A Companion to Media Authorship
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Edited by
Jonathan Gray
and
Derek Johnson
Contents

Notes on Contributors ix

1 Introduction: The Problem of Media Authorship 1
   Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray

Part I Theorizing and Historicizing Authorship

2 Authorship and the Narrative of the Self 23
   John Hartley

3 The Return of the Author: Ethos and Identity Politics 48
   Kristina Busse

4 Making Music: Copyright Law and Creative Processes 69
   Olufunmilayo B. Arewa

5 When is the Author? 88
   Jonathan Gray

6 Hidden Hands at Work: Authorship, the Intentional Flux, and the Dynamics of Collaboration 112
   Colin Burnett

Part II Contesting Authorship

7 Participation is Magic: Collaboration, Authorial Legitimacy, and the Audience Function 135
   Derek Johnson

8 Telling Whose Stories? Re-examining Author Agency in Self-Representational Media in the Slums of Nairobi 158
   Brian Ekdale

9 Never Ending Story: Authorship, Seriality, and the Radio Writers Guild 181
   Michele Hilmes
## Contents

10 From Chris Chibnall to Fox: *Torchwood*’s Marginalized Authors and Counter-Discourses of TV Authorship  
*Matt Hills*  
200

11 Comics, Creators, and Copyright: On the Ownership of Serial Narratives by Multiple Authors  
*Ian Gordon*  
221

### Part III Industrializing Authorship

12 “Benny Hill Theatre”: “Race,” Commodification, and the Politics of Representation  
*Anamik Saha*  
239

13 Cynical Authorship and the Hong Kong Studio System: Li Hanxiang and His Shaw Brothers Erotic Films  
*Stephen Teo*  
257

14 The Authorial Function of the Television Channel: Augmentation and Identity  
*Catherine Johnson*  
275

15 The Mouse House of Cards: Disney Tween Stars and Questions of Institutional Authorship  
*Lindsay Hogan*  
296

16 Transmedia Architectures of Creation: An Interview with Ivan Askwith  
*Jonathan Gray*  
314

17 Dubbing the Noise: Square Enix and Corporate Creation of Videogames  
*Mia Consalvo*  
324

### Part IV Expanding Authorship

18 Authorship Below-the-Line  
*John T. Caldwell*  
349

19 Production Design and the Invisible Arts of Seeing  
*David Brisbin*  
370

20 Scoring Authorship: An Interview with Bear McCreary  
*Derek Johnson*  
391

21 #Bowdown to Your New God: Misha Collins and Decentered Authorship in the Digital Age  
*Louisa Ellen Stein*  
403

22 Collaboration and Co-Creation in Networked Environments: An Interview with Molly Wright Steenson  
*Megan Sapnar Ankerson*  
426
Contents

23 Dawn of the Undead Author: Fanboy Auteurism and Zack Snyder’s “Vision” 440
   Suzanne Scott

Part V Relocating Authorship

24 Authoring Hype in Bollywood 465
   Aswin Punathambekar

25 Auteurs at the Video Store 485
   Daniel Herbert

26 Authorship and the State: Narcocorridos in Mexico and the New Aesthetics of Nation 506
   Hector Amaya

27 Scripting Kinshasa’s Teleserials: Reflections on Authorship, Creativity, and Ownership 525
   Katrien Pype

28 “We Never Do Anything Alone”: An Interview on Academic Authorship with Kathleen Fitzpatrick 544
   Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson

Index 551
Notes on Contributors

**Hector Amaya** is Associate Professor of Media Studies at the University of Virginia. He writes on the cultural production of political identities and the complex manner in which cultural flows and immigration are transforming the nation-state. He is the author of *Screening Cuba: Film Criticism as Political Performance During the Cold War* and *Citizenship Excess: Latinas/os, Transnationalism, Media, and the Ethics of Nation*.

**Megan Sapnar Ankerson** is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan. She has published in *New Media and Society*, *NMediaC*, and in collections including *Convergence Media History*, *Web History*, and *Digital Confidential*. She is writing a book that explores the commercial development of web design industries, production cultures, and aesthetics during the dot-com bubble.

**Olufunmilayo Arewa** is Professor of Law and Anthropology at the University of California, Irvine School of Law. Her writing focuses on the creative industries, copyright, and technology. She has written about various topics related to African-American music and Nigeria’s Nollywood film industry, and is currently working on two separate book projects on Nollywood and the global impact of African-American music.

**David Brisbin** has production designed over 20 movies ranging from the fiercely independent (*Drugstore Cowboy, My Own Private Idaho, In The Cut, A Single Shot*) to popular "tent-pole" fare (*The Twilight Saga: New Moon, The Day The Earth Stood Still*). He also directed a documentary feature about Cambodia and has taught production design at Capilano University in Vancouver and at the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts.

**Colin Burnett** is Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies at Washington University in St Louis. He is currently working on a book manuscript titled *The Invention of Robert Bresson: Auteurism and Cinephilia in Postwar France*. 
Kristina Busse is an independent scholar and active media fan who has published a variety of essays on fan fiction and fan cultures. She is co-editor of *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet* and *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*, as well as founding co-editor of *Transformative Works and Cultures*, an Open Access international peer-reviewed fan studies journal.

John T. Caldwell is Professor of Cinema and Media Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. His books include *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice, Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television, Production Studies: Critical Studies of Media Industries* (co-edited), *New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality* (co-edited), and *Electronic Media and Technoculture*.

Mia Consalvo is Canada Research Chair in Game Studies and Design at Concordia University in Montreal. She is the author of *Cheating: Gaining Advantage in Videogames*, and is currently writing a book about Japan’s influence on the videogame industry and game culture. She has held positions at MIT, Ohio University, Chubu University in Japan, and the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

Brian Ekdale is Assistant Professor of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Iowa. His research on new media, international mass communication, and media production has appeared in journals such as *New Media & Society, Information, Communication & Society*, and *Africa Today*. He also has directed and edited award-winning documentaries.

Ian Gordon is Associate Professor of History at the National University of Singapore. He is the author of *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture* and has edited *Comics & Ideology* and *Film and Comic Books*. Recent essays include “La bande dessinée et le cinéma: des origines au transmédia,” in *La bande dessinée: une médiaculture*.

