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The Author and other Avatars on digital Media Platforms: Mediatization reconfigured.

Abstract

The notion of authorship has been widely discussed since the proclamation of the Death of the Author in mid 20th century. Authors are still writing, but a variety of new forms of authorship and new kinds of relations between authors, texts and readers have emerged. Many new forms of authorship are enabled by the use of digital media, which provide a new layer of hypertextual and interactive software in between the 'author' as a representation of the human creator and the author as an indexical reference to a text. The paper present a number of these forms which are based on the use of 'avatars' as intermediaries between the human individuals and the stories told. It is argued that the use of digital media opens for new trajectories in the development of authorship forms, and that such new trajectories calls for new sorts of research questions and development of new methods.

Key words

authorship, avatar, co-writing, data-double, gate-keeping, hypertext, internet, mediatization, user-profile.

Introduction. The concept of authorship

In the mid-twentieth century, the ideas of the open work and the 'death' of the author were declared in literary scholarship and philosophy by prominent authors such as Umberto Eco, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida – whose positions as authors were, incidentally, strongly reinforced by their very deconstruction of the authority of the Author and his Work.

The breakdown of the authority of the author as a sovereign creator of his own and owned works were accompanied by the conceptualization of a broad range of textual interrelationships bypassing the individual author, such as the notions of intertextuality, transtextuality, paratextuality, and hypertextuality (Genette, 1987). With an increasing focus on the role of the reader in the production of meaning it became an issue to establish the specific text as a relatively stable node in the flux of meanings. Later, this became a point of departure for renewed audience studies addressing television audiences.

Strange as it may seem, literary scholarship from the 1960s and onwards seemed to prepare itself conceptually for an otherwise completely unforeseen migration from the medium of fixed print, to a future medium of fluid hypertext.

At the same time, but within a different sphere, one also saw the advent of the idea of so-called non-linear hypertexts (Nelson, 1965), from which, thirty years later, the world wide web

would emerge as a new hypertextual archive of all sorts of authorship and works, allowing new sorts of interconnections between authors, works, and audiences. A connection between the two hypertextual paradigms was drawn in Landow (1991) utilizing the former as an interpretive model for the conceptualization of electronic text.¹

The ideas of the open work and the death of the author may be regarded as indications of an emerging paradigmatic shift, also metaphorically referred to as 'the end of the book' or 'the end of the Gutenberg Galaxy', thus raising the question, What follows?

As already noted, we are still producing texts, many of which have well-defined authors. What actually faded away during the last century was primarily the idealized status of the Author as a creative master, or perhaps even genius, producing 'auratic' works of art (Benjamin, 1936), rather than humble writers of texts that might eventually still be regarded as works. In retrospect, the fading away of the aura may be understood as reconfiguring the position of the author, as 'aura' was built around the notion of the individual genius.

It has been argued (Author, 1999a, 2011) that the transition from text culture to hypertext culture is better understood as a process in which the 'Gutenberg galaxy' is inscribed into a 'Turing galaxy', rather than a transition in which the former is replaced by the latter.² In the present context it means that the modern notion of the author is not simply replaced or abandoned, but rather reinterpreted and inscribed into a new, wider field of authorship forms. One of the arguments is that computers are fundamentally textual in nature. Both content and programs are processed as sequences of editable bits. A second argument is that texts are still produced by authors, albeit in less auratic and more varied forms. As we shall see, authorship may now also be articulated in a variety of new forms, due to software supported interferences in the production of texts.

In Author (2011) this framework is further developed by relating it to recent reinterpretations of the concept of 'mediatization' initiated by digital media. It is argued that digital media are used in ways which establish an array of new trajectories, owing to the hypertextual, interactive, and multimodal nature of digital media.

In the following sections it will be shown how such new trajectories appear in authorship and gate keeping. It will also be shown that the process of mediatization is heavily dependent on the biases and affordances of the specific media technologies that form the basis for mediatization processes.³ New media, in this case digital media, imply that new forms of mediatization emerge, and that new trajectories occur in the process of mediatization.

