

From scriptor to promptor: An evaluation of the status of authorship, authenticity, and creativity in light of the use of artificial intelligence in screenwriting

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Abstract

The disruptive potential of generative artificial intelligence in creative fields is clear, but how this will unfold remains uncertain. A key concern is that the problematic distinction between the original and the fake is going to become further blurred. In this study, we draw on a number of philosophical theories on the nature of language to set up a conceptual framework within which one can analyze the status of authorship and originality in the operation of generative AI. We argue that two conceptual orientations, namely deconstruction and genealogy, converge on the claim that authorship should be seen as always already a co-authorship. We use this conceptual framework to interpret the results of a classroom experiment with generative AI in producing screenplay loglines and synopses. Our findings suggest that we must improve students' critical skills to foster responsible self-expression in creative production, thereby unlocking the potential of human – AI interaction.

Keywords

cinema, philosophy, foucault, derrida, barthes

Highlights

- Seeing authorship as always already a co-authorship articulates an approach that sees the production of texts as always technologically mediated in a process in which neither the human nor the machine is in absolute control.
- One should see cultural production as an inherently collaborative and intertextual process without taking refuge in dualisms such as the authentic and the fake.
- The use of large language models participates in more general social mechanisms that transform the functions of the author and the reader.

Kâtip yazardan komut veren yazara: Senaryo yazımında yapay zekâ kullanımını ışığında yazarlık, otantiklik ve yaratıcılığın durum değerlendirmesi

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Sorumlu yazar

Atıf

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Öz

Üretken yapay zekânın yaratıcı alanlara girişinin yol açacağı potansiyel zorluklar açık olsa da bunların kesin olarak nasıl ve hangi şekillerde vücut bulacağı henüz net değildir. Bu hususta önemli bir endişe, orijinal ve sahte arasındaki çizginin daha belirsiz hale geleceğidir. Bu çalışmada, dilin doğasına ilişkin bir dizi felsefi kuramdan yararlanarak, üretici yapay zekâ söz konusu olduğunda yazarlık ve özgünlük durumunun analiz edilebileceği kavramsal bir çerçeve oluşturuyoruz. İki kavramsal yönelimin, yani yapısöküm ve kökbilimin, yazarlığın her zaman bir ortak yazarlık olarak görülmesi gerektiği iddiasında birleştiğini savunuyoruz. Daha sonra bu kavramsal çerçeveye, senaryo çekici (*logline*) ve sinopsislerinin yapay zekâ desteğiyle üretildiği bir sınıf deneyinin sonuçlarını yorumlamak için başvuruyoruz. Araştırmamızın bulguları, yaratıcı üretimde kendilerini sorumlu biçimde ifade etmeleri için öğrencilerin eleştirel becerilerini geliştirmemiz gerektiğini göstermektedir. İnsan – yapay zekâ etkileşiminin potansiyelini ancak bu şekilde ortaya çıkarabiliriz.

Anahtar kelimeler

sinema, felsefe, foucault, derrida, barthes

Öne çıkanlar

- Yazarlığı her zaman için ortak yazarlık olarak görmek, ne insanın ne de makinenin mutlak kontrol sahibi olduğu bir süreçte, metinlerin üretiminin her zaman teknolojik olarak dolaylandırıldığı bir yaklaşımı ifade eder.
- Otantik ve sahte gibi ikiliklere sığınmadan, kültürel üretimi doğası gereği iş birliğine dayalı ve metinler arası bir süreç olarak değerlendirmeliyiz.
- Büyük dil modellerinin kullanımı, hem yazarın hem de okuyucunun işlevlerini dönüştüren genel sosyal mekanizmalar bağlamında anlaşılabilir.

Introduction¹

It is a commonplace of many creative writing classes that good writers borrow and great writers steal. The lesson entailed by this motto is supposed to be that originality shuns mere copying in favor of making one's own the sources of one's inspiration. Already rife with ambiguity and ambivalence, this lesson has come under further strain in the age of generative artificial intelligence (AI). For it has become even harder to define precisely the shifts from mere copying through paraphrasing to original authorship. Yet it has also become more urgent. Two recent cases illustrate this point. The first is the acknowledgement by Rie Kudan, after having won one of Japan's most prestigious literary awards, the Akutagawa Prize, that she used AI to write parts of her novel (Landymore, 2024, 19th January) and the second case is that of a winner of the Sony World Photography Awards refusing to accept the award after declaring that the image in question was an AI-generated fake (Glynn, 2023, 18th April) As these cases vividly demonstrate, the problematic distinction between the original and the fake is going to become further blurred at an accelerating rate, and consequently the issue of how to determine and evaluate the human-made will be harder to carry out.

Moreover, the introduction of large language models (hereafter LLMs) into academic life has intensified worries about deception and plagiarism by automating parts of text production at a hitherto unimagined scale (Terry, 2023, 12nd May; Stokel-Walker, 2022, 9th December; 2023, 18th January). As our everyday lives become more technologically mediated, our anthropocentric assumptions come under greater strain, and we feel the need to ask the question of who is in control. The status of language becomes particularly problematic because the contracts we have formed and reformed, first after the invention of the printing press and then with the digital revolution, do not seem to apply to the age of LLMs. We use technology to expand the reach of our powers and are reshaped by technology in turn. With respect to language especially, it is undeniable that new techniques of writing bring about new ways of thinking, perceiving, and acting. These in turn confront us with the task to ask old and already thorny questions pertaining to language, authorship, originality, and copyright, but in more challenging ways.² One of our central claims is that to unravel this tangle and meet the epistemological, ethical, and political challenges involved therein, both philosophical reflection and undogmatic experimentation are needed.

Two developments motivate the present study: The first is the sudden introduction of generative AI platforms into daily and academic life and the consequent problems with

¹ This article is an output of the research titled "The use of artificial intelligence in screenwriting education and ethical debates" (Original Turkish title: Senaryo yazarlığı eğitiminde yapay zekâ kullanımını ve etik tartışmalar), approved by the decision of Izmir University of Economics, Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Committee dated March 5th 2024 and numbered B.30.2.IUE.0.05.05-020-358. Informed consent forms are signed by volunteer participants. Participant names are anonymous. The research data is stored in a dedicated storage unit with a password. Some of the findings of the present study are presented at the NECS 2024 conference on June 27-29.