Jonathan Gray is Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Author of *Watching with The Simpsons: Television, Parody, and Intertextuality; Television Entertainment; Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*; and, with Amanda Lotz, *Television Studies*, he is also co-editor of *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World, Battleground: The Media; and Satire TV: Politics and Comedy in the Post-Network Era*.

John Hartley is Professor of Cultural Science and Director of the Centre for Culture & Technology, Curtin University, Western Australia. He is co-founder of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries & Innovation, and Editor of the *International Journal of Cultural Studies*. Recent books include *Digital Futures for Media and Cultural Studies, A Companion to New Media Dynamics* (ed.), and *Key Concepts in Creative Industries*.

Daniel Herbert is Assistant Professor of Screen Arts and Cultures at the University of Michigan. His research is devoted to understanding relationships between the
media industries, geography, and cultural identities. His essays appear in several collections and journals, including Canadian Journal of Film Studies, Film Quarterly, Millennium Film Journal, and Quarterly Review of Film and Video.

**Matt Hills** is Reader in Media and Cultural Studies at Cardiff University in the UK. He is the author of five books, including Fan Cultures and Triumph of a Time Lord. Matt has published widely on cult media and fandom, and is currently completing a study of Torchwood for I.B. Tauris publishers.

**Michele Hilmes** is Professor of Media and Cultural Studies and Chair of the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her recent publications include Only Connect: A Cultural History of American Broadcasting (3rd edition), and Network Nations: A Transnational History of British and American Broadcasting. Her current project is Radio’s New Wave: Global Sound in the Digital Era, co-edited with Jason Loviglio.

**Lindsay Hogan** is a PhD Candidate in Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Her research interests include television and new media industries, stardom and celebrity, and qualitative audience studies. Her dissertation explores the ways in which young stars mediate the relationship between teen/tween identity practices and the economic adaptations of media conglomerates.

**Catherine Johnson** is Lecturer in Culture, Film, and Media at the University of Nottingham. She is the author of Branding Television and Telefantasy and co-editor of Transnational Television History and ITV Cultures. Her current research examines the broader creative industry sector that produces promotional material for the screen industries.

**Derek Johnson** is Assistant Professor of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where his work focuses on understanding production cultures, cultural hierarchies, and creative identities within the media industries. He is the author of Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries, and has published articles in journals including Media, Culture & Society, Cinema Journal, and Popular Communication. He is also co-editor of the forthcoming Intermediaries: Management of Culture and Cultures of Management.

**Aswin Punathambekar** is Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan. He is co-editor of Global Bollywood, and author of From Bombay to Bollywood: The Making of a Global Media Industry, and of articles published in various journals and anthologies.

**Katrien Pype**, an anthropologist, wrote her dissertation on the production of television serials in Kinshasa, and afterwards worked as a Newton Fellow on journalism and memory in Kinshasa. She is currently a MarieCurie Fellow at MIT and KULeuven, studying media in the lifeworlds of Kinshasa’s old aged. She is
Author of *The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa*.

**Anamik Saha** is a Lecturer in Communications Studies at the Institute of Communications Studies at the University of Leeds, where he had previously held an ESRC Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship. He has also held visiting fellowships at Trinity College (Connecticut), and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His work has been published in journals including *Media, Culture & Society*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, and *Popular Music in Society*.

**Suzanne Scott** is a Mellon Digital Scholarship Postdoctoral Fellow in Occidental College’s Center for Digital Learning + Research, and a board member of *Transformative Works and Cultures*. Her work has appeared in *Cylons in America: Critical Studies in Battlestar Galactica*, *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, *How to Watch Television*, and the Anniversary Edition of *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.

**Louisa Ellen Stein** is Assistant Professor at Middlebury College. Her work focuses on transmedia authorship, gender, and generation in media culture. She is co-editor of *Teen Television* and *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*. She is a Futures of Entertainment fellow and Book Review Editor for *Cinema Journal*. Her current book project, *Millennial Media*, explores digital authorship and fandom in the millennial generation.

**Stephen Teo** is Associate Professor and Head of Division of Broadcast and Cinema Studies in the Wee Kim Wee School of Communication and Information, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore. He is the author of *Hong Kong Cinema: The Extra Dimensions*, *Wong Kar-wai, Director in Action: Johnnie To and the Hong Kong Action Film*, and *Chinese Martial Arts Cinema: The Wuxia Tradition*. 
Introduction

The Problem of Media Authorship

Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray

Why write a book about media authorship when it seems that so much is already being said about it? Perhaps we would be better off turning to Facebook, for example, where our news feeds are often dominated by discussion of the creative practitioners behind popular culture and their significance to what we see on our screens. “David Cronenberg makes strange movies,” announced the first line of one article shared by one of the editors’ acquaintances.1 Just two items down, a picture from another friend mapped the writing staffs of many popular American television shows back to Joss Whedon as supposed father figure. Whedon reappeared in another friend’s post linking to a New York Times review of The Avengers whose title boldly announced “A Film’s Superheroes Include the Director,”2 and that linked to a slide show on “The Work of Joss Whedon.” Yet, Whedon’s star was dwarfed on this day – May 4th, or “Star Wars Day” to some – by many items discussing George Lucas, some of which extolled his virtues as a master storyteller, many of which expressed dismay with his “meddling” with his films, and many of which compared him to other franchise author figures such as Christopher Nolan, J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Suzanne Collins. Other posts debated or glowingly commended various newspaper columnists and media pundits’ comments from the morning or the night before. Yet another linked to the latest video by online auteur and actress Felicia Day. And while clicking on these links, many of the accompanying ads used their authors to sell: one sidebar, for instance, sold The Five Year Engagement as “from the producer of Bridesmaids,” while another announced The Lucky One as being “from the acclaimed bestselling author of The Notebook and Dear John,” and another for the new Walking Dead videogame offered a more complex authorial trail by noting that it was based both on the comic book series by Robert Kirkman and on the AMC television series. In this same feed, television scholar Jason Mittell even announced that he had just published a chapter (about television authorship,
Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray

no less!) of his book-in-progress, *Complex TV*, in an experiment in ongoing peer review, whereby Mittell encouraged readers to comment (thus, in some way becoming “co-authors”?) so that he could revise the book prior to publication in paper. Projects such as this call attention not only to the authorship of media, but also to how authorship is mediated, where the technologies and platforms that we use in the course of creativity seem to enable social and collaborative forms of cultural production. So while the news feed of a Facebook user who happens to be editing a book about authorship may certainly be shaped by a bit of self-selection, it seems reasonable to conclude at the very least that there’s a vast discourse about authorship already in circulation, and that perhaps this book is thus not needed to call our attention to the importance of media authors or media authorship.