If the notion of 'the author' is emptied of its former meaning, there is also made room for new meanings and configurations. The same goes for the notion of the work, and its fixed relation to the recipient. The dissolution of the physical fixity of printed texts when digitized is often seen as implying dissolution of the work both as a creation of an author and as a static unity presented to the reader. Thus O'Donnell (1998:63) foresees a transition to a new world of 'authorless creations' where it is 'not quite clear who is the author of a collective, cumulative, and collaborative work of scholarship'. It remains however a paradox, that these ideas of the dissolution of the work as a unity are most forcefully articulated in the very same format which is considered obsolete.

Since the theme is presented from the perspective of the individual author as the creator of text it should be mentioned that we have always had texts which was not or could not be ascribed to an individual author.

This goes for many of the oldest and most famous text we have: The bible, and many religious books and writings. Juridical texts are also written by unknown individuals of behalf of institutions, states, kings, and Cesar's. The old folk-song traditions, 1001 nights and other folk tales, the Icelandic sagas are missing known authors as well. Authorship is also doubted when it comes to the writings of Homer, of Shakespeare and others. We cannot but acknowledge that the value of such works in the end depends on the works and not the author. However even if Homer is only a name constructed as a representation of the creator(s), a name is needed as a reference

to a particular story or set of related stories. The author has always been both the writer of a story, who may leave the story and a figure which remains related to the story told and maybe also to be identified as a figure told within the story. Many stories told throughout history also include frames and stories within stories implying a multiplication of the authorship-figures involved.

The weight we put on the individual as the author is a sign of modernity, but even in modern society we have a growing bulk of texts written by collectives, and anonymous contributors. This goes for many political programs and documents, for institutional texts of all sorts, and for most texts presented in radio and television. Professional communication is another area of complex authorship whether strategic oriented towards the public or more oriented to the market, as a kind of para-textual device which help to identify the products.

In science the individual authors are not expected to express themselves in the work, they are outside the work, while in some parts of the social sciences and in arts and humanities, the individual authors are maybe within the work, as interpreters.

The real state of the art is more complex than prescribed by the romantic notion of the Author genius. Even so, we may still claim that we are witnessing a profound historical change in authorship- and gate keeping relations – changes which are manifested in the use of digital media, and which expresses a variety of social and cultural needs to develop media with these properties. Still it can be argued with Burke (1998:202) that authorship may survive because of the need to mark the specificity of any single text in the universe of texts.

The author as a position between individuals and the text

The position of the author may now – perhaps as in preprint-cultures – be conceptualized as an open or empty space for changing constellations of producers, which themselves may be created as avatars. That is, as in the original Hindu sense of ‘incarnations of ideas coming down to us from above’, or in a more mundane fashion, as materialized products of our imagination.

In the literature on digital media, ‘the avatar’ is simultaneously used 1) to represent the player in a game or in a fictive world, 2) for the role of the avatar in the game/world, and 3) as a tool for the player (e.g. Linderoth 2005). Even if the usage is normally restricted to computer games and worlds, the notion clearly refers to the relationship between the person as individual (with a proper name), as author (with a user name), and as the imaginative and narrated position of the author within the story, which is a tool for the author residing outside the story. This basic relationship is independent of whether the avatar is designated as an image, as an icon, or as text.

O’Donnell (1998) considers the avatar slightly different as the instantiation or materialization of the word as sound, as written, printed or electronic (digital) form. Even the spoken word is an avatar. Still the main aspect is the (different forms of) material incarnation.

Bailenson et al. (2008:77) define the avatar as a ‘three dimensional digital representations of people in a shared digital space’. What they have in mind is rather two dimensional, visual screen representations of a three dimensional space. The crucial difference to former types of remote communication is that the digitization allows to ‘systematically filter the physical appearance and behavioural actions of their avatars in the eyes of their conversational partners.’ Important here is that the term ‘filter’ covers all sorts of production and editing of the digital representations of people. The relation between the individual person and the avatar is itself a variable, that is: the creation of the avatars’ appearance and actions can be made a distinct part of individual messages and not defined by the medium. Of course, digital media are also storage media thus allowing the storage of figures for later retrieval, but the stored figure remains editable.

The very same repertoire for roles and functions of an avatar, which is available for the visual representation, is also available for the textual representation. Thus the role and function of the avatar is not ultimately dependent on the appearance, but on the agency as connector between the individual and the space of communication.