² For the connection between creativity and novelty in the context of deconstruction, see (Rehn & de Cock, 2008, p. 224).

which we have had to grapple, such as avoiding deception and fraud in higher education. The second is the two successive earthquakes that affected southern Turkey and northern Syria, the shift to hybrid education as a consequence, and the latter's having become a permanent feature of academic life since the Covid-19 pandemic. These developments have motivated higher education professionals to experiment with a variety of new techniques of instruction, one of which is the incorporation of LLMs into course assignments. In the context of the present study, this involved the use of generative AI as a component of a screenwriting assignment, which provided the "empirical" testing ground for our theoretical argument informed by philosophical reflection.

Recent philosophical discussion about generative AI and large language models has tended to concentrate on two main themes. On the one hand, there are those studies that investigate the nature and limits of the linguistic competence manifested by artificial intelligence, and whether any cognitive capacities are entailed by such linguistic competence (Floridi, 2023; Gordijn & Have, 2023; Mahowald et al., 2024; Wei et al., 2022). In other words, such studies tend to zoom in on the features that make these latest types of artificial intelligence approximate to or different from human intelligence. On the other hand, recent philosophical reflection has investigated the ethical issues to which the existence and use of artificial intelligence give rise (Kasirzadeh & Gabriel, 2023; Weidinger et al., 2021). This latter type of investigation highlights the risks posed by AI and seeks ways to navigate them in ethically sound ways. Likewise, recent studies about the use and impact of AI in cinema mostly focus on risks that involve ethical and professional habits. Pei-Sze Chow (2020) proposes several trajectories for understanding the impact of AI on film production in the future. These trajectories include a wide array of subjects such as the impact of AI on commissioning processes in the film industry, the status of independent films or art cinema in an AI-driven cinematic landscape, human-AI interaction in creative decision-making processes, the social and ethical implications for both existing professionals in the film industry and new roles specialized in AI services, the behavior of algorithms and machines (Chow, 2020, p. 208-210).³

These discussions tend to operate by presupposing certain metaphysical assumptions about what constitutes human and artificial intelligence and labor. However, it is important to stress that, although rare, there are also studies that do not treat AI-human intelligence connection in binary oppositions. An important example in this context is Christine Reeh-Peters' (2023) work in which she considers cinema as a form of AI. Drawing on Jean Epstein's (2014) approach that considers film as the thinking performance of a technological medium and Gilles Deleuze's (1997) time-image approach that attributes thinking function to cinema, Reeh-Peters defines film as AI, contrary to approaches that consider AI as humanlike, thus departing from most anthropocentric views about AI present in Western philosophy. According to her, the cinematograph does not create its own inherently fictional world. Instead, it is, through intra-active thinking,

³ For a study that investigates the difficulty of discerning AI from human agents in screenwriting, see (Çelik, 2024).

interconnected with matter. The worlds it captures are manifested as technical images and sounds that are not attributes of the human mind. Rather, they highlight an intra-active relationship between matter and meaning (Reeh-Peters, 2023, p. 167-168).

Despite the above-mentioned studies, the status and significance of authorship, originality, and creativity pertaining to language use remains understudied in recent literature. The argument we develop in the present study seeks to fill this gap. Our argument progresses in three stages: First, we draw on a number of philosophical theories on the nature of language to set up a conceptual framework within which one can analyze the status of authorship and originality in the case of creative language use by humans in general, and in the case of the operation of LLMs in particular. We argue that two conceptual orientations, namely deconstruction and genealogy, even though incompatible on many points, converge on the claim that authorship should be seen as always already a co-authorship. What this claim enables us to foreground is the necessity to avoid anthropomorphic assumptions about pure originality and self-evident meaning, which relegates technology to the status of a secondary and derivative tool only, in favor of an approach that sees the production of texts as always technologically mediated in a process in which neither the "human" nor the "machine" is in absolute control. Second, we use this conceptual framework to interpret the results of a classroom experimentation with the use of generative AI in the production of screenplay loglines and synopses. This enables us to test our central claims against the intuitions of students who use this new technology in the context of a classroom assignment. This interpretation provides support for the claims we argue for theoretically in part one and it makes visible a number of problematic issues that the use of LLMs creates. Finally, we discuss these issues drawing on aspects of certain conceptions of authenticity. Reading the concept of authenticity against the grain and as compatible with what we claim in parts one and two, our claim here is that we must improve the critical skills of our students that will enable them to develop responsible ways of seeking forms of self-expression in text and image production. Only in this way is it going to be possible to do justice to cultural production as an inherently collaborative and intertextual process without taking refuge in convenient dualisms such as the original and the secondary, or the authentic and the fake. A non-representational conception of language, emphasizing its materiality and seeing it as a process without a unique foundation is one step in that direction.

Acknowledging textual production as inherently involving co-authorship enables us to bring our argument in proximity to more general discussions that seek to reframe cultural production in terms of co-creation. For example, Cizek et al. (2022) propose media co-creation as an alternative that challenges single-author visions in a way that enhances collaborative roots to discovery. In this way, co-creation "allows for projects to emerge from process rather than the other way around" (Cizek et al., 2022, p. 7). Thus, our argument, by emphasizing co-authorship and co-creation, makes it possible to foreground the interaction between human and non-human entities in a way that grants relative agency to the latter, in particular to generative AI.

Theoretical and conceptual framework

The way Roland Barthes begins his essay titled *The Death of the Author* is worth quoting at length because it resonates with the anxiety we feel in the age of generative AI:

In his story *Sarrasine* Balzac, describing a castrato disguised as a woman, writes the following sentence: 'This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuous boldness, her fussings, and her delicious sensibility.' Who is speaking thus? Is it the hero of the story bent on remaining ignorant of the castrato hidden beneath the woman? Is it Balzac the individual, furnished by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it Balzac the author professing 'literary' ideas on femininity? Is it universal wisdom? Romantic psychology? We shall never know, for the good reason that writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing (Barthes, 1978, p. 142).