What this book can do, however, is point to what often goes unspoken in all the discourses and issues of media authorship that surround us in everyday life. To see press or marketing for almost any item of media today without seeing the invocation of at least one author figure is rare. Yet each and every item carries with it the ghosts of authors not mentioned. *The Five Year Engagement* might be from the producer of *Bridesmaids*, for instance, but who directed it? Who wrote the script? One comment on a friend’s Facebook post about *Star Wars* Day alleged that *Star Wars* was taken largely from Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* while another noted *A New Hope*’s (1977) multiple borrowings from *Hidden Fortress* (1958). Discussions of adaptations often lead to accusations of “ruining” a pristine original and of textual infidelity, moreover, so to invoke “the acclaimed bestselling author” of *The Notebook* and *Dear John* is not only oddly to summon an author without a name, but is also to risk igniting concerns about poor adaptation, and a divergence from “the way the author intended it.” And behind each and every one of the above-mentioned texts, we could list at the least tens, and perhaps even thousands, of other faces of the author-as-hero, of individuals who contributed to the creation, envisioning, and realizing of the text, and yet whose names are not listed. If we examine *Star Wars*, for example, even beyond pointing out the obvious influences from Campbell and *Hidden Fortress*’s director, Akira Kurosawa, we might ask about the authorial power of other directors, writers, producers, cast, production designers, special effects designers, matte artists, sound designers, foley artists, and so on. Some of these figures have gained authorial or pseudo-authorial status in popular culture themselves, as with John Williams, the composer of the *Star Wars* music, Ben Burtt, the sound designer, or Carrie Fisher, a cast member who went on to become a writer and who has thus often been suspected to have written parts of the dialogue. Yet others remain untouted, except by the most loyal and informed fan and/or production communities.

On one level, the constant invocation of authors reveals a cultural fascination with them and with the super powers ascribed to them. The narratives – both fictional and non-fictional – that the media delivers become resources for so many discussions and thoughts in our waking and sleeping lives, making it only natural that we often find ourselves keen to find out who made them and how they
made them. The author as figure is often posited as the individual who created the product, he or she who can variously be thanked or blamed, and he or she who then “gave” it to us (witness the language of texts being “from” an author, as if a parcel in the mail). The author is thus imagined to stand at the gateway and threshold between creativity, innovation, wonder, and magic, and us – all of those experiencing and taking pleasure in media culture in the mundane spaces of everyday life. If we are to understand how that world of wonder and magic works, the author is often posited as the figure we must capture and study. Why wouldn’t we want to know not only who the magician is, but also how his or her tricks are performed?

On another level – lest all this talk of wonder and magic has readers crinkling their cynical brows – this widespread interest in authorship also reveals a cultural suspicion about precisely how magical they are. Instead of taking this whole system of creativity, mundanity, and the author-as-magician positioned in between for granted, we should see it as a discursive construct. Whose interests does it serve to see the world divided into the magical and the mundane, and if the author is the mediating figure, who has the power to create this figure and to install him or her on that threshold? What, in other words, is at stake in seeing authors in general as magicians, but what too is at stake in seeing any particular individual as an author-magician? As noted above, every nominated author has a wealth of ghost authors standing behind him or her, those whose names have not been invoked – whether by an ad campaign, a review, or a fan in question. What are the strategic reasons, then, to sell one author (“the producer of Bridesmaids”) in one setting, or another in another setting (“from the acclaimed bestselling author”)? Who gets to determine who “counts,” who argues over this, and why might we argue over it? What cultural work is the author’s name expected to do?

Let us follow up on the case of George Lucas briefly. When Lucasfilm or Twentieth Century Fox sell him as a remarkable author figure, they clearly have their reasons to do so. In a world full of many more movies than any one person could ever see, announcing that this movie is special, that it comes from a true visionary, aims to make any film of Lucas’ stand above others. In this sense, media authorship plays very similarly to the star system: a form of product differentiation cranked out of the marketing and promotion machines of Hollywood to distinguish product in a crowded marketplace. Of course, this similarity helps us to realize that it’s also not quite that simple, since Lucasfilm and Fox in fact sell the movie as multiply-authored, pointing to other members of the cast and crew whose work we are similarly encouraged to see as wholly unique, pathsetting, and magical. This poses actual challenges for those working on “a film by George Lucas,” as hierarchies need to be created of who gets to control what. If a whole host of people have supposedly unique visionary powers, how does one bring them all together? In any artform that requires collaboration – as with almost all forms of mass media – authorship will therefore require not just magical ideas but also no small amount of management. How do Lucas, Lucasfilm, and Fox ensure, in other
words, that John Williams can write his best music, Harrison Ford can offer his best performance, Lawrence Kasdan can write his best script, and so on, yet that they can still come together and form something that is not just a cacophonous collection of contrasting creative acts? But the management that these individuals and their marketing teams must perform is also discursive. For beyond the actual acts of who does what, Lucas, Lucasfilm, and Fox (and now Disney) will encourage us to see some authors as more active than others. Hierarchies of control and value are not merely required on set: they are required in the press and in the popular imagination regarding what creativity is.