Whether the avatar is created as a two or three dimensional representation, as photorealistic imitation, a purely artificial drawing (like in Second Life and most games) or as morphed blends of such formats is a matter of genre. In this respect it makes no difference whether the avatar is articulated as an image in a visual or audio visual universe or as a textual figure in a textual universe or an aural figure represented by a voice in a digital universe.

This does not mean of course that there are no significant differences between textual and other forms of representations. The position of the avatar, however, on digital platforms is the same whether he is enacted as connected to an author of text or a painter of an image.

If a person in face-to face communication appears and acts as somebody else, he is an actor, a narrator or a traitor who lies to you about who he is. The relation may be complex, but there is no avatar, as there is no separation in time and space between the person and his figure. The position of the avatar as a disembodied figure is thus established as a necessity because of the gap between the writer and the written text. The ways it is done, however depends in some respects to the particular properties of different media.

The relationship just described depends on the fact that the author (a name on the book) and the user (a name on the screen), who are both external to the universe (the work), and their representations within the universe (the position and actions of the narrator), as well as the universe itself are separate from their human creator and readers. This separation is a constitutive property of texts, images and other forms of externalized means of communication. To ask 'Who wrote this text?' and 'Who made this image?' is different from asking 'Who is speaking?'

The speaker is embodied without externalized mediatization and always intimately connected to his speech. The speaker needs to be present when he presents, while the author is always separate from his work, connected only by a sign, his name, as a representation of his identity and rights concerning the text. The author is a constructed representation to be declared by the signification of a name supported by various para-textual devices.

The French hermeneuticist, Paul Ricoeur, once described this gap as a leap that made way for the transition from orality to scripturality, from memoirs to history (Ricoeur 1999).

Modern mass media have rendered authorship a much more complex system of authors, editors, instructors, producers, and co-producers, but it still maintains a basic orientation towards the declaration of authorship. Depersonalization – ignoring the names of those who produced the texts and images – more frequently occurs in text production within business and public institutions still maintaining the claim of authorship on behalf of that institution corporation.

With texts and images there are always a gap, a separation in time and space, between the creator and the creation. This is a separation that must always be bridged, and is the gap that allows for changes and variations in configuration. What is new, then?

With digital media the character of the separation is changed, because online communication may be both textualized and synchronous, meaning that the separation in time between the production and the reading of the text may be minimized, whereas – in contrast to the spoken word – the disembodiment and the text remain.

What happens on the internet may be seen as a further expansion of connections between individuals and texts, mainly in filling the author and text positions, but often also including the reader or user positions. This process is also accompanied by the development of new kinds of paratextual, intertextual, and hypertextual devices, as the formerly abstract relations are materialized and turned into digitized software sequences, making them to texts on par – and interfering – with the primary texts, which are also digitized. In this process, new kinds of authorship emerge, followed by changes in the relations between the author, the narrator, the narrative, the text, and the interpretations of the recipients.

With the dissolution of both the normatively and materially fixed relationship of author-name-work, the issues of originality and authenticity are also put on the agenda, further enforced by the internet, which lowers the entrance barrier to the public sphere.

This lowering of the entrance barrier reveals that the system of authorship is connected to a system of gate keeping, and the constitution of audiences for whom the gates are kept by the intermediaries between author and the reader.

In the following paragraphs, I will present a set of new types of authorship, as examples of new genres and new trajectories on the internet, bringing new dimensions into the process of mediatization.

New forms of authorship

Even if many texts on the internet may be ascribed to identifiable, individual authors, there is a growing array of textual expressions that cannot. Here, six types are identified. None is treated in depth. Instead, the argument focuses on their shared significance in establishing new trajectories, owing to the advent of, and incorporation of digital media in society.

1. Personal profiles and user names
2. Fictional and semi-fictional representations
3. Data doubles
4. Computer generated texts
5. Co-produced texts
6. Virally processed messages

3.1. Personal profiles and user names as self representation

The first category includes a variety of texts that do have an identifiable author (at least someone who knows his own authorship), while the text presents itself to the reader either in your own name or as created by more or less anonymous user names. Personal profiles represent a new form of textualized and public presence.