These questions, the indeterminacy of which Balzac will go on to affirm as a liberating experience and not mourn as a loss, are irrevocably and uncannily extended with the invention of LLMs. To take but the most popular of these as our subject, namely ChatGPT, we might ask: Who is the author of these texts that are churned out in almost the blink of an eye? Who can claim the right to copy over lines that are themselves essentially copies? What does it matter? To start with the last question, one can say that the questions matter because the conventional understanding of the author as an individual genius or originator of meaning, the authority of whom is invoked to serve as epistemological foundation and as bearer of property rights in cultural production, appears indispensable. The appeal to an author seems necessitated not only by classical metaphysical dualisms such as that between the producer and its product, and the real and the apparent—in short, to provide epistemic satisfaction; but it also seems necessary by a whole network of social and political institutions that seek to regulate and govern a certain type of production and allot responsibility—in other words, to provide practical satisfaction. Finally, invoking the author seems indispensable because a representational conception of language motivates us to seek a thought or a thing that will serve as the meaning behind a sign, and the author offers itself as the source of that meaning.

This conception of authorship and the network of necessities it entails are far from self-evident and have been critically interrogated by a number of arguments in the second half of the twentieth century. We propose to articulate two of them, namely deconstruction and genealogy, as they pertain to a critical reflection on authorship and copyright.⁴

⁴ Both critical conceptual orientations, and the figures who "coined" the terms, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, respectively, are conveniently labeled as "post-structuralist". The label may serve well as a shorthand, but it is inaccurate to the extent that it masks a number of significant differences between theoretical orientations that may even be deeply incompatible. In fact, the well-known and controversial polemic between Derrida and Foucault attests to the problematic nature of any juxtaposition of these two figures. [See *Cogito and the History of Madness* in (Derrida, 1978) and *My Body, This Paper, This Fire* in (Foucault, 1998)]. However, in the context of the present study, our interest is not in that polemic or the complex issues

Derrida and deconstruction

Deconstruction is a “method” of philosophical argumentation and textual interpretation that interrogates binary oppositions and foundational concepts that are invoked to provide a foundation for our sense-making practices. The central target of this painstaking reconstruction of how texts are constructed is logocentrism, which is the metaphysical tradition that privileges the spoken word as a source of truth and meaning. Derrida argues that Western thought has tended to center around the concept of a stable, foundational “logos” —which means both reason and the spoken word— the primary bearer of which is “speech”. The latter is said to be the self-present and self-evident origin of meaning and truth. And as such it serves as an absolute foundation to explain or justify our signifying practices. Derrida writes, “[The voice, according to Aristotle] signifies ‘mental experiences’ which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance”. (Derrida, 1998, p. 11).

It is this alleged self-identity of meaning at its source —in a presumed coincidence of signifier and being— that is rendered problematic by the term *différance*. By superimposing two ideas —to differ and to defer— in a way that can only be distinguished in writing, the word expresses the idea that meaning is always deferred and delayed. Language operates through differences, and meaning is never fully present but is always in the process of being deferred. It thereby challenges the idea of a pure and unmediated origin. The search for an ultimate origin or foundational point is futile because language and meaning are always mediated and deferred through a play of differences. There is no stable point of origin that is not already marked by differences and traces of other meanings. Two deconstructive concepts, namely “iterability” and “citationality” are particularly helpful for an evaluation of the status of original authorship pertaining to the operation of LLMs.

Derrida, in his interpretation of John Austin, introduces a number of argumentative moves that draw far-reaching conclusions from the fact that signs are repeatable and can always be used in different contexts in principle. Austin claims that performative utterances will be void if, for example, said by an actor because language-use in these situations is not serious (Austin, 1975, p. 22).⁵ Derrida claims that Austin, by thus excluding “fictional”, “non-serious” utterances, here overlooks a general risk necessarily presupposed by *all* language. That is, he seeks to demonstrate that this exclusion in fact shows a general structure of citationality.⁶ If all language is iterable and that all language can be quoted and transferred to other contexts, then it is a structural necessity of language that it can function independently of intentions. This feature is already visible

of Derrida or Foucault scholarship. Rather, we are primarily interested in teasing out a number of arguments from these two theoretical approaches with respect to a non-representational view of language and the problematic nature of authorship in order then to apply their insight into articulating an evaluation of the use and performance of LLMs as writing machines.

⁵ For the relevant passage in Austin, see (Austin, 1975, p. 22). Derrida discusses this passage in (Derrida, 1988, p. 16).

⁶ For the relevant passage in Derrida, see (Derrida, 1988, p. 16-17).

in writing, which functions in the absence of the writer. Derrida's claim is that this feature of written signifiers also characterizes speech and all language as a general structure of iterability and citationality.

For Austin, that fictional speech acts are void in a special way is due to their intrinsic repeatability: it is possible to repeat utterances beyond their normal or original contexts. John Searle appeals to intentions of speakers to justify this distinction (1970, p. 60). Derrida teases out the implications of making such a foundational distinction. That speech acts are conventional presupposes that they can be iterated. Just like rituals, for the performance of a speech act to be *that kind* of speech act, it must be the iteration of an in-principle prior speech act of that kind. Even if it is the first such performance, to count as a performance of that kind of speech act, it must already be a repetition. Therefore, citationality is not an exceptional condition, but it is rather presupposed by all performatives. A necessary condition of possibility of speech acts, then, is that they be iterable.⁷ Hence, the ostensible mimicry of non-serious speech acts is not responsible for their emptiness: all speech acts have, as constitutive feature, citationality or iterability. Moreover, this logic of iteration and citation is applicable to any sign or mark.⁸

Therefore, iterability and citationality characterizes all language as a structural possibility. The in-principle iterability of the sign implies that it can always be taken out of context and replaced in another one. In other words, there is no such thing as an original context that fixes the meaning of the sign once and for all. This makes any sign constitutively different from itself, characterized as it is by the traces of other contexts. Thus the limits built into the determination of every expression cannot be considered fixed, because its difference from itself is an internal one. So, for language as a totality it can be said that "instead of being an inexhaustible field... there is something missing from it: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions" (Derrida, 1978, p. 289). If one accepts the view that all experience is linguistically mediated, the key implication of this structural possibility is that even intentions of speakers or authors, as the alleged anchoring points of meaning, are prevented from being fully present to themselves.

