

People Quote People - The Death of the Author 2.0

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The (second) removal of the author is a historical fact.

The figure of the romantic genius was born in the XVIII century. Since this time, many speculations have surrounded the myth of authorship and its aura. In more recent times, authorship has become a culmination of capitalist ideology, in which the greatest importance is typically attributed to the economic value of the author. The images and ideas of authorship in popular culture are often tyrannically centred around the personal lives of authors – on their tastes, passions and styles.

By the first decade of the XXI century, the myth of the author had died (again).

In the digital act of copying data we lose the notion of the original and we increasingly forget the author. As a consequence, the only things that we effectively remember and feel are common codes of narrative and shared cultural signs.

The digital experience is described through the idea of the prosumer and the freedom embedded within the digital culture allows ordinary people to become artists and producers. This model fundamentally challenges the traditional assumptions of authorship - it moves away from the idea of the romantic notion of authorship, which saw authorship and cultural production as an isolated activity of a genius, creating something out of nothing.

The democratic diffusion of tools for the creation and spreading of content, the explosion of the economy of the imagination, the sharing of intellectual products, the emergence of prosumers and the social networks of web 2.0 – all these factors have desacralised the figure of the author and have stripped it of its aura. It has been plunged into the Pangea of Knowledge, which is the only one creator of human culture, transversal in time and in place.

As authorship becomes indistinguishable from the multiplicity of authors, this profusion transforms culture and creators into one single body: the collective intelligence; a return of the rules of oral and folk culture. Collaborative creativity, mutual influences, a remixing, sampling, reshaping and meshing of diverse publications of intellectual products, from ideas and concepts, to the arts and research - these are the causes that have eliminated the prominence of originality, individuality and autonomous composition.

Culture consists of a multiplicity of writings. This multiplicity is collective and united; and it is this not the author who takes on a central role.

Now, the author goes back to his old work of being a compiler and its name is not important anymore. This is inevitable: it becomes increasingly difficult to attribute a work with certainty, as it might not be created by a single individual.

Similar to what has been the case in the past, anonymous contributions to narratives are the roots of our culture and social reality. Contemporary examples of social spaces are YouTube, MySpace, Digg, Delicious and Blog Sphere.

In the end, the fifteen minutes of fame each of us was expecting, has gone down to zero seconds. At the same time every little piece of art becomes infinitely more useful to human beings. The forest takes its shape from the tree, not vice versa.

Quoting represents culture as being at the basis of human becoming, improving human thinking, from quoting to quoting, from the evolution of ideas into other ideas and their eventual negation. Culture is a tissue of citations, resulting from thousands of sources of cultural signs. The history of human thinking is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.

It is the culture that speaks, not the author. The author is just the "subject", and this subject is void inside because it originates from a collective culture.

Art tries to set itself free from its creator, challenging preconceived ideas or opinions, sometimes enabling itself to exceed the importance of its creator.

"Right or wrong, once these sayings get into the language they're impossible to eradicate"
David McKie

Networked Culture as Folk and Oral Culture

Originality has no or little relevance in all traditional and popular cultures all over the world. Most folk songs and folktales are collective, anonymous creations. Variation, modifications and translations are traditionally encouraged as part of their tradition. Recently, many authors based a lot of their wealth on folk tales, taking them out of the public domain and turning them into property and tools for exploitation.

The same is true for many works considered part of the high cultural canon, crafted by unidentified, often collective authors: Homer's epics for example, or the tales of 1001 nights, which were spread by storytellers and of which no authoritative, 'original' written version ever existed. For instance, Shakespeare was a brilliant playwright, but we should also remember the fact that he drew rather freely from various sources, history, mythology and the work of his peers, for inspiration and as source for modification. In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, original authorship was more disregarded than encouraged. Literally works typically render themselves canonical not by inventing new stories, but by rewriting existing ones, adaptations of the same.

Originality of artwork exists in recognising the value that various users contribute through their modifications and adaptations of an existing work, thus placing higher importance on collaborative production than on isolated production. In fact the history of cultural production has, to a large extent, been the history of collaborative production, and this is true in all kinds of human achievement.

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