These sorts of texts evolve as a still-increasing variety of profiles, through which individuals access various, more or less public services on the internet. The very existence of such representations of oneself is a new phenomenon that is already considered trivial, which it probably is not.

If you enter an online discussion or chat forum, you will normally present yourself via a user name, which may be chosen in the specific situation, or related to the specific service. Often, you are allowed to, or even invited to reveal more information about yourself, still without necessarily giving your actual name, or other possible connections outside the service in question. You may enter other discussions and services with other user names and supplemental information, or you might enter the same service with a different user name on a different occasion. It is often assumed that this kind of anonymity influences the expression, arguments, and reasoning in such forums, that participants are more direct, emotional, and expressive, and recount things in ways they would not if they were writing under their actual name, or that they are more likely to present themselves in the most favourable way possible – not necessarily lying about themselves. One may also establish oneself under multiple user names, referring to one another, possibly conversing with each other, as if these represented separate individuals

Profiles come in multiples, as, over time, we edit existing profiles and produce new profiles on online chat and debate forums, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, eBay, Academia.edu, and elsewhere. In the case of Facebook you are assumed to use your own name, but in many other cases you create a separate username. Given the popularity of these services, it seems that during their lifetimes, people in the future will accumulate a series of such individual profiles, manifested by the articulation of their user names on an ever-growing number of sites. We might ask, what are the role, the impact, and status of these rapidly-expanding archives and reservoirs of publicly accessible profiles, which convey more or less anonymous communication about all

sorts of social, cultural, and political issues? Such profiles also add to the data doubles discussed below, as they are usually also stored by the service providers

Over the years, these profiles record your digital life story, which may be partially reconstructed in a variety of forms, for a variety of purposes, by all sorts of possible stakeholders, ranging from friends and family, old and new acquaintances, employers, and competitors, to public authorities, including the police.⁴

A particular instance is found in the use of life logging software (Allen, 2008) which aims at allowing the user to store any kind of trace and documentation of his or her life.

Furthermore, personal profiles are produced by almost everybody belonging to the educated middle class. What this will mean over time remains to be studied and analysed, but it is already a significant cultural trend that calls for a long-term perspective

There are parallels here to the previous use of pen-names, pseudonyms, anonymous authorship, and so forth, but there are also significant differences, the primary one being that user names, distinct from your legal name, are the norm, not an exception, for which there is a specific explanation. But also the still ever-growing number of representations throughout the lifetime of the individual constitutes a remarkable new trajectory to be further explored

Anonymity connects these profiles with more or less fictive profiles that might be created by a fictional character, an avatar, whether or not it conceals the fictional character. Thus a grey zone of anonymous, semi-anonymous, semi-fictional, and fictional profiles is established.

3.2. Fictional avatars

A second kind of profile develops as an intended semi-fictive presentation in games (e.g. first person shooters), and fictive presentations in virtual worlds, for example, as avatars in *Second Life*. We may not be very interested in the first person shooter's self-presentation, which is more or less completely defined by the game's producer, but there is a series of varying degrees of elaborative efforts, and of fictiveness of such avatars (or characters).

Second Life and similar virtual worlds reveal a field for the composition of the relationship between the individual who decides to create an avatar, by choosing a part of a name from a given matrix that strongly negates personal identification, and also by choosing – still from a given matrix – the clothing and appearance of the avatar to enter the fantasy world co-created by innumerable others.

When we read *Alice in Wonderland*, we may imagine we are part of the story, but we cannot share our imaginings with those of other readers. They do not have a user name in our universe, and do not occur as avatars. We simply cannot represent our imaginations in the same communicative space. This is what we can do in *Second Life*, but as it turns out, it seems to be very difficult to free the creative imagination. Many activities in *Second Life* are mimetic replicas of off-line affairs. Perhaps one lesson of *Second Life* is that most of us have difficulty inventing new fictional identities and worlds. Or perhaps we are only at the very early beginning of a new trajectory: Digital storytelling may evolve in many variants.