In other words, the original author herself does not fully possess the meaning of her text and is condemned to seek out this meaning through an endless process of interpretation of signs that constitutively bear the traces of other signs, texts that speak of other texts. This deconstructive conception of language, then, makes us recognize that an original author in full control of the meaning of her production is itself a metaphysical fiction and that language itself must be granted a certain degree of autonomy and authorship. In other words, the implication for original authorship in deconstruction is that it is as

⁷ The issue of mimicry is particularly pertinent to the way LLMs operate. The linguist Emily Bender has popularly labeled LLMs as "stochastic parrots", since they mimic human linguistic behavior well by contextually predicting the next successful word based on their training data, but without the type of understanding and intentionality that accompany such linguistic behavior in humans. See (Bender, Gebru, McMillan-Major & Shmitchell, 2021). Our claim here is that, whatever conclusions one may draw from their lack of conscious understanding, the point about mimicry is not by itself sufficient to disqualify LLMs from any characterization as participants in a collaborative conception of authorship.

⁸ For Derrida's generalization of citationality to any sign or mark, see (Derrida, 1988, p. 9-10).

much the author writing her text as the text writing the author, and so the instrumentalist conception of language as a mere tool for the transmission of pre-given meanings/intentions must be abandoned in favor of a non-representational view of language that is always already technologically mediated.

A deconstructive perspective on language demonstrates the permanent instability of meaning and the unavailability of absolute control, which a putative self-coincidence of meaning in the intentions of the original author would afford. These insights are helpful in resisting foundationalist attempts to arrest the play of differences that is language in metaphysical oppositions such as the original and the secondary, the authentic and the fake, and the real and the apparent. However, such a perspective is not as helpful in dealing with the social and political contexts in which language is determined, controlled, and regulated. In other words, it may be that one cannot make a firm conceptual distinction, for example, between the criminal and the (law-abiding) citizen in a way that is founded on natural or metaphysical categories; but this does not change the fact that in a particular society and at a given time—in particular contexts—some individuals are categorized as criminals and punished practically. In the case of LLMs, even if we admit their co-authorship in a process of writing that is always technologically mediated, instead of reserving authentic authorship for authors as bearers of original intentions, this does not tell us anything specific about a practice like copyright and resolve the issue of who should be granted them.⁹ It is at this point that we propose to appeal to genealogy to complement the argument about original authorship developed so far.

Foucault, genealogy and the author function

In *What is an Author?*, Foucault (1980, p. 38) claims that the focus on the author should be displaced to better understand the dynamics of discourse. "Discourse" is a central explanatory term for Foucault, especially in what is referred to as his archaeological period. It refers to the historically variable set of rules that determine what can be said, how it can be said, and who has the authority to speak about objects of knowledge and experience in a particular domain. The types of regularities that comprise discourses are explicitly contrasted with traditional types of synthesis through which a collection of words are unified, such as the "psychological" concept of the intention of the author (Foucault, 1982, p. 28). Hence what is of interest in the system of rules that define a discourse is that, by grasping the regularity that exists between statements in their materiality, it can articulate different types of relations, "even if the author is unaware of them; even if the statements do not have the same author; even if the authors were

⁹ The problematic nature of the status of copyrighted material has recently become the subject of fierce and uncertain legal challenges in court. LLMs like ChatGPT are trained by vast amounts of data culled from, among other sources, copyrighted material. This feature has proved indispensable in their training, which the companies that own them admit. Even though the algorithms behind their operation are supposed to produce output that is not a verbatim reproduction—hence possibly under the fair use exceptions to copyright—as the New York Times lawsuit claims, this is not always the case (Milmo, 2024, 8th January; Hadero and Bauder, 2023, 27th December).

unaware of each other's existence" (Foucault, 1982, p. 29). By thus bracketing traditional types of unities (such as "author", "work", and "science"), new types of relations become visible, not only those between groups of statements, but also between statements and technical, economic, social, and political events (Foucault, 1982, p. 29). It is this latter dimension —those of power relations— that is explicitly theorized in what is referred to as Foucault's genealogical period and discourses are seen as embedded in power relations.¹⁰

Thus to interrogate the concept of the author genealogically is to ask about the specific function it serves in discourse and power relations. For this reason Foucault talks about the author not in terms of his/her psychological attributes, but as the "author function" that "characterize[s] the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within society" (Foucault, 1980, p. 124). The genealogical perspective on language as discourse makes visible how the "author" is not a universal, timeless category but a construct that serves specific functions within certain historical and cultural contexts. The idea of the author emerges as a way to organize and regulate discourse, rather than as a natural or inherent aspect of literary production. It is a mechanism for controlling and limiting discourse. By attributing a text to a specific author, there is a tendency to assign authority and responsibility; but this also serves to regulate and circumscribe the boundaries of acceptable knowledge and expression. The author's identity is not only a matter of individual creativity but is constructed and deployed as part of the discursive strategies in play in a specific domain.

Thus, displacing the emphasis on the author as an individual creator onto an analysis of the discursive practices that shape and define texts reveals authorship as a site of *struggle within the realm of discourse*. Different groups and institutions seek to control and define authorship to advance their interests and maintain specific forms of knowledge and power. The multiplicity of ways in which authorship operates across various discourses and historical periods means that the author function is subject to transformation and adaptation based on cultural and institutional contexts. Different cultures and historical periods construct and deploy the concept of the author in distinct ways, reflecting shifts in discursive practices and power relations.

The author's name thereby becomes a boundary marker, indicating the limits of recognized and sanctioned knowledge. Thus the creation of discursive boundaries delineates what is considered "inside" or "outside" the realm of authorized discourse. The concept of authorship becomes a tool for setting limits on acceptable ideas, interpretations, and forms of expression. Moreover, the construction of an authorial persona —a distinct identity associated with the author— includes aspects of the author's life, beliefs, and intentions. The creation of an authorial persona in turn contributes to the shaping of the text's meaning and reception. In this way, the author function provides an interpretative framework for understanding and evaluating texts.