Witness here the battles between Lucasfilm and some Star Wars fans. The latter have often contested the idea that Star Wars “belongs” to Lucasfilm, and have thus felt free to author it themselves. Some fans create fan film or fan fiction that add new characters to the mix, and that transform other already-existing characters or events. To do so is to challenge the notion of Lucasfilm and Lucas having a monopoly on the realm of magic, as the fans now position themselves on the threshold of magic and mundanity, and allow themselves freedom of movement, rather than seeing themselves wholly as receivers of the gifts from Lucasfilm-approved authors. At times, Lucasfilm has “allowed” this by not challenging the fans over the legalities of their actions, and usually these allowances come when Lucasfilm feels its economic and semiotic interests are not challenged inasmuch as it doesn’t stand to lose revenue or control over what the Star Wars franchise means and what it does. However, when their interests are challenged, as with much of Hollywood, it has then quickly invoked legal discourses of authorship, rights, and ownership in order to deny authorial rights to fans. Moreover, its approach is not simply reactive, as it also invests considerable capital – through press junkets, “making of” specials, Blu-ray bonus materials, licensed merchandise and books, and so on – in determining exactly who counts as an author, and who counts how much, so that when and if battles do occur, the battles take place on an uneven playing field.

Authorship is therefore about control, power, and the management of meaning and of people as much as it is about creativity and innovation. That makes authorship one of the more vital processes in modern media and culture. The author is a node through which discourses of beauty, truth, meaning, and value must travel, while also being a node through which money, power, labor, and the control of culture must travel, and while frequently serving as the mediating figure standing between large organizations (such as Lucasfilm or Fox) and the audience. No wonder academics and citizens alike are all endlessly fascinated by authors. And no wonder we all discuss authors so frequently, since arguments about creation, beauty, the audience, production, the industrialization of culture, labor, and flows of meaning and cash will often be couched in terms of authorship.

With the author performing so many actual and discursive roles in society, so much is thus at stake in understanding how authorship works, and authorship is a key entry point into examining much of how media culture works. In an age of new and digital media, these issues become even more interesting.
briefly discussed the authorship of something like the *Star Wars* franchise above, let us also consider the portal through which we arrived at such a discussion, and ask what authorship looks like on something like Facebook. Who authors our Facebook feeds or our Twitter streams? These are massively collaborative productions that defy notions of singular heroic authorship, and that also require us all the more to ask questions of management, by organizations (Facebook), by individuals (Mark Zuckerberg, or an individual Facebook friend), by policy (Facebook’s notorious, and ever-changing, privacy settings that determine what we see and can’t see), and by algorithm and code. Even individual status updates or tweets quite often defy simple notions of authorship, as they might on the one hand combine the poster’s words with another’s (retweeting or embedding), and/or on the other hand frame whatever is linked in a way that adds the voice of the poster to the linked-to subject’s words.

Ultimately, then, while the last hundred years or so have been a period of intense fetishization of and dogged belief in the singular author in Western societies, with the likes of Facebook, Twitter, Final Cut Pro, blogs, YouTube, and Pinterest making collaborative, fused, remixed authorship all the more obvious and normative, it now strikes us as a particularly opportune time to stop and take stock of exactly what an author is and how authorship works. Along with enabling everyday authorship, perhaps the digital era has cleared away some of the Romanticism and belief in magic that has often doomed discussions of the author to beatification. Such is our hope, and such is the reason for us offering a collection of new statements about media authorship now.

Within academia, considerable debate has raged about what authors are, how much authority they have over a text (or how much author is in authority), how much power our practice as analysts accords them, how much power we should or should not accord them, what their relationship to the text is, what they do for and to texts, and what is at stake in studying them. The chapters in this collection revisit these questions to offer fresh answers. Whether we care about art or industry, creation or reception, production or consumption, text or theory, culture or aesthetics, or all of the above, the author naggingly reappears as a problem to be solved. If authors need “solving,” though, this also suggests that fresh answers, theories, and understandings of how authorship work may have significant knock-on effects for our understandings of how art, texts, production cultures, audiences, power, identity, aesthetics, and meaning work.

We have endeavored to collect voices from across various disciplines and addressing various media products. Thus, chapters cover authorship of everything from the films of Robert Bresson to the videogames of Square Enix, from Disney’s institutional authorship of Hilary Duff to collaborative cultures of making music, from the video store clerk as author to the nation-state as author of itself and of citizens, from amateur video storytelling in the slums of Nairobi to the business strategies of advertising and promoting Bollywood, from authorship on Twitter to authorship in the board room, and from the penning of comic books to practices
of authorship by fans, music coordinators, production designers, cast members, academics, and more. Authorship has more often been studied in highly contained settings, and yet our goal in assembling such a diverse selection of subjects, writers, and disciplinary frameworks has been to eke out some grander truths of authorship through comparison. We have no definitive answer of what an author is, no easy statement to share in this introduction that could be underlined or highlighted and that could thus spare the reader the journey ahead. Rather, we hope that the chapters that follow will challenge readers to think of the many different ways in which authorship works: as a mediator of aesthetics and meaning, as an act of power and control, as industrial strategy, as something to be practiced, something to be contested, and something to be won, awarded, denied, hoarded, and/or shared. All in all, this means that the business of solving the problem of media authorship is as much about asking critical questions as it is about providing concrete answers.

Chapter Summaries

While each of the chapters in this book offers its own unique perspectives on media authorship, a shared set of research questions unites them all. While the popular discourses of our Facebook feeds (and other sites where authorship discourses are constructed) seem to suggest that we know it when we see it, the chapters comprising this collection first and foremost problematize the question of what authorship is. This means not just accepting tacit definitions of practices and tacit assumptions about what constitutes creativity, but also engaging in critical thought about how all that cultural production is imagined and made meaningful. Through what discourses and cultural processes is media authorship produced? How does the authorship of different media – and the mediation of authorship more broadly – demand that we give our attention to the contexts in which creative agents and their practices unfold and are made culturally intelligible? This means thinking not just about where media authorship comes from, but also who that authorship is constructed around, how, by whom, in what kinds of cultural spaces, and for what purposes. Authorship is therefore not just a question of art and individual expression, but also of social and institutional structures that govern cultural production, enabling, compelling, and authorizing some forms while constraining others.

