parodies the problem of readerly interest in and identification with the imagined or, in Jorge J. E. Garcia’s terms, pseudo-historical author. In this story, the connection between the author, Neil Paraday, and the reader, a younger critic, is tested by an adversary against whom they make common cause, an entrepreneurial journalist who seeks to bring Paraday into his coterie of celebrity authors, so that a consortia of periodicals can mine him for opinions, interviews, and other bits of what we would now call “content”. It turns out that two other authors in his collection have erected cross-gendered pseudo-historical facades to enable readerly attachment. “Guy Walsingham, the brilliant author of ‘Obsessions’”, is actually “a lady who goes in for the larger latitude”, since “the larger latitude”, that is, modern topics that presumably include sex, coming from a woman writer, “would look a little odd” (1986b, 272). Likewise, “Dora Forbes, author of ‘The Other Way Round,’ which everybody’s talking about”, is the pseudonym for a man: “‘He goes in for the slight mystification because the ladies are such popular favourites. A great deal of interest is felt in his acting on that idea [. . .] and there’s every prospect of it being widely imitated’” (1986b, 273–74). For these two figures, the journalistic amplification of their authorial-ness is not only desirable, but necessary. Guy Walsingham is reported to have declared, about the journalist’s latest sketch, “I had made her genius more comprehensible even to herself” (1986b, 272).

In both of these stories, recognizable expressions of queerness — in “John Delavoy”, the narrator’s erotic interest in the editor, hidden to himself; in “The Death of the Lion”, the coterie authors’ willingness to cross-dress their public selves — are or would be facilitated by concession to middlebrow sensibilities. We could read these stories as fables of repression: that queerness is the sacrifice James extracts from himself for his high dedication to the “art of fiction” — for an idea of authorship founded on rare genius. But perhaps we should read their publication instead as a sign that James’s queer authorship has succeeded — and, moreover, that it has succeeded in publications designed to promote like-minded conceptions. “The

Death of the Lion” was recruited from James personally by Henry Harland for the first issue of *The Yellow Book* in April 1894 and “John Delavoy” appeared in *Cosmopolis* for January–February 1898.²⁰

Moreover, James also found a middlebrow audience for these stories. “The Private Life”, for instance, was published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in April 1892.²¹ While the cosmopolitan desires of the magazine’s readers must have been excited by the story’s cast and setting — fashionable Londoners assembled at a Swiss mountain retreat — its plot veers from this promise, delivering instead something more like a psychological detective story. It is the only story among the group of ten in which the narrator is not explicit about his appreciation of the author’s work, but he is certainly a reader of the public persona of the famous novelist Clare Vawdrey, referring several times to what the papers say about him and analyzing in great detail his self-presentation. The narrator is even more than a reader; he is “a searcher of hearts — that frivolous thing an observer”, in the words of the actress Blanche Adney (1986c, 204). And his interest in Vawdrey is, it seems, more personal: “I had had, for my part, an idea that he was [‘really so nice’]; and even a good deal nicer, but that was too complicated to go into then; besides it’s exactly my story” (1986c, 192).

20. *The Yellow Book*, running from 1894 to 1897, insisted on a sophisticated inter-arts perspective and front-loaded illicit associations with French erotica through its yellow cover; it was also linked to Oscar Wilde via the artist Aubrey Beardsley. *Cosmopolis*, published by T. Fisher Unwin from 1896 through 1898, was a multi-lingual magazine dedicated to international literature and politics, with a view of fiction that must have appealed to James: “Fiction stands for literature and the literary art with a completeness which an article can hardly have. We want to show the literary art at its highest, whether in English, French, or German” (ORTMANS 1896, 492). See also MILLAN 2013.

21. Brodhead has pointed out the degree to which James received preferential treatment at the *Atlantic Monthly*, but the middlebrow potential of these stories was recognized by several other periodicals. See BRODHEAD 1990, 108–09. The first five were first published in general interest monthlies, all illustrated except for the *Atlantic Monthly*, and oriented in part to literature and culture: “The Author of Beltraffio” in *The English Illustrated Journal* (June–July 1884), “The Lesson of the Master” in *The Universal Review* (July–August 1888), “The Aspern Papers” in *The Atlantic Monthly* (March–May 1888), “The Private Life” in *The Atlantic Monthly* (April 1892), and “The Middle Years” in *Scribner’s Magazine* (May 1893). The next five were published in *The Yellow Book* and *Cosmopolis*: “The Death of the Lion” in *The Yellow Book* (April 1894), “The Coxon Fund” in *The Yellow Book* (July 1894), “The Next Time” in *The Yellow Book* (July 1895), “The Figure in the Carpet” in *Cosmopolis* (January/February 1896), and “John Delavoy” in *Cosmopolis* (January/February 1898).