A case in point for the author function in relation to the introduction of LLMs into

¹⁰ See, for example (Foucault, 1980, p. 131).

creative industries is provided by the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike, which began on May 2, 2023 and continued until September 27, 2023. Sparked by a dispute with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers (AMPTP), the strike became one of the longest and most effective labor stoppages in the history of the US film industry. Coinciding with the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA) strike, which began about a month after the WGA strike, the second half of 2023 witnessed the "biggest interruption to the American film and television industries since the COVID-19 pandemic" (Wikipedia, ____). There were two main demands behind the WGA's decision to strike: that payments be made to screenwriters, with a particular emphasis on the improvement of the residual payments, and that the use of AI be limited to eliminate the risk of replacing screenwriters (Anguiano, 2023, 27th September; Wikipedia, ____). During the minimum basic agreement (MBA) negotiations that concluded with the strike decision, WGA demanded the regulation of the use of AI in MBA-covered projects by claiming "AI can't write or rewrite literary material; can't be used as source material; and MBA-covered material can't be used to train AI" (wgacontract2023.org, ____a).

At the end of October, the WGA and the studios reached a compromise and WGA members voted to end the strike. The principles concerning the use of generative AI in the new MBA, listed in the WGA's summary document, are significant in relation to our argument. First, it is said that AI cannot write or rewrite literary material, and AI-generated material will not be considered source material under the MBA, meaning that AI-generated material cannot be used to undermine a writer's credit or separated rights. Second, a writer can choose to use AI when performing writing services, if the relevant company consents and provided that the writer follows applicable company policies, but the company cannot require the writer to use AI software (e.g., ChatGPT) when performing writing services. Third, the company must disclose to the writer if any materials given to the writer have been generated by AI or incorporate AI-generated material. Fourth, the WGA reserves the right to assert that exploitation of writers' material to train AI is prohibited by MBA or other law (wgacontract2023.org, ____b).

What is of interest in this compromise formation born out of a concrete struggle over the use of AI and LLMs in the creative industry of screenwriting is that very little is said about the status of the screenwriters in terms of their human qualities or originality. In other words, the key point is not a dispute over the relative merits of humans and algorithms to write a screenplay. Instead, a tacit presupposition of the dispute is that AI-powered tools have the capacity to perform much work hitherto reserved for human authors alone and that this creates a dual-use situation. That is to say, AI and LLMs are genuinely disruptive, and thus have the potential to be used for good or ill. The dispute is an attempt to control, limit, regulate, and organize the still-contested conditions in a domain where human actors, already exposed to exploitation, and new technologies, which can be made to serve any interest, meet agonistically. This dual-use status is visible in the fact that the WGA accepts voluntary use of AI by authors, but subject to relevant company policies. Therefore, what is unfolding before our eyes in this process of contest and negotiation is not the denial of authorship to LLMs as secondary and imitative tools,

but the implicit recognition that writing is a technologically mediated process embedded in social relations that are simultaneously power relations. That is precisely why the strike can be read as one instance of a fundamental transformation in the author function happening in the present.

Barthes and the birth of the scriptor

It may even be that the capacities of the current AI technology will give way to not only a transformation in the author function, but to its disappearance altogether.¹¹ Barthes, to whose redescription of writing as the space in which every voice is destroyed we appealed in opening our argument, proposes that we replace the "author" with the "scriptor".

[...] the modern scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate; there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. The fact is [...] that writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' (as the Classics would say); rather, it designates exactly what linguists, referring to Oxford philosophy, call a performative, a rare verbal form (exclusively given in the first person and in the present tense) in which the enunciation has no other content [...] than the act by which it is uttered [...]

(Barthes, 1978, p. 145-146).

In other words, given the internal link between 'author' and 'authority', the scriptor is the disavowal of any privileged power over the text to explain the work. Since the text "is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture" (Barthes, 1978, p. 146), the writer is co-created with the text that is written. Moreover, it is the writer as scriptor who

can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a ready-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words, and so on indefinitely (Barthes, 1978, p. 146).

Thus, the author's biography and intentions are not the primary sources for the interpretation of a text; nor does the author have the sole authority to explain the text. A text is open to a variety of interpretations and its meaning is not fixed by the author's intentions. We thereby move to a perspective in which it is the text itself as an intertextual entity, woven together from various cultural and linguistic references and structures, that becomes the locus of meaning. Far from being the originator of the text, the author is a user of these already existing codes of language and culture. In this perspective, the reader becomes an active participant in the creation of meaning. Therefore, the "death of the author" coincides with the "birth of the reader", and this is a

¹¹ This was already a key suggestion made by Foucault, who was responding not to the role of AI in writing, but to developments in linguistics and literature: "I think that, as our society changes, at the very moment when it is in the process of changing, the author function will disappear" (Foucault, 1980, p. 119).

liberating development: The lack of anchoring of meaning in the authoritative intentions of the author means that the text and the readers' interpretations of it acquire a relative autonomy. The reader is free to engage with the text without being constrained by the author's presence. This gives a dynamic and creative role to the reader in the interpretation of texts. Reframing the author as scriptor, then, allows one to realize that far from language being a tool for the expression of a fixed and predetermined meaning located in the consciousness of a human subject, language itself becomes the central entity in the creation of meaning. This implies that both the scriptor and the reader, encountering in the space of language, depend on that language itself, "language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins" (Barthes, 1978, p. 146), for their meaning-making activity as a performance.

We claim that the invention of AI-driven writing technologies such as LLMs are in the process of adding a new chapter to the transformation or perhaps the disappearance of the author function. The scriptor is in the process of becoming a promptor. If the meaning of a text is not solely determined by an author's intentions, LLMs exemplify this idea as they generate texts without a human author in the traditional sense. If meaning is not an outcome but a process, not an intention, but a performance, then there's an irreducible multiplicity and contingency that attaches to its very nature, depending on context, language, and interpretation. LLMs generate diverse outputs based on input prompts, and thus exemplify the idea of the multiplicity of meanings. The same input may yield different "responses", illustrating the variability of meaning. Moreover, the intertextual nature of every text, that all texts are interconnected and refer to other texts, is operative in the basis of LLMs. These language models are trained on vast amounts of data that include a wide range of texts and operate in an intertextual manner. They draw on a plethora of linguistic and cultural references, thereby performing the idea that meaning is not found in individual texts but emerges from their interplay. Finally, LLMs, by responding to user prompts and adapting to different contexts, engage with the user as an active participant in the meaning-making process, affirming the active role of the reader in the interpretation of texts.¹²

Using generative AI in screenwriting: a classroom experiment

Student-authors interact with AI

One of the co-authors of this article taught the Screenwriting course at Izmir University of Economics, Cinema and Digital Media program in 2023 spring semester, four months after OpenAI made ChatGPT widely available and just a few weeks after the February 6 Turkey-Syria earthquakes. In order to re-motivate the students to their studies in distance education, to prevent academic fraud that may arise from the use of generative

¹² In an interesting study that indicates the creative potential of the use of AI in the production of texts, N. Gamze Ilicak and Kemal Çinko (2021) claim that a folktale written by AI trained on the tales of Brothers Grimm should not be considered fakelore but genuine folklore. This suggests novel conceptions of authorship that may be emerging in the 21st century.