3.3. Data doubles.

At the outskirts of this landscape of more or less anonymous profiles, we also find a different series of profiles, those with which you present yourself to personal services, such as your bank, your insurance company, your doctor, the hospital, and public authorities – any of which may add to your profile, with information collected by 'cookies', by tracking your movements on a given site, and by the traces your surfing leaves on numerous servers. In a way, you are not presenting yourself, but you are represented, anyway. These representations are known as data 'doubles', (Haggerty and Ericson, 2000; Lyon, 2007), which may constitute images of the user quite different from what the user might believe. These doubles are constructed from the traces you leave behind on various servers when surfing the internet, or which are collected from your computer via cookies when visiting different sites.

Thus, these profiles and internet identities are – in contrast to the formerly mentioned types of identities – closely related to the various forms of information that we more or less automatically provide, as we surf the internet. Regarding face to face communication, Goffmann (1959) discussed expressions given and expressions given off, the latter being given via behavioural manners, clothing, facial expressions, and body language, of which we are not necessarily aware. He also introduced a distinction between more private and informal back stage behaviour and more public and formal front stage behaviour.

Meyrowitz (1985) introduced the notion of a middle region between Goffmann's front- and back- stages in his analysis of television, which differed from face-to-face communication, as it blended front-stage and backstage behaviour, while still including expressions given off, owing to the presence of voice, face, and body on screen. On the internet, everything is textualized. We are still giving off expressions, though of a different kind. We do so in the form of the informational traces left while surfing the internet. Since these traces of our digitized behaviours are always left when surfing, whether knowingly or not, they can be considered a new kind of – digital – expressions given off.

Thus we may regard the internet as a middle region, if only by admitting that it differs from the middle region of television as defined by Meyrowitz, because on the internet, 1) media users are able to enter the region, articulating their views and entertaining themselves, 2) the content is textualized (as written or recorded images and sounds), owing to its form as sequences of machine operative bits, 3) and may be edited and coded before being published, 4) may be stored and retrieved, recoded, and eventually further transmitted via overlapping networks (spread-cast), and finally, 5) because the expressions given unwittingly are given off as traces of your route and sampled collections of bits of information from your computer, mobile device, or your latest new digital gadget.

The expressions given off both knowingly and unknowingly are also of importance for a peculiar new kind of co-authorship, because, owing to these expressions, digital media can be responsive to the particular content of individual messages, capable of reacting to them, thus enabling the media to enter the discourse as a co-author. A rather simple example is found on Amazon.com, which suggests that you buy books others have bought, based on theirs and your former searches and purchases. It is possibly less known that Facebook, for instance, edits the news stream on your 'wall' by prioritizing the news items based on the activity level of the friends on your list, and various other more or less hidden criteria – e.g. richness of images – thus utilizing these unknowingly created, user-generated data. Facebook, like all such service providers, also provides a specific framework for your self-profiling, initiating the communication of specific messages among the users. Thus Facebook, secretly intervening, interpolates itself between the 'author' and 'editor' positions, depending on the individual messages and the previous activities of the users. This sort of practice utilizes the fact that the programming software and the content are expressed by the same binary alphabet as mechanically editable sequences.

Thus, even if the news items on Facebook appear to be written by identifiable authors, they are prioritized, and the profiles and self-representations are also structured by a co-authoring service provider. We might also add that, in the end, we do not know whether, or eventually how, either Facebook or our friends recirculate comments and status updates, thus making us co-authors of texts in an unpredictable array of contexts.

3.4. Computer generated texts.

As stated above, in contrast to older media, digital media may be sensitive to individual messages, and able to respond to them, but the capacities of digital media go further, as they also allow us to compose what we might call 'computer generated texts'. These are not really computer generated, but initiated by individual requests, blending information from a variety of

sources (databases), and therefore are texts that may only exist for the reader. Often, they are also created in ways you may be unable to overview or control. These differ from the previously-mentioned types of texts, in that they do not include a representation of the individual, the author, who initiates the production of the text.