By interrogating authorship as culture – and thereby, as something we can both construct and deconstruct – we are able to do more than legitimate creative genius worthy of note in those Facebook feeds; instead, we can explore how the attributions of authorship and claims of authority we make give specific value and meaning to the practices, creative or otherwise, of mediated everyday life. We can conduct grounded research into how authorship is rendered visible and invisible. We can understand how authorship is not a natural phenomenon, but a set of
Introduction

Cultural values and concerns variably mobilized in different historical moments and geographic locales. We can think about how authorship has helped constitute the hierarchies between media, considering how literature and film have been legitimated through claims of the genius and vision of individual auteurs compared to forms of cultural production marked as more commercial or collaborative in television, videogames and emerging digital media – in which competing claims to authorship have now worked to construct new structures, practices, and ideals of creativity. In interrogating its relationships with struggle and power, we might not be able to define authorship in a neat, systematic way, but we can start to make sense of the culture that informs it and that it supports in turn. Asking questions about authorship, rather than just producing new claims about authorship, is the best way to get at that culture.

With these shared questions, the authors showcased in this book were able to study authorship in a wide variety of contexts and yet produce a collective intervention. The answers they offer in the attempt to solve the problem of authorship feature a diversity of tones and registers, but from this diversity of approaches and case studies comes a harmony in which the most valuable ideas reinforce one another. Again, this collective contribution is not a definition of media authorship, but something that goes beyond while leaving the topic an open question; instead of a single definitive statement, the book works as a whole to propose a plan of how media authorship might be further problematized in both creative practice and scholarly examination of it. From that outlook, media authorship can be theorized and historicized as a discursive, legal, and practical phenomenon; it can be contested as a site of struggle between multiple parties claiming authority; it can be industrialized within structures and institutions of cultural production; it can be expanded to include new labor categories, emerging sites of creativity, and shifting understandings of the audience; and it can be relocated outside of the commonsense realm of creativity in spheres like retail, marketing, the nation-state, and even the divine.

The first section of the book, Part I: Theorizing and Historicizing Authorship, therefore, aims to demonstrate what that theorization and historicization of authorship might look like. On the level of theory, the chapters in the section all extend from a shared concern with authority and agency, seeking to understand how authorship has been deployed as a concept to mediate tensions between the two. On the level of history, these chapters seek to understand how creative practices are themselves dynamic, changing phenomenon, but together they recognize that what practices count as authorship in what contexts has also been a matter of flux and change.

In the first of these chapters, John Hartley seeks to distinguish between creativity and authorship, arguing that in historical usage the term “author” “never was a simple individual, but one who channels system-level or institutional authority into text” (original italics). While his chapter is far reaching – tying authorship to emergence, public sphere, industrialization, and property rights – Hartley begins, in fact, with
the figure of God as the authority from which creativity was derived and made powerful through the idea of authorship. In conceiving of authors as agents of systems more so than sources of individual intention and agency, Hartley casts a critical eye on the “narrative of the self” and the way that do-it-yourself publishing and social media have everyone responsible for participating in authorship. Kristina Busse follows up these concerns with an exploration of the ethical basis of authorship, asking how and why it matters who the author behind a text might be. Surveying literary understandings of the author, as well as those of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, she focuses specific questions of authorial responsibilities, privileges, and identities in specific contexts of production and reception. From examinations of hipster racism to fandom, she argues that it matters not just who is authoring culture, but also how the context we have for making sense of that authorship matters. Complementing these ethical perspectives, Olufunmilayo Arewa follows with an examination of authorship from a legal perspective, equally concerned with the history of copyright as with musical forms as well as race and ethnicity. Arewa argues that Western traditions of classical music have sat at odds with models of creativity based in collaboration, borrowing, or copying in African-based musical forms like blues, jazz, gospel, soul, and rap. Uncovering the ways in which hierarchies of race and class have shaped authorial rights, she makes a compelling argument about the inadequacy of copyright and issues a call for alternative structures that “recognize borrowing as a norm and incorporate better delineation of the scope of acceptable borrowing and mechanisms for compensation that better recognize the reality of sharing and collaboration in creation.”

Jonathan Gray follows this critique of copyright’s racial hierarchies with a similar attempt to uncover the contingency and selectiveness of authorship discourses. Seeking to understand the temporality of authorship, Gray sees authority over a text as a something of a moving target, constructed in specific discursive circumstances but reconfigurable and reconstructed in successive moments. His argument, ultimately, centers upon the idea of authorial flux, in which clusters of authorship and authority are continuously built and rebuilt. Equally concerned with this idea of flux is Colin Burnett, who problematizes the notion of fixed authorial vision and worldview in examining the collaborations between film director Robert Bresson and his frequent cinematographer Léonce-Henri Burel. Studying production materials, Burnett theorizes an “intentional flux” in Bresson’s work that can account for the historical and social conditions in which individual creators’ intentions are negotiated and in which solutions to creative problems are found. Pointing to the “hidden hands at work” in film as well as television and videogames Burnett explodes the concept of intention often assumed as the basis for authorship while paying close attention to the specific choices made by human agents working in social relations. Together, these five chapters push us to understand authorship in terms of shifting social relations, specific contexts, and systems of power.
The second section of the book, **Part II: Contesting Authorship**, builds upon these theoretical interventions to posit authorship as a field of contestation. This means correcting utopian rhetoric about creativity and free expression – particularly in a digital age defined by social media and participatory culture – and engaging in questions of conflict based in ownership, creative constraints, competing claims to authority, and above all, marginalization within the kinds of hierarchies that so often mark the cultures of media authorship. In concert with one another, these chapters examine authorship as something asserted amid the power relations of industry and other social institutions, in which multiple claims to authorship circulate in tension with one another.

Looking at the ways in which contemporary media culture is understood to be a site of co-creativity, participation, and collaboration on the part of consumer-users, Derek Johnson considers the politics of collaboration and asks how the discursive imagination of audiences in those terms reinscribes them and their creative practices within dominant hierarchies and markers of legitimacy. Putting the gendered devaluation of toy/television property *My Little Pony* in tension with claims of authorship surrounding producer Lauren Faust and the franchise’s participatory audience, Johnson complements Foucault’s notion of the “author function” with an “audience function” in which certain gendered, sexed, and aged audiences serve as a prop in the process of constructing and imagining authorial legitimacy. Brian Ekdale continues this corrective to the utopian rhetoric of participation, arguing that marginalization and difference persist even when removed from the industrialized realm of Hollywood. Focusing on young producers of non-profit self-representational media in Nairobi slums, Ekdale describes authorship as a battle between creativity and constraint where personal stories are not produced or owned by individuals or communities, but “constructed at the intersection of individual autonomy, personal histories, existing stories, and circumstances.” Even in self-representational media, therefore, authorship is something fought for, negotiated out of the constraints of production.