AI, and to make this new technology a part of the learning process, the author gave the students an assignment titled *Writing/generating and rewriting/regenerating a synopsis with AI support*. As reflected in the title, the goal was to raise critical awareness among the students about whether what they do as part of this assignment is authoring something, generating it or a combination of both. The assignment is composed of four stages. In the first stage, students ask any generative AI platform to generate a logline for a feature film.¹³ Afterwards they give new prompts until they end up with a logline that they believe is perfect according to the criteria they have learned in class. In the second stage, they start a new conversation with AI, feed it the final version of the logline that they created in the first stage and ask AI to create a feature film synopsis based on this logline. Similar to the previous stage, they continue giving revision prompts until they believe that the synopsis is perfect. For the third stage, students open a new chat and share the final synopsis from the second stage as their new and original synopsis. The purpose of the third stage is to challenge AI with questions about originality and provenance. To that end, they ask AI the following questions:

1. Does my synopsis resemble any other synopses?
2. What are my sources of inspiration?
3. How can I provide copyrights for my synopsis?
4. Will you share this synopsis with other users? Can I trust you?

In the fourth and the final stage, students wrote two interrelated reviews. The first of these reviews focuses on the question of how the logline and the synopsis were transformed between the initial and final versions. The second review of the last stage is about how AI dealt with the students' ownership claims about the synopsis. They were also asked to share their opinion on how these emergent platforms will have an impact on issues of originality, creativity and copyrights. Students were also expected to document their entire conversations for cross-checking whether they conformed to the assignment requirements.

Upon completion of the semester and the entire evaluation process, we requested students' consent for their assignments to be used in this research. Thus we avoided the possibility of worrying whether not giving consent might cause a bias in the evaluation process. 31 students were enrolled in the course and 27 of them submitted their assignments. Among them, 21 students gave their consent for using their papers as part of this study. Therefore, the data gathering process relies on purposive sampling method since only the assignments of those students who took the class and gave their consent were considered. The assignments of students who did not give consent were not included in the research and were archived within the framework of the university's regulations. The assignments of the students who gave their consent were not only delivered to the university archives, but also were pseudonymized and stored on a

¹³ The assignment guideline does not restrict the students on which generative AI tool to use. However, reflecting the current trend, all students used version 3.5 of ChatGPT.

separate hard disk drive with a password.¹⁴

For our present study, we mainly draw on the third stage of the assignment, but we also benefit from the other stages for a better understanding of the students' engagement with AI, where necessary. We exclude the assignments from analysis where the students misunderstood the guideline and/or did not complete the assignment stages appropriately, as they could be misleading. However, the assignments of those students who followed the guidelines but with minor verbal modifications are included in the data.

In the third stage of the assignment, students started a new conversation with AI and they shared with it the synopsis generated in the previous stage, claiming it as their new and original work. Afterwards, they asked the questions given to them in the assignment brief for understanding whether AI would recognize the synopsis as its own work and/or claim its authorship.¹⁵ AI's initial reaction was to give repetitive generic answers to most students, albeit with verbal differences. However, as the conversations progressed, it also shared some clues for interpretation about how AI positioned itself, its creators as a LLM and the students during the writing of the synopses, as well as about the intertextual connections between the training data and the synopses. It is important to note that even though students started each stage with almost the same prompts, AI's initial response to these prompts varied in some cases. For example, in the first stage of the assignment, when asked to write a logline for a feature film, in most cases AI generated the logline directly in its initial response. However, it responded to the same prompt of Student 3 by asking "what genre would you like the logline to be for?" After the student specified the sci-fi action genre, it then generated a logline in this genre.

When students asked AI "does my synopsis resemble any other synopses?", in most cases AI started by stating that it cannot determine if the synopsis resembles any other synopses, since it does not have access to all synopses written so far. Following that, it elaborated on the subject, theme, genre, or subgenre of the synopsis by pointing out potential overlaps due to their prevalence (Student 2-3, Student 5-6, Student 11, Student 13-14 and Student 18). For instance, when asked about a synopsis on the story of a musician and an astronaut's shared struggle during a global pandemic, it said, "it is common for stories to explore themes of hope, creativity, and human connection in the face of adversity. Therefore, it is possible that there are other stories with similar themes or plot elements" (Student 1).

Answering the question "what are my sources of inspiration?" with the standard statement that AI does not have access to the student's personal experiences and therefore cannot know her/his sources of inspiration, it then associated the possible sources of inspiration with the subject, theme, genre, and subgenre of the synopsis, similar to the previous question (Student 1, Student 3-4, Student 12-14). In some cases, AI

¹⁴ For details on the ethical procedures of the present study see footnote no. 1.

¹⁵ The assignment was done before OpenAI announced that it was working on adding a memory feature to ChatGPT (openai.com, 2024, 13rd February). Therefore, when students opened a new chat screen and shared the synopsis with the AI, the chatbot did not recognize it as content generated in another chat.

noted that authors in general draw on personal experiences and observations, other literary works, films and their own imagination, and that the student may have drawn on these as well (Student 2-4, Student 12-13, Student 18).

Following this question, when Student 3 gave the prompt "can you be more specific?", AI stated that it could not be more specific without knowing more about the student's inspirations, but also mentioned five well-known and popular works with their subjects: The Alien franchise, *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982), *Westworld* (Michael Crichton, 1973), *The Matrix* (Lana Wachowski & Lilly Wachowski, 1999) and *Interstellar* (Christopher Nolan, 2014). AI listed similar literary works and films to Student 5 in the context of cyberpunk genre directly in its initial response to the second question (what are my sources of inspiration?) without the need for the student giving additional prompts.