As an observer, the narrator documents extensively the contradiction between Vawdrey the boring public man — “he addressed himself to women exactly as he addressed himself to men [. . .] his opinions were sound and second-rate, and of his perceptions it was too mystifying to think” (1986c, 193–94) — and the author, the “genius that created the pages [his readers] adore” (1986c, 212). Moreover, tracking Vawdrey’s many social engagements, the narrator notices that the author seems not to spend any time writing. The mystery of Vawdrey’s authorial production deepens when the narrator comes upon Vawdrey one evening in his room, writing in the dark and utterly unresponsive to the narrator’s intrusion — at the very same moment that, to all appearances, he is also on the hotel terrace looking at stars with Blanche Adney. Vawdrey, it seems, is literally duplicitous: there is a public and a private self, existing simultaneously; “one’s the genius, the other’s the bourgeois”, the narrator jubilantly proposes (1986c, 212).

This revelation seems poised to serve as the story’s climax. Yet our attention as readers is directed, with the narrator’s, to another character, Lord Mellifont. Handsome, beautifully dressed, and equipped with a “wealth of discourse”, he is always a “public character”, a politician, a skillful manager of group dynamics; but he lacks interiority to the extent that he ceases to exist when alone (1986c, 215). Mellifont is presented as the opposite of Vawdrey: he “isn’t even whole”, while Vawdrey is “double” (1986c, 212–13). So why does the narrator harbor for Mellifont, a beautiful shell, “an extreme tenderness and a positive compassion” (1986c, 216)? Why does he expend pity on “the perfection of his performance” and curiosity about the “blank face such a mask had to cover” (1986c, 216)? Because it is charming to be in Mellifont’s company; his public persona, drawing energy from the gaze of an admiring audience, is the repository of his genius. Vawdrey, in contrast, never does admit the narrator to the light, which resides in his private life. Whereas, early on, the actress is jealous of the narrator’s position versus her own — “it’s the genius *you* are privileged to flirt with!” — it is she who eventually gains access to the *sanctum sanctorum* (1986c, 212). Visiting his room, she experiences, she reports, “the hour of my life”, simply because “He saw *me*” — and she, in turn, seeing at last the “one who does it”, is able to “tell him I adore him”, which is exactly what, the narrator wails, he has “never been able to tell him!” (1986c, 230). The ending of the tale is a deflation, not a denouement: the narrator leaves the valley with Vawdrey, but it’s not the Vawdrey he wants.

James teases us with erotic risk in this story — out in the open of the *Atlantic Monthly*, no less, the narrator’s attraction to two different kinds of male genius are just perceptible. (It’s not clear how we should take the narrator’s relationship with Blanche Adney, or how to read her sexuality.) But

there is another kind of queerness stalking the story, with equally radical implications: the structural queerness, *pace* post-structuralism, of a more complexly folded doubling. Both Vawdrey and Mellifont are too homogeneous in their public presentation: Vawdrey's is uninteresting because it is too consistent: "He differed from other people, but never from himself" (1986c, 193). Mellifont's, though pleasing, is impervious: he is always "so essentially, so conspicuously and uniformly the public character" (1986c, 215). With his new awareness of Mellifont's flawless exteriority — an exteriority he can suddenly see through, as with "the whisk of the curtain" — the narrator observes of Mellifont, "he never had struck me as so dissimilar from what he would have been if we hadn't offered him a reflexion of his image" (1986c, 215–16). Once you work out the math of all the syntactic negatives, you realize that "what he would have been" does not describe something that was never there; it describes, rather, a concrete loss, or perhaps something that simply can't be apprehended in the glare of "reflexion". What the narrator encounters in the dark of Vawdrey's room, an opaque and impenetrable privacy, bears a remarkable similarity to Mellifont's "blank face". Both Mellifont and Vawdrey are doubled. More importantly, both of them, in different ways, have forsaken the conventional configuration of outer life and inner.

If this irregular gap between public and private selfhood is the "epistemology of the closet" (SEDGWICK 1990) at work, it also resembles the dilemma of authorship. Indeed, professional pressures have led to public-private asymmetry in each case. Mellifont simply is a politician. Vawdrey, in a roundabout way, is also conforming to a professional archetype: the idea that an author's genius be entirely expressed in and spent on imaginative work, and not through anything so base as conversation. We thus receive a few clues that, departing from the story's overt allegiances, Vawdrey's private life is just as much a performance as Mellifont's public one. First, when the narrator glimpses Vawdrey in his *camera obscura*, what he sees is the historical person unified for a moment with the reader's imagined author: "it looked like the author of Vawdrey's admirable works. It looked infinitely more like him than our friend does himself" (1986c, 212). Only when the tawdry public is absent does Vawdrey take on the appearance of the celebrity he is supposed to be — an "it", an object of display, relieved of gender. Perhaps it is not only the pressure of heteronormativity, but also the essential need for a reader — a need not unlike Lord Mellifont's — that induces Vawdrey to admit Blanche Adney to the company of his genius while excluding the narrator. The narrator, after all, is an observer, which

is to say an absorber of views; but she is an actress who begs to perform Vawdrey's lines, reflecting back to him what he has written.