Returning to the commercial realm, Michele Hilmes offers in her chapter a historical examination of how claims of authorship have been attributed and arbitrated in the broadcasting industry by trade organizations such as the Radio Writer’s Guild. In addition to its relevance to debates about seriality and writing for broadcast media today, Hilmes’ history offers insight into how authorship has been asserted in the face of institutional structures and forms aimed at effacing the work of creativity. In radio broadcasting, she identifies the emergence of what she calls “streaming seriality,” in which ongoing production and the lack of a closed, individual text has troubled traditional notions of originality and authorship. Moving from broadcast history to the contemporary moment, Matt Hills explores what he calls discourses of “counter-authorship,” wherein competing claims to television authorship emerge in response to industry power relations. Hills argues that “[a]nalyzing processes of TV authorship in this manner means starting not from the end-product’s credits, but rather addressing the
journey whereby a range of authors are effectively written out, or opt out, along the way.” Offering a case study of the BBC series *Torchwood*, and the authorship claims made by and attributed to figures like “absentee landlord” Russell T. Davies, showrunner “tenant” Chris Chibnall, and US networks like FOX, Hills suggests that the identities of channels, programs, and author cannot all be aligned without compromise, contestation, and struggle. Closing this section is Ian Gordon’s analysis of multiple authorship in comic books, wherein he argues that industry structures have been set up to deny the authorship of figures like Joe Shuster, Jerry Siegel, and Jerry Robinson with moral claims to characters like Superman and Batman, in favor of contractual obligations to other parties. Gordon offers an account of moral authorship, legal limbos, and negotiation over corporately owned resources shared by for-hire labor over long periods of time. In positioning authorship as a site of multiplicity, and offering a detailed account of how rights to authority are assigned, Gordon – like each of the authors in this section – understands media authorship as a site of cultural tension.

While many of the above chapters recognize authorship as a phenomenon made meaningful in and by industrial forces, the third section of the book, *Part III: Industrializing Authorship*, works to push these observations further, focusing on how corporate structures shape and are shaped by authorship. This means that these chapters aim to rethink some of our common assumptions about authorship, rejecting ideas that it might be tied to art free of industrial constraints and that the most commercial of popular culture is not authored in its market-driven purpose. Instead, these chapters put authorship in direct relation to the commodification of culture and the reification of social identities; they situate collaboration as a site of compromise and institutional control; they think about authorship as a kind of identity suited to product differentiation; and above all, they consider authorship as a strategy and practice tied up in commercial and institutional demands.

To open this discussion, Anamik Saha explores how, in the commodification of production by the culture industries, diasporic subjects find their work undermined and their alternative or oppositional narratives of cultural difference reified. Drawing from an ethnography of British South Asian cultural production in the theater, and critiquing works of cultural studies that would divorce study of texts from their context of production, Saha argues that non-white playwrights and theater companies working in the West find their work impeded and subverted in such a way as to demand that we consider those industrial structures as authorial forces in and of themselves. To position *industry as author*, Saha argues that “the increasingly standardized and rationalized processes of contemporary cultural production limit and restrict creative freedom and that thereby takes on authorial powers in itself.” Following Saha, Stephen Teo too seeks to understand what happens when cultural production occurs within highly rationalized systems, exploring the work of film director Li Hanxiang in the Shaw Brothers studio system of 1950s and ’60s Hong Kong. Unsatisfied with approaches based in either auteurism or collective collaboration and seeking to account for non-Western
modes of cinematic authorship, Teo theorizes Li’s erotic films at Shaw not as Romantic authorship, but as Cynical authorship, where Li was no solitary genius, but someone whose authorship was tied up in the “problem of the system.” Situating Li’s authorship in relation to both studio and generic constraints, Teo’s understanding of collaboration marks negotiated compromise not in opposition, but instead as an “innate element of authorship.”

Moving from film studios to television networks, Catherine Johnson’s chapter considers authorship as a site at which conflicts in ownership and authority in broadcasting and television programming are enacted. She sees the branded television channel as a central paratext that, through “idents” and other markers, constructs an identity for television programming, authoring it in the process. Authorship, in this sense, is an “augmentation” of pre-existing programming and our experience of it – something that shapes it and makes it identifiable in certain ways. By tracing a history of network branding into the cable/satellite era and also into the contemporary moment of digital convergence, Johnson shows how the branding of MTV, FOX, and ITN offers a clear authorial voice and has attracted audiences in service of those networks’ commercial needs. Similarly concerned with branding is Lindsay Hogan, who in her chapter examines the “star machine” with which Disney has cultivated a stable of young female stars and used them to target “tween” audiences. This puts authorship in tension not just with branded corporate identity, but also with branded star texts – the intertextual tensions of which Disney seeks to maintain and manage in their branding practice. Focusing on the discrete motivations and strategies within different subsidiaries and divisions in the Disney empire, Hogan paints a picture of corporate struggle to maintain dominance, figuring that corporate authorship as “a constant process of meaning production among various groups (or authors) competing for control.” Corporate hierarchies and brands play a crucial role in Mia Consalvo’s chapter as well, where she considers how Square Enix, the Japanese developer of the Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest videogame franchises, have approached the creation, sales, distribution, and marketing of their product on a transnational level. Consalvo situates corporate authorship not just with globalization, but specifically within a disposition of cosmopolitanism that positions hybrid subject positions as the ideal. This corporate cosmopolitanism, she argues, provides a “polymorphic vision” in which games are conceived of as something to be reauthored for different contexts. These critical studies of the institutions of authorship are also complemented by an interview with Ivan Ask with, a producer of transmedia narratives and platforms. This interview gives insight into how authorship might figure into corporate strategy defined by opportunity cost, management principles, architectures, and discourses, and the value of controlling access.