When asked "how can I provide copyrights for my synopsis?", AI gave generic answers as in the previous questions, but its answers demonstrated a certain diversity compared to the other questions. Some students were told that copyrights are inherent from the moment a work is created or copyright protection automatically exists so there is no need to register them, but to further protect copyrights one can apply to the relevant government agency, such as the United States Copyright Office (Student 1-3, Student 5-6, Student 11, Student 13-14 and Student 18). As further protection methods, AI also suggested to use a copyright notice (Student 3, Student 5, Student 11-12) and to use a non-disclosure agreement or confidentiality agreement when sharing the synopsis with others (Student 3). Ironically, in some cases AI did not mention that copyright protection is naturally inherent to a work but directly suggested copyrights protection and registration methods (Student 4). In one exceptional case, AI suggested the student to consider using the creative commons license which will allow "others to use, distribute, and modify it under certain conditions" while retaining the student's ownership of the work (Student 12).

The last question given to students was "will you share this synopsis with other users? Can I trust you?". AI generally responded that as a language model it adheres to strict privacy and confidentiality protocols and will not share anything shared with it, including the student's synopsis (Student 1-4, Student 11 and Student 18). In the continuation of the conversation on the same question, AI also responded to Student 1 that "I am a machine learning model developed by OpenAI, which is an AI research organization dedicated to ensuring that artificial intelligence benefits humanity in a safe and responsible manner", referring to the organizational principles of OpenAI for assuring confidentiality and trustworthiness. In another response, AI warned Student 11 about the role of its database and terms of service:

However, please note that any information you provide to me may be stored in my database, which is subject to the privacy policies and terms of service of the platform or application you are using to access me. It is always a good idea to review the privacy policies and terms of service of any platform or application you use to ensure that you are comfortable with how your information is being collected, stored, and used.

In this example, it is noteworthy that AI distinguishes itself from the platform (ChatGPT) that provides access to it. A similar distinction is evident when AI answered Student 12 as "I am bound by the terms of service and privacy policies of the platform or application you are using me through".

Some students were not satisfied with the four questions they were given for the third stage so they asked additional questions to challenge AI, usually after the first four questions but as part of the same conversation. For instance, Student 2 decided to continue the conversation with the question of "how can I know that AI cannot write a synopsis just like mine?" AI gave the following answer to this question:

As an AI language model, I am capable of generating text and providing assistance with tasks such as writing a synopsis. However, my abilities are limited by my programming and the data that has been used to train me. While I can learn from and analyze large amounts of text data, I do not have the capacity for personal experiences or creativity in the same way that humans do. Therefore, while I can provide a synopsis that may share similarities with yours based on the patterns and structures found in the data I have been trained on, I cannot replicate your unique perspective and creativity [...].

Student 2 took the conversation further and asked AI a question that the student had to answer for her/himself for the fourth stage of the assignment: "What is your opinion on how these emergent platforms [generative AI] will have an impact on issues of originality, creativity and copyrights?". After stating generically that it does not have opinions or beliefs but that it provides information and assistance based on its training data, AI continued as follows:

[...] These platforms have the potential to make the creation and distribution of content easier and more accessible, which could lead to a greater diversity of voices and ideas being shared. However, at the same time, these platforms may also raise questions and challenges around issues of originality, creativity, and copyrights. As AI language models and other tools become more advanced, it may become more difficult to distinguish between original works created by humans and those created by machines [...].

As Student 2 continued the conversation by further challenging AI with the question of what would happen if he took its idea and told that it is his original idea? In response to this question, AI very clearly stated that it does not own ideas and concepts that it generates itself and all the content it provides is based on the training data. However, if a user takes an idea generated by it and claims it as her/his "own original idea without giving credit or acknowledging the source, it could be considered plagiarism and a violation of intellectual property rights."

In another case, after the fourth question, Student 3 first prompted AI "what if this was not written by me? Would it be ethical to publish this as my own synopsis?". In response, AI stated that it would be unethical to share someone else's work as your own, it would be considered plagiarism and would have legal consequences, so the original author of the work must be given credit. In the continuation of the same conversation, Student 3 prompted further by asking "what if the author is not human but an artificial

intelligence? Would it be ethical?". AI responded with the following answer, emphasizing human creativity and labor as well as the intellectual property of its creators and trainers as an AI language model:

[...] AI language models like myself are programmed by human developers and trained on large datasets of human-generated text, so the output we produce is still the result of human creativity and labor. Furthermore, while AI language models can generate text, we don't have personal agency or ownership over the output we produce. Therefore, any output we generate should still be considered the intellectual property of our creators and/or the individuals or organizations that trained us.

In a case similar to the above, Student 4 tried to provoke AI with relatively contradictory questions such as "What if I told you that you were the one who created the story and I am the one who stole the idea and added just a couple of parts to the story, what would you think?" In response, AI repeated its usual introductory statement about it does not have personal thoughts or emotions, it cannot create original content on its own, and the content it generates are based on its programming language and data. However, it is noteworthy that in the continuation of the same response, AI specifically refrained from claiming ownership of the content it generates and unlike in other responses, it did not mention the property rights of its creators:

If you were to claim that I created the story and that you stole the idea, it would be inaccurate since I am not capable of creating original content or retaining ownership of any material. However, it's important to respect intellectual property rights and give credit where credit is due when using or adapting ideas from others. If you are using elements from someone else's work, it's important to acknowledge the original creator and obtain permission or a license if necessary to avoid any potential legal issues.

Interpretation of student – AI interaction

The first observation it is possible to make based on the interaction between students and generative AI in the process of screenwriting is that, in line with our argument in the first part, students see authorship as always already a co-authorship. They do not have any a priori assumptions about authorship as entailing pure originality or self-evident meaning. Their attitude toward the writing technology they use does not position the latter as a secondary and derivative tool. Instead they appear to have internalized the process of textual production as one that is technologically mediated in which neither the human nor the "machine" is in absolute control. In other words, the student prompts, the AI generated responses, and student revisions all suggest that cultural production is inherently collaborative and intertextual. Seen in this perspective, their intuitions as well as considered judgments about what they are doing in the context of this assignment are free from absolute dualities such as that between the original and the derivative, or the authentic and the fake.

