Der digitale Autor. Autorschaft im Zeitalter des Internets (review)

Peter Krapp

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Insofern stellt sich diese *Einführung in die Theaterwissenschaft* als eine weitere Variation jener Theatergeschichten dar, welche die Postdramatik letztendlich als Paradigma der Gegenwart und als Kulminationspunkt der Theatergeschichte ansehen. Dass auch die Postdramatik mittlerweile historisch ist, wird nicht thematisiert, wie die Aufführungsanalysen belegen. Der zentrale Gegenstand der Theaterwissenschaft "ist nicht das Drama oder der Theatertext, sondern die Aufführung, welche sich durch Kopräsenz von Akteuren und Publikum, durch ihren Live-Charakter und das Mittel der Transitorik charakterisiert" (8). In dieser Abgrenzung wird die säuberliche Einteilung in Literaturwissenschaft hüben und Theaterwissenschaft drüben weiter aufrecht erhalten. Es ist dies nun ein mittlerweile etwas abgenutztes Argument der Theaterwissenschaft. Auf der Folie einer Welle von dramatischen Texten erscheint dies beinahe wie die beschwörende Formel einer jungen Disziplin, sich neben den traditionellen Fachrichtungen zu behaupten.

Exeter University —*Birgit Haas (†)*

Der digitale Autor. Autorschaft im Zeitalter des Internets.
Von Florian Hartling. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009. 382 Seiten + zahlreiche Abbildungen. €34,80.

What if research and development in the last decades of the 20th century had emphasized not immersive graphics and virtual worlds, but put the equivalent processing power at the service of narrative structures, plots and genres? What if popular cultural interfaces had congealed not around twitchy buttons and ergonomic controls, but instead had emphasized an evolution of authorship and story-telling? Such a counter-factual media history might seem like idle speculation, given where we are in the history of automation and computing. And yet a rigorous look at what we call either creative writing or text processing might uncover discursive formations that are surprising, even deviant from the powerful logic that appears to program our current digital culture.

Rather than pursuing this train of thought, however, most current discussions of literary authorship under the conditions of the computer and, by extension, of the network, start instead from the assumption that the universal machine somehow transforms writing (or perhaps the very conditions of possibility of writing) in such a way as to threaten it with oblivion: they assert a visual, or audiovisual turn, beginning with the advent of radio and television, gramophones and typewriters. Literature in the digital age, then, can appear ambivalent—torn between futuristic cyberpunk that imagines the media society but is written on a mere type-writer, and writing that is generated as part and packet switch of the computer-mediated world, yet feels anachronistic as it aspires to the status of literature.

In the current state of the internet and its layers, from email and chat to blogs and games, what is the place of digital authorship, of literature? Florian Hartling, whose book is based on his dissertation, is well-versed in literary theory, and relies in particular on the way the work of Foucault has been put to use in German Studies. Hartling draws on a wide range of examples, assimilating them very capably into nine systematic chapters. He summarizes critical concepts of literature and authorship, defines his Foucauldian vocabulary, introduces the parameters of literary production

and distribution online, surveys the history of the internet, the open source movement, wikis and blogs, net activism and user-generated content. Among his many admirable renditions of online literature, net art, YouTube authorship, and related debates, what Hartling de-emphasizes is the larger context of media history, computer history, internet history. Recent books on literature under the conditions of the networked computer, such as Nick Montfort's *Twisty Little Passages* (2003) for instance, manage to give literary writing its proper status alongside gaming and interactive entertainment by putting them into a historical and conceptual frame that joins them together in very real ways, technically as well as aesthetically. Another regrettable thing about Hartling's book is that although it mentions a lot of established and good examples of digital authorship, he hardly engages in what used to be called reading. One notable example that demonstrates a few possible reasons is his discussion, in the penultimate chapter, of Johannes Auer's "Search Lutz!" (2006), a performance. Nonetheless, amidst all the excellent analysis of trends, and well-balanced evaluations of online commentary on online authorship, Hartling does not examine most of his examples in detail, preferring to cluster them in evidentiary layers. Thus perhaps, without invalidating the smart synthesis of discourse theory in Hartling's book, the study of literary production in the digital age might engage in something computers are particularly good at, namely a persistent interrogation, branching into many different directions, of "what if"—as this review tried to sketch out in its opening paragraph. For as Foucault writes, the very first risk he took and his initial hypothesis was to ask: what if "the very possibility of recording facts, of allowing oneself to be convinced by them, of distorting them in traditions or of making purely speculative use of them, if even this was not at the mercy of chance? If errors (and truths), the practice of old beliefs, including not only genuine discoveries, but also the most naïve notions, obeyed, at a given moment, the laws of a certain code of knowledge? If, in short, the history of non-formal knowledge had itself a system?" (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*. New York: Routledge 2002, x.) That kind of systemic closure—neither at the mercy of chance nor affected by error, other than by recuperating error into its order—would reduce the archeology of the human sciences to a code-set of epistemological regularity. Thus authorship in the digital age may well be over-determined by a Foucauldian dispositive, as Hartling seems to suggest at times—or it may still, despite everything that Hartling correctly observes about the compelling power of the Turing machine, the ARPAnet, and the culture of the web in the aftermath of the Cold War, allow for a literature of the user error; for a writing that is fully accountable to that "error between keyboard and chair" that remains the focal point and implicit audience of literary production in the digital age.

In sum, Hartling's highly competent and well-informed book on digital authorship raises, but does not begin to address, issues concerning the many contemporary forms of digital readership, particularly this side of their aggregation for the purpose of advertising and statistics. As long as this aspect is masked in the unfortunate moniker of "user-generated content" or other commingling of production and consumption online, the study of digital culture remains blindered both to the implications of audience aggregation and to the aesthetics, for lack of a more contemporary term, of digital culture.

University of California, Irvine —*Peter Krapp*