You are the author, but you do not know what you produce. The result is a text that is not simply the product of your own intentions, but a product of a not-quite-foreseeable blend of the request and the reservoir exploited by the request. A basic form is the Google search; more elaborately, we have 'Google ads' responding to your searches without your knowing or asking, 'Google news', and 'Netvibes', which you may edit according to selected criteria. At what may be a more professional level, there is also a huge array of results of complex searches through extensive databases, and the crawling of the web according to a variety of parameters. These texts are the result of the use of search engines which may include resources far beyond what you can possibly utilize by means of former techniques. Within research and the remaining forms of scholarship, these sorts of textual corpora are produced in more systematic forms, based on a growing range of selective criteria, and may constitute a new field of 'web-based data collection' that includes a steadily growing array of methods for surveying the internet, be it for research-defined data, or for the study of 'real' web materials, as they are actually found on the internet as the products of all sorts of authorship.

Many such texts – initiated by individual requests to a reservoir of data resources – may only exist in a specific situation, and be known only to the individual making the request, while others may be published as they stand, or be incorporated into other published texts.

At the level of fiction, we may consider the development of hypertextual narratives based on extraction from any sort of reservoir of components that may be defined as a limited set of resources, but that might also be based on the whole array of heterogeneous material on the internet. A special set of these practices is sometimes discussed under the heading of 'remix culture', which is formed around existing cultural reservoirs, rather than created from the bottom up by individual minds.

3.5. Coproduced texts

A fifth configuration consists of *co-produced texts*, whether generated by crowd-sourcing processes (e.g. Wikipedia and the like) or other collaborative formats, whether asynchronous (e.g. blogs) or synchronous.

As with many others formats that unfold on the internet, crowd-sourcing also has its roots in pre-web history. The basic principle is that a question is posed to a wide audience, from which you want some sort of answer.

You may only need one answer – the right one – or you may want a collection of answers, which may be combined into a fuller and richer picture or a rich text, or you may want to take a poll, a survey, and so on. This sort of procedure is well-supported by the capacities of the internet, and we have seen a number of innovations in this genre. Most prominent is Wikipedia, the online encyclopaedia composed by a huge number of people who participate as amateurs, even if they are professionals in the field to which they contribute. One of the arguments is that the internet allows the crowd to not only provide and edit the information, but also to maintain high quality. The world is less than ideal, and Wikipedia has had to install its own gate keeping structures.

Since the Wikipedia-texts are produced as granular units, bit by bit, so to speak, this also reveals that the gate keeping process can now be blended into, and synchronously integrated into the writing process, thus disturbing the clear distinction of these processes, and mingling the system of authorship with the system of gate keeping.

Still, if the crowd – the group of authors that establishes itself as such by their individual decisions to contribute – is large enough, and motivated by some shared spirit, they may produce significant results. In the case of Wikipedia, it is possible to trace the individual contributions,

including those of contributors whose only work has been to eliminate errors (a very specialized kind of authorship, one might say) or to interpolate some pieces between whole texts and small bits of information. In print media this would often be the work of a copyeditor or an editor, whose contributions would remain hidden, while such contributions are recorded as distinct efforts in the Wikipedia-log. There is also a difference in the organization of the work, as the copyeditor works on behalf of the author or publisher, while the intervention on Wikipedia is the result of an individual decision made after the publication of the text. The notion of authorship is furthermore blurred as the text is edited over time: The 'same text' acquires a growing array of authors. Each article in the encyclopaedia is thus the outcome of a specific and ever-changing system of authors.

In Bruns (2006) this form of authorship is described as 'produsage', (with an 's'), where users produce their own texts, but in the case of Wikipedia we have a more traditional constellation, insofar as users are concerned: The majority of users are not producers, but only readers. It is the structure of the author position that is peculiar. The second aspect that of the authors being amateurs, is an independent variable. These two dimensions should not be conflated.

There are other sorts collaborative texts produced differently, such as joint writing in groups, or the creation of texts composed of separately produced units, as in a traditional anthology or magazine. Collaborative texts may also appear without author names.

One may consider the blog a relatively traditional kind of individual author-produced text, though frequently, the blog unfolds around a principal writer who also functions as editor or moderator, with commentators producing an ongoing, text-based conversation, which both adds the joint efforts of several people, and postponing the finalization of text, perhaps not making it never-ending, but making its termination unpredictable.⁵

Collaborative texts may be produced asynchronously (e.g. blogs) or synchronously. They may be produced by people who know each other, or who do not. They may live in different periods, as may someday be the case with Wikipedia texts, and other kinds of indefinitely edited and ever ongoing writings.