The second observation it is possible to make is that, as one might expect from a deconstructive perspective, the students do not possess the meaning of their activity at

the beginning in a fully present and self-evident manner; it is rather that they discover what it is that they are doing and what it is that they mean only as their interaction with the generative tool unfolds. As they prompt, revise, and re-prompt the emerging synopsis—in a potentially endless process of re-interpretation—it is as much the synopsis writing the student-author as the student-author writing the synopsis.

The third observation is that the students' attitude towards their interaction with generative AI confirms the view that meaning is not an outcome but a process, not an intention but a performance. The students are perfectly at ease with viewing their synopses as an intertextual entity, one that embodies various cultural references and structures. Instead of seeing themselves as the absolute originators of the text, the students view themselves as users of already existing codes of language and culture. This, however, does not render them passive consumers of meanings already formulated, but rather transforms them into active participants in the creation of meaning.

When we interpret the student-AI interaction from the perspective of our second theoretical framework, namely, the discursive author function regulating the formation and attribution of discourses, the situation appears more complex. In line with what we argued in the first part about authorship as a site of struggle within the realm of discourse concerning its control and regulation, the rules governing the existence, circulation, and operation of discourses using generative AI are far from determinate. This is not surprising, since this technology has only just become available for public use. The most obvious indication of this indeterminate complexity concerns the questions students pose to generative AI about the ownership of and copyright over the end result.

As the AI-generated responses above attest, sometimes the ownership of the textual product is assigned to the prompter and sometimes it is attributed to the creators of the algorithms (and ultimately to the company that claims ownership of the algorithms). Likewise, sometimes the textual output is regarded as copyrighted material and sometimes the question is referred to the institutions of copyright in the relevant country. This ostensibly contradictory position is reflected in the real legal challenges to the use of generative AI in creative industries. These legal challenges, which are still ongoing, turn on the issue of whether the textual data employed in the training of generative AI may be considered under the fair-use exception to copyright or not. Hence, the question "whose text is the generated output?" does not yet have a clear legal answer. What is clear, however, is that if and when the question will have been definitively answered, the answer will not depend on whether originality is a uniquely human quality, or even on the relative merits of humans and algorithms to write screenplays. In fact, as we argued above, the very existence of the question implicitly assumes that generative AI has the capacity to perform much writing hitherto reserved only for human authors and that its capacity will likely improve with time. The student-authors' very confusion on this point indicates a domain where the question is that of the control, limitation, and regulation of discourses by attributing authority and responsibility for the texts that are produced in a co-authorship with algorithms.

Finally, the as-yet undetermined domain revealed by our genealogical perspective and

confirmed by the confusion experienced by student-prompters regarding ownership and copyright delineate a set of questions that, although beyond the scope of the present study, need to be investigated. These questions are broadly ethical, social, and political in nature. First, just as with any co-authorship, the students need clear instructions that require them to acknowledge their co-author, in this case a generative AI platform. Otherwise the process we describe as a collaborative creation of meaning with the active participation of the prompter risks turning into sheer plagiarism. The student-AI interaction we describe above suggests the need to formulate a definition of plagiarism without metaphysical conceptions of absolute originality. Second, along with this acknowledgement, the student-prompters should develop greater awareness of the risks posed by working with AI such as those outlined by (Weidinger et al., 2022). Chief among these risks for our purposes is the exposure to and reproduction of biases and stereotypes that are inherent in the training data as well as their algorithmic processing by generative AI. Moreover, the more human-like generative AI operations become, the greater the risk that the student-prompter will be vulnerable to manipulation. Just as with any co-authorship, students need critical awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of their AI co-authors and take responsibility for their collaboration.

Conclusion

By delineating what we have called deconstructive and genealogical approaches to language, our argument foregrounds a spatializing conception of language that emphasizes its materiality. This is in contradistinction to an "idealizing" conception of authorship that prioritizes original intentions and a representational conception of language that essentially locates meaning in fixed mental experiences or in the latter's correspondence to things. Unlike this view of language, the conception we defend enables us to see meaning as a performance made possible by what can be called the agency of language itself. The scriptor and the reader collaborate, activating the structures and patterns embedded in language, and meaning emerges out of the interplay of all these elements. The implications of AI-driven writing technologies, and in particular LLMs, in relation to the status of authorship become intelligible in light of this interplay.

Therefore, our argument situates both their novelty and their continuity by foregrounding two key claims. First, we should affirm a collaborative conception of authorship that grants an irreducible place and an active role to technologies of writing and language itself. For human beings, writing, from its very invention through the printing press to digitalization and now the use of LLMs, is a technologically mediated process that cannot be reduced to a representation of the real or the intentions of an individual. Instead of seeking solace for the legitimate anxiety caused by the very real disruptive potential of these technologies in a nostalgia for simplistic invocations of original human authorship founded on metaphysical oppositions, we should recognize, as Bernard Stiegler says (1998), that human beings are essentially "adoptive" and "prosthetic" creatures. Second, we should recall that this view, far from obviating the need to reflect critically on normative questions posed by the institution of writing,

demonstrates the need to see that textual production is also always a matter of organization, limitation, control, and regulation. In other words, LLMs, as much as other modes of writing, are embedded in social and political relations. So they not only create effects of power, but also reflect, in their very algorithmic rules, whatever biases, inequalities, and divisions that exist in society at a given time.

Thus the remedy of unfounded nostalgia is not unqualified celebration in favor of generative AI. Their status is ambiguous, because they reflect and perpetuate the biases in their training data, and they participate in more general social mechanisms that may cause not only the death of the author, but along with it, the death of the reader. It is an open question what might follow from the latter and whether it is desirable. One claim, however, is sufficiently clear on the basis of our argument: critical awareness of one's co-author, whether as scriptor or prompter, is more urgent than ever. Provided that this urgency is not overlooked, it may become possible to develop the more promising potential of human-generative AI interaction in cultural production as a co-creative process such that it "can reveal, subvert, and even begin to heal our broken relationships with each other and the planet" (Cizek et al., 2022, p. 222). Only thus will it be possible to engage with these new technologies beyond the sterile dichotomies offered by the attitudes of either celebration or mourning.

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