These public-private performances are not just structurally aligned with "the love that dare not speak its name"; they are also similarly bound by what can and cannot be pronounced. The two would-be disciples refine their terminology for Vawdrey in an exchange that sounds strangely familiar to anyone who has ever witnessed LGBTQ+ allies struggling to find the right words: "I'm fascinated by that vision of his — what-do-you-call-it?" "His alternate identity?" "His other self: that's easier to say" (1986c, 217). Whatever it is called, the narrator seems to know very well its value. He puts his new understanding of Mellifont into terms that could be applied equally, or better, to Vawdrey: the terms of the literary marketplace. The full impression of Mellifont's "perfect manner" leads the narrator to "a tacit sense that it would all be in the morning papers, with a leader, and also a secretly exhilarating one that wouldn't be, that never could be, though any enterprising journal would give me a fortune for it" (1986c, 216–17). This literary capital that cannot be cashed, this "outing" that cannot be published, nevertheless provides the narrator with an enjoyment that is "almost sensual, like that of a consummate dish or an unprecedented pleasure" (1986c, 217). Such enjoyment eludes him with respect to Vawdrey, perhaps because, having been refused as the inner author's mirror, simple knowledge of the secret is no longer sufficient.

"The Private Life" suggests, along with the other stories in this group, that James's idea of authorship requires more than a mere splitting of the unified subject, a private self where genius resides that is betrayed by its public front. The authorial mantle is for him, rather, a kind of drag: it's not just that it is a performance, a vehicle for transmitting an interior truth; it's also necessary that the performance be internalized. For the person in the author's motley costume (or, we might say, for the figure in the carpet), the performance of authorship offers a first-person experience of genius that can only be accessed when it is seen by others. Authorship is what happens when the historical person, writing, catches sight of the author in the reflection of the imagined reader's eye.

Seeking in these fictional traces the patterns of a larger meaning, I have fallen into the familiar trap of "interpreting" James's stories to unwind the author's mind. But if I have presumed that James's stories convey, beyond his power or desire to control it, an intimate understanding of the queer performance that is authorship, that is only because, as we know, James also learned the tricks of the public-private trade-off from another intimate

source, his own sexuality. The closet is an implacable master of this lesson: how to perform authenticity.

You will sense too from my wording in the paragraphs above that, despite my own warning against the “exemplary genius” move, I am tempted to make a claim that goes beyond James. If I were to succumb, I might propose something like this: perhaps *any* idea of authorship that relies on genius, especially genius as a rare interiority, repeats in some way this closet maneuver — or, does so whenever it operates within the publicity parameters of the “age of newspapers and telegrams and photographs and interviewers”, as James called his era in “The Aspern Papers” (1907–1909, 8). That might be because of the involved dynamics created by an investment in authorial privacy that is set up in opposition to the “author industrial complex” and yet provides the very food it feeds upon.

If I were to extrapolate from James a broader notion of authorship for this period — the period that also embraced Stein — as a queer performance, then some other sources of support immediately come to mind. Barthes’s “Death of the Author” is usually read as a crib, a poetic gloss, of one aspect of Derridean *écriture*. It seems that is how Foucault responded to it. And yet there are so many other networks into which we could read it. Most important, for my purposes, is the essay’s original publishing context in the multimedia art magazine *Aspen*. Commissioned specifically for the 5+6 issue, dedicated to minimalism and “the unpredictability and indeterminacy of multiple viewpoints and subject positions”, “The Death of the Author” was published first in English in a pamphlet with other critical essays, placed within a box of artifacts that also contained prints, music discs and spoken word recordings, films, literary texts, and interviews contributed by a host of luminaries, including Susan Sontag, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, and Robert Rauschenberg (ALLEN 2011, 57). In other words, “The Death of the Author” was initially created as a media performance, in company that was partly, literally, queer.²² Likewise, it is important to recall that “What Is an Author?” was originally performed for an audience — members of the Société Française de Philosophie, at the Collège de France, as a lecture — that included the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the poet and philosopher Jean Wahl, the novelist Jean d’Ormesson, the philosopher Lucien Goldmann, and the philosopher and historian Maurice de Gandillac, Foucault’s thesis advisor and Derrida’s. It is therefore not surprising

22. For the original publishing context for Barthes’s essay (1967), see ALLEN 2011 and LOGIE 2013. *Aspen* has been reproduced for the digital environment at UBUWEB, <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/>.

that in his introductory remarks, Foucault frames the lecture humbly, as “un essai d’analyse dont j’entrevois à peine encore les grandes lignes” [“an attempt at an analysis the main lines of which I barely glimpse”] (1969, 75), and presents himself as a bit of a novice seeking “en bon névrosé” [“like a good neurotic”] (1969, 75) the benefit of feedback from the esteemed authors who were, indirectly, his targets. Both of the founding texts of our contemporary authorship discourse, in short, spring from circumstances that are remarkably theatrical, although we have mostly failed to see them: circumstances that invite and deflect a “reflexion” on their authors of their own queer genius. Just on the other side of the industrial era, embedded in a new media regime, these two *auteurs-saboteurs* could afford to externalize, perhaps, what had been a private spectacle.

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