If authorship has been the subject of competing claims and monopolistic seizures, we offer in the fourth section of the book, Part IV: Expanding Authorship, a lens through which the boundaries of authorship might be rethought and made to be more expansive. Indeed, if authorship can be considered a kind of hoarding
of creative and cultural authority, this section might be imagined as the reality-TV-style intervention into that oftentimes problematic habit. These chapters each work to bring an inclusiveness and diversity to our recognition of creative contributions in the spaces and work routines of cultural production, often in opposition to auteurism and other dominant discourses of authorship that would deny them. Together these chapters expand the range of sites and practices at which we might look for creativity, authority, and legitimacy. Beyond pointing to new authors, however, these chapters are also concerned with theorizing the creative pleasures of collaboration and putting these in tension with the conflicts highlighted in the Part III of the book. Of particular concern here is the role of the audience, both as a site of interaction and collaboration with professional media workers (and the discourses surrounding them), and as a site of authorial activity on their own.

John Caldwell looks to expand our study of authorship by looking at below-the-line labor of craft and technical workers in Hollywood production cultures, where expressive control and creative identities might be constructed and operate in opposition to those of recognized auteurs at the above-the-line level of writers, directors, and producers. Looking at contracts, industry policies, and practices of paying overworked labor in “authorial capital,” Caldwell sees authorship as something dictated by industrial structures but also produced and negotiated through professional rituals and everyday work routines. Considering the claims that workers make to authorship through texts from sizzle reels to tweets, Caldwell considers below-the-line labor as an “authorship brokerage” in which workers try to affirm their creative agency even as it is blurred and erased by top-down forces. Caught himself within these forces, professional production designer David Brisbin offers his own perspective on these issues by focusing our attention on one specific site of labor ignored by these traditional above-the-line auteurist claims. But rather than place production design in tension with auteurism, Brisbin notes that “[e]mbedded in the idea of the auteur is shared authorship” (original italics), figuring the relationship between director and production designer as a marriage. In provocatively suggesting that this marriage often involves directorial affairs with visual effects supervisors, however, Brisbin captures the tensions in these collaborative relationships as new industrial relationships form in response to new technologies, and furthermore, he identifies production design as a site of continued dependence on the part of directors, as they that design can imagine the worlds and spaces increasingly in demand by participatory audiences.

Louisa Stein’s chapter follows this possibility to a logical conclusion by placing additional creative agents in the role of collaborator: both actors in the professional realm, and fan audiences in the realm of grassroots cultural production. Examining the cult television series Supernatural, Stein explores how its authorship cannot be understood without reference to the social networking platform of Twitter, which has been used both by recurring cast member Misha Collins as a means of performing a particular counter-authorial identity, and by fans to allow them the
ability to participate in the ongoing co-creation of that identity. Stein reads Collins’ performance as a marginal site at which fans might be allowed to play, and in doing so, “the mostly female fans perform and thus author their own fan personae as transgressive, aggressive, and overtly sexual, yet intellectual, digitally skilled, and self-aware.” Yet Stein complicates this performed authorship by putting it in tension with the disciplinary power of writers and producers, identifying a push and pull between the authorized and the unauthorized in this new frontier of co-creation. The audience also figures as a primary concern for Suzanne Scott, who looks at how the authorial identity of Zach Snyder, director of *Watchmen* and *Sucker Punch*, has been tied up in how audiences are both imagined into and excluded from hegemonic forms of cultural production. Scott identifies Snyder as one of several “fanboy auteurs” who is figured to straddle the line between professional producer and amateur fan, negotiating several cultural contradictions in the process. The fanboy auteur, she argues, is a gendered performance that allows the fanboy auteur to “evade the feminizing stigma of fandom and paternalistic arrogance of the auteur simultaneously.” In offering a vision of authorship that “thrives within tensions between the commercial and the subcultural, the mass and the niche, the recognizable and the intertextual,” Scott’s case study explores the new, expanded models of authorship we might consider while also remaining critical of those possibilities. Along with these four chapters come two additional interviews meant to expand the horizons at which we might continue that critical research in the future. The first is an interview with Bear McCreary, a music composer most recognized for his work on television series including *Battlestar Galactica* and *The Walking Dead*. As with Brisbin’s chapter, this interview turns our focus to an often ignored category of creative work; but it also puts into relation (and often tension) with authorship the construction of professional identities, the pleasures of working in a collaborative medium, and the dynamics of engaging with fan audiences through blogging and other digital media practices increasingly embraced by media professionals. Megan Sapnar Ankerson’s interview with Molly Wright Steenson, a digital studies scholar with a long history of working in the web industries, works to consider authorship in terms of networked creativity. Because web production – whether professional or amateur – involves a significant amount of remixing (whether at the level of code or content), web work at once stretches the limits of authorship while also relying on traditional foundations in intellectual property. The interview thus helps us to understand what web authorship might be, and how it might be located at the level of code, infrastructure, and new communicative forms such as Twitter and Pinterest.

By pointing to the new online spaces in which we might look for authorship, we can transition into the final set of critical interventions made by this book, in that we can conceive of authorship as something to be relocated. The question “where might we find authorship?” may seem geographic as much as anything else, in that the spaces in which authorship is considered range from South Asia to North America to Africa. Yet we do not imagine Part V: Relocating Authorship as defined
by “globalization,” or at least not anymore than in any other part of the book (as we have strived for international and transnational diversity throughout). Instead, this section might be thought of as an attempt to locate authorship outside of the traditional, commonsense bounds of creativity and production culture. To what other spaces – physical or conceptual – might we move our study of media authorship? The chapters in this final section offer a wide range of possibilities – from thinking about media authorship at the site of retail exchange, to the offices of promoters and marketers, to the legal and juridical realm of the nation, to the space of the almighty divine, and self-reflexively to the arena of scholarship itself.