3.6. *Viral spread and remix*

A sixth configuration of the 'author' position relates to the recirculation, as *viral spread and remix of content* also including user generated content. The phenomenon referred to here is not simply the singular articulation, but the aggregated production and recycling of messages which may acquire new meanings during the viral spread through which the author-position is constantly added new contributors.

Viral communication is nothing new. This is the form of rumours, hype and gossip which have always travelled throughout society via more or less undetectable 'fast-speed' connections. But the genre has changed from being mainly a 'word of mouth' to be a 'word of mouse' based on the mechanized copying and spread of the textualised forms of everyday small talk ranging from SMS, e-mail and online chat forums, and exploding via social network sites, such as Myspace, LiveJournal, Orkut, Cyworld, and Facebook. In some countries, and in some instances, Twitter also contributes to this.⁶

In Denmark, the previous government's newly appointed minister of internal affairs, a ministry that was primarily focused on restricting immigration, in March 2011 openly declared that he did not want immigrants who would not assimilate, and fully identify themselves with Danish norms and values – whatever these values might be. In the subsequent days, a rapidly-growing number of Facebook profiles appeared with the face of the minister replacing their own face. We have assimilated, they said: One face fits all.

The photo as such was not the message, the message lay in the criticism of the assimilation politics illustrated by replacing one's own Facebook profile portrait with that of the minister.

There is no doubt that this was a concerted, textualized action, forming a collective statement about the stand taken by the then new, now former, and rather young and controversial minister. Where did this message or these messages exist? First, it exists on many individual Facebook profiles. But the message was not to be read on any one profile, but only by being aware that this photo replaced the individual profile photos of many users. Even then, you would also have needed to be familiar with the original message.

The message did not simply exist in the heads of all the readers of these various profiles, the friends, as the articulation of a single author's statement, but gained new meaning and strength as it is repeated through a process of viral transmission, and finally appears in the mass media and in spoken conversations. We may call it viral authorship, as the viral distribution involves not simply distribution, but changes the message by the addition of increasing numbers of authors, making it a kind of petition, and sometimes a form of making somebody ridiculous.

However, Facebook stepped in, and closed down the pages with the photo of the minister, thus silencing the communication among the interconnected groups of friends 'downstairs'. This is censorship, and as such, nothing new.

As stated, Facebook did act as an intervening gatekeeper in this process, maintaining certain norms and moral values, not beforehand, in this case, but in response to the content of a series of individual messages. The method, simply to delete the user generated content is new and despotic. The system of authorship is changing, as is the system of gatekeeping.

From this perspective, what has been described as the lowering of the entrance barrier to the public sphere is part of a change of the gatekeepers' functions. The editorial gate keeping systems of mass media may now be bypassed, while a new, more diverse and complex system of gatekeeping, 'gate-watching' (Bruns, 2008), and 'cyber chiefs' (O'Neil, 2009) emerges from the everyday social interaction. At the same time, a new array of selection and presentation mechanisms emerges, including a full array of ever-evolving search engines (Halavais, 2009), web crawlers, browsers, and site-specific filtering and presentation mechanisms.

Conclusions

Previously, it has been argued that the use of digital media creates opportunities for new trajectories in the ongoing processes of mediatization.

We have already seen huge transformations in the institutionalization of media adapting to the internet and other digital media. Digital media also allow for a number of new business models, and most companies are now present in the public space of the internet. New trajectories are also established by the textualization of visual and auditory representations, and by new forms of written social communication. These include a number of new, near-synchronous, speech-like genres, such as online chat, texting, e-mail, micro-blogging, and discussion forums, filling the space between speech and writing, made possible by the reduction of the time separation between writing and reading a message. To these and other new trajectories opened by the use of digital media, new kinds of authorship and gate keeping may now be added.

The emerging patterns have previously been indicated in concepts such as 'reader-writer' (Landow, 1992), 'prosumer' (Toffler, 1980, the *Cluetrain manifesto*, 1998), 'authorless creation' (O'Donnell, 1998), 'co-author' or 'co-writer' (Finnemann 1999a), 'social peer-production' (Benkler, 2006), and 'produser' (Axel Bruns, 2008), but the new forms go beyond these concepts, while older concepts are also still alive and entering into new co-evolutionary processes in the forms of authorship, editorial practices, and gatekeeping.

Formerly, public access was guarded by, and limited by the mass media – only a few could expect to have a say in these media. Today, access to the public is, in principle, open to everybody. The internet is the first medium freely available to every single citizen and any civil society group.

While mass media adhered to a relatively small set of gate keeping and moderating criteria (based on the combination of quality criteria and market criteria for news, eventually supported

by public service criteria, or subsidizing state money, etc.), everybody can now publish according to his or her own combination of criteria. Even if everybody will never have a say in society at large, we have a fast growing variety of gate keeping and moderating criteria (managed by a vast number of new 'cyber chiefs'), thus changing the game of opinion building.

While a human editor was formerly responsible for the selection and presentation of news to the public, a variety of mechanized gate keeping mechanisms, such as search engines and a variety of mechanisms for the recirculation of content have now been added.

The positions of the author, the text, and the recipient are still relevant to the understanding of the production of meaning, though both the positions and the production chains have become more variable and complex. The linear mass media chain and the Author/Book/Reader paradigm, based on relatively stable positions and interrelations, are transformed into an ever-changing set of interrelationships in which each of the positions may have its own complex composition, while simultaneously the individuals may change their positions as writers, editors, and readers.

Many of these new forms of authorship have already initiated huge social conflicts and discussions on immaterial rights, and raised concerns about quality and identity. These are old issues, but it is not only the 'clothing' that has changed. The issues themselves must be reconsidered. Digital media are no longer new media, but our use of these media will continue to establish new trajectories in many years to come, as the only limit to digitization is that it is based on representations by the binary alphabet.

New trajectories raise new research questions which will need the further development of digital methods to be explored.

¹ The seemingly striking parallel between postmodern critique and early digital hypertext theory is further discussed in Author (1999a). For a more elaborate critical discussion of the idea of the death of the author and the need of a revival of the notion of authorship see Burke (1998).

² The 'inscription argument' implies that the incorporation of digital media in society is also accompanied by transformations in the roles of older media, and that the relation between democracy, science, rationality, and the free market is changed, but not necessarily broken down, and that modernity is modernized, rather than dissolved in postmodern immateriality (Author 1999b).

³ The *notion* of bias is used (after Harold Innis) to describe the characteristic and particular constraining properties of a medium. To the time/space biases addressed by Innis, one might add perceptual, cognitive, semantic, and even institutional biases. The *notion* of affordance is used (after J. J. Gibson) to describe a (favourable) correlation between a particular organism (e.g. a goat) and a particular environment (e.g. a slope), while there is no affordance in the relationship between an elephant and the slope. The *notion* of affordance is taken from Gibson's perceptual theory into *Human Computer Interaction Studies*, by Donald Norman, describing the idea that system design should afford the intended usages. While biases are properties of particular media, affordances are favourable relationships between a medium and a particular context of use. However, the term is also often (mis-)used to denote biases or simply properties of a medium or an interface.

⁴ In Denmark, the police recently (October 2011) revealed that they had searched the Facebook profiles of around 50 individuals who had been arrested during the World Climate Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, and who later complained of this, and won their case against the police, who are now appealing the case in a higher court. The purpose of this investigation was to show that the protesters' social connections on Facebook would reveal that they belonged to the usual suspects in the radical protest milieu. In this case, it seems that for the time being, the court will dismiss this sort of 'evidence'.

⁵ A young Danish writer, Olivia Nordenhof, recently published a novel in print. Immediately afterwards she continued the story on a blog in between other blog entries. <http://jegheddermitnavnmedversaler.blogspot.com/>. In an entry November 8 she announces that together with another author she has established a new blog villabor.blogspot.com where their novel characters meet.

⁶ The use of Twitter includes a) a mass-media-like function as a means of star-to-fan communication, that escapes the gatekeepers of mass media, b) a specialized, topic-defined news service, c) a specialized, event-defined news service, and d) peer-to-peer communication. There are some viral dimensions to all these functions, although you have to subscribe to be included. In some countries, as in Denmark, Twitter is used by very few.

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