This final section begins with Aswin Punathambekar’s examination of the Hindi-language film industry in Mumbai, and the ascendance to power and authority of in-house marketing divisions, public relations firms, and advertising agencies over the past two decades. Although these categories of media labor remained relatively marginal to that industry prior to the 1990s, the rise of new technologies and new media platforms brought with it a shifting set of industrial relations in which these upstart professional fields were able to reposition themselves as centrally important by virtue of their ability to “facilitate interactions and exchanges among professionals in film, television, and advertising despite what appeared to be incommensurable regimes of value and modes of knowing the audience that defined those industries.” Crystallizing the relationship between authorship and audience explored in the previous section and elsewhere in this volume, Punathambekar identifies the discursive role of the audience in legitimating new classes of workers and imagining new kinds of authorships and authorities – even for those outside of the creative realm. Dan Herbert makes a similar move, but locates authorship not in the audience per se so much as in the practices of media workers who organize the shelves at independent video stores. In Herbert’s analysis, authorship is an organizational category within the retail space that works to position directors as auteurs; the authorship of film directors is thus something operative and disseminated through these commercial spaces as much as the practice of producing the films themselves. As such, Herbert considers the work of video store clerks as a kind of authorship based in making selections and devising ways to organize and make production work meaningful – although, as he also points out, directors such as Quentin Tarantino have subsequently laid claim to the video store as a means of constructing their own authorial identities. In this way, Herbert convincingly positions video store culture as “co-constitutive of contemporary practices of auteurism.”

Hector Amaya moves the discussion of authorship even further from questions of creativity, individuality, and agency within film, television, or new media production cultures. Instead, he seeks to define authorship in a legal way, “one that defines authorship as ownership of action that establishes legal responsibility and legitimate authority.” His case study considers Mexican narcocorridos, hip-hop forms that narrate the lives of drug dealers and have been subject to state censorship out of concern for their normalization of drug violence. Amaya asks
what this censorship tells us about the nation-state, and ultimately concludes that in its affirmative attempts to define juridical and aesthetic forms, censorship acts as a means through which the nation works to author citizenship. But while “the nation-state authors citizens,” Amaya suggests that this authorship/censorship fails because our transnational relationships with media are often divorced from a specifically national identity. While Katrien Pype moves to resituate the study of media authorship in relation to discourses of the divine—a move toward cultural authority that some may see as higher than even the nation—she nevertheless returns our examination of media authorship to the place where John Hartley began. Through her participant ethnography of Congolese television serial production, in which she performed herself with CINARC, the most popular performance troop in Kinshasa, Pype explores questions of ownership, originality, and inspiration in improvisational forms, explaining how they were attributed in this context to a sacred and holy force. In her analysis, Pype wrestles with the way that attributions of African authorship by scholars in the West have both reproduced stereotypical perceptions of primitivism and imposed Western concerns and value over that cultural production. Yet instead of presenting this attribution of authorship as the quaint superstition of an Other—or legitimating the idea of authorship from a higher power—Pype allows us to see authorship as something contextual and socially constructed that we can denaturalize in critical scholarship. In concert with the other chapters in this section, therefore, this work encourages us to see authorship as something not inherently tied up in creativity, practice, and individual agency in industrial structures, but rather as something that we have often imagined into being there and in numerous other cultural realms. And finally, an interview with Kathleen Fitzpatrick, a pioneer in the exploration of how digital technology might enhance the production of scholarship, offers a self-reflexive glimpse into how scholarship itself is authored, and how that authorship might change in the future. Advocating for change in the way that scholarship is communicated via emerging communication technologies, Fitzpatrick points to how the production of knowledge is in transition, and allows us to consider how all our claims about media authorship are themselves mediated practices of authorship.

**Authoring a Book about Authors . . . With Many Authors**

So by way of further scratching the surface of authorship, and putting these questions and conceptual lenses into some practice here before letting the following chapters develop them, let us begin by contemplating this book as authored product, and how it challenges us to consider the politics of collaboration, who “truly” is an author, and why this matters.

As an edited collection, not a “single-author” tome, the authorship is thoroughly collaborative. And yet even that collaboration is marked by power lines and
Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray

Hierarchies. As editors, we played a key role in selecting who would contribute, and when receiving first drafts we had the power to call for revisions, with the implicit threat of dropping a contribution if it did not toe a line that we set. Each contributor gave us a first draft, which we then commented upon. Sometimes this process involved suggesting ideas that we felt should be included in the chapters, offering us the chance to add our own voices to their chapters. At other times, we found ourselves disagreeing with a writer’s argument, or arriving at different conclusions, which forced us then to determine whether we would like to intervene and insert our authorship more determinedly, or whether to sit back and honor the writer’s authorship. This collaborative process of revision was moreover a mediated process of authorship itself, taking place through communication technologies such as email, embedded comments in word processing software, and extending into dialogue on social media platforms. Surely this mediation shaped how our suggestions, intended to be helpful pushes toward productive transformation, may have alternatively read as overbearing or constraining notes from meddling managers. Practically, though, and especially in a field such as academic writing, where one receives little direct remuneration for most written work, we could only ask for so many changes anyway: should we ask for more, an annoyance factor would definitely set in for some writers and they would abandon us. Thus we mention our own “powers” not to claim authorship over the constituent chapters here, but instead to point to an interplay. This interplay extended to ourselves, too, as the two of us were never in perfect agreement and would often need to hash out differences of opinions or strategy – again, with the mediation of that process both enabling and constraining resolution.

Wiley-Blackwell, meanwhile, had powers as publisher to set overall word length, to make its own demands with regards to the contributor composition, and as we typed these words, we knew that they could in theory reject them and refuse to print them. We also knew that the their reviewers could similarly play such a role, as it is common for reviewers to request the deletion of entire chapters. What we did not predict was that Wiley-Blackwell would demand that our preferred authorial order for the collection – Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray – be reversed to the order you now see on the cover. Following submission of the manuscript, on the rationale that Jonathan was the more senior and published author, and hence the one they felt would be more marketable, the press insisted that Jonathan’s name should come first. Our editor explained that for a commercial press such as Wiley-Blackwell, marketability was the key consideration in determining authorial order and, thus, who might be perceived to be in a lead position. Our own impassioned arguments that Derek had in fact put more blood and sweat into the editing were not received well, and we were left with the option of sticking with “Gray and Johnson” (while inserting this passage here and giving Derek his due by placing his name first for this Introduction) or trying to dissolve our contract with Wiley-Blackwell, and finding another publisher. And thus we witnessed first-hand how attribution isn’t just about who did what, as the (perceived) discursive value