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The Deaths of the Author: Reading and Writing in Time
(review)

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Leonardo, Volume 45, Number 3, 2012, pp. 305-306 (Review)

Published by The MIT Press



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authors approach what they see as the ignorance, naivety and in some ways arrogance of the transhumanists by separating technology/human interaction into three levels.

I found this classification system most edifying. Level I is the base technology (a jet aircraft for example). Level II is the infrastructure that attempts to run the Level I technology (flight schedules, air traffic controllers and so on). Level III is how the two previous levels can react at a global level (the rapid spread of disease, carried quickly to many distant countries almost instantaneously). Allenby and Sarewitz argue, in fact it is their main thesis, that most problems arise when we confuse the different levels of technology, especially when we try to solve a Level III problem at Level I (which, they insist, we do all the time).

I have one minor, though not trivial, criticism of Allenby and Sarewitz's approach. Even though they vigorously analyze and attack the Enlightenment way of understanding the world, the same Enlightenment reasoning methodology underpins their approach. To be sure, they discuss religions here and there, but they do not acknowledge the "way of knowing" we could term spiritual. Many Eastern religions, Australian Aboriginal cosmology and various other tribal systems have totally different ways of knowing the world than the Western way and, consequently, different ways of solving the global conditions we children of the Enlightenment have created. These deserve serious consideration in any approach that suggests ways to deal with major Earth problems. I sense the authors perhaps have an empathy with such spiritual approaches, but it is neither articulated nor acknowledged. After all, John Templeton's vision was "the possibility of acquiring 'new spiritual information' from his commitment to rigorous scientific research and related scholarship."

This is an important book (criticism aside), if for no other reason than that it confronts the reader in a way that demonstrates neutrality is not really possible; one cannot sit on the fence, for example, regarding the way to solve climate change problems. We are forced into a position of having to (re)think the whole gamut of human-technology interactions and either agree with the authors' *modus operandi* or come up with a better approach. We are not left the myopic luxury of "business as usual."

THE DEATHS OF THE AUTHOR: READING AND WRITING IN TIME

by Jane Gallop. Duke University Press, Durham, NC, U.S.A., 2011. 184 pp. Trade, paper. ISBN: 978-0-8223-5063-7; ISBN: 978-0-8223-5081-1.

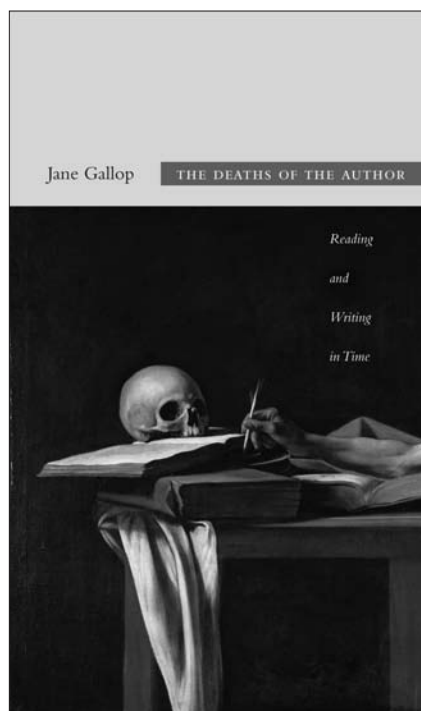
Reviewed by Jan Baetens, University of Leuven, Belgium.

"The Death of the Author" is the title of a brief 1968 essay by Roland Barthes that has become one of the most popular and often-quoted slogans of postmodernism in literary and cultural theory. Almost mantra-like, this shortcut postmodernist dismissal of the author and subsequent foregrounding of text, system, field and signifier has been used over and over again as a way of continuing the May 1968 revolt in France against tradition. Its academic reception has systematically linked this text with Michel Foucault's 1969 essay "What is an author." It is not an exaggeration to claim that Barthes's essay has achieved the status of a truly classic work.

Yet, it is one thing to recognize the value of a text and the concept it has put to the fore, and another thing to really read it. The starting point of Jane Gallop's book is that the easiness of the concept, which delivers a sexy and catchy meaning that we think we understand immediately, may have blocked

our critical reflection on the notion as well as our reading of the very text that introduced it. The automatic coupling of Barthes's essay with the one by Foucault, which despite its similar title presents a totally different discussion, suggests already that there is a huge gap between the deceptively simple concept and the abyss that its close reading can reveal to us. Jane Gallop is a stubborn practitioner of close reading, even in times like ours, in which there seems to be no place left for this approach in academy. Therefore, she delivers a twofold lesson in this important book. The first one is on the importance of close reading—and here the influence of Derrida, who transferred close reading from literature to philosophy and whose prestige has kept close reading present on the intellectual stage, is dramatically visible. The second one is on the meaning of the death of the author as a concept, but also as a practice—and here Gallop convincingly demonstrates that the significance of the concept cannot be reduced to its first reception in 1968.

In order to revisit the notion of the death of the author, Gallop adopts a method that is both extremely straightforward and tremendously subtle. On the one hand, she looks at how four key critics, first as readers and then as authors, have actually used that very notion. What did Barthes, for instance, write on the author after having declared that the author is dead? Did he delete the concept from his theory? Did he enjoy or lament it? Did he return to the author? Did he contradict himself? Did he react to the discussions raised by the success of his essay or did he ignore them? The answers that Jane Gallop offers to these questions painfully disclose that readers are often lazy. As it turns out, the death of the author is just a stepping-stone in Barthes's thinking on the position and role of the author. Moreover, his thinking on this relationship did not end in 1968—as we too easily accept it did. Instead of reading Barthes's essay in relationship with general theoretical and ideological statements, Gallop reconstructs the various links that help to discern the gradual shift to a different approach to the author, who becomes, according to Barthes, the object of an erotic dream by his or her reader. It is to the extent that we are aware of the author's death that it becomes possible to once again desire his or her presence in the body of the text. Focusing on a very small set of well-chosen fragments in Barthes's



work, fragments that are read and reread from a wide range of perspectives (the rhythm of the sentences, the multilayeredness of the metaphors, the conceptual variations, the play with a permanently mobile intertext, the blurring of the boundaries between the text and its publication context, etc.), Gallop succeeds in revealing new meanings of an apparently worn-out concept, gradually opening the single death of the author, an event having occurred in 1968 and never really challenged over the years, to the steadily complexifying plural of the deaths of the author.

The three other chapters that complete the new reading of Barthes, respectively on Jacques Derrida, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Gayatri Spivak, follow similar lines, as far as the close reading methodology is concerned. Yet they broaden the scope in two crucial respects.

First of all, it appears that the book is divided into two well-balanced parts, which coincide with the division of reading and writing. In the case of Barthes and Derrida, the death of the author is seen primarily from the viewpoint of the reader: What does the notion of the death of the author mean when the author I am reading is a departed author I knew? The example of Derrida, who introduced “in memoriam” as a real genre in recent philosophy, demonstrates the painful and ethically complex questions that are raised by this situation: Does one have the right to speak in memory of a friend while at the same time analyzing his or her work, and how to do it even if one is not allowed to do so, to quote the deceased friend, etc.? In the case of Sedgwick and Spivak, the viewpoint is more that of the reader as writer (even if Barthes and Derrida do reflect on their authorship as well, of course): How does the death of a friend, who is also an author, influence and change my own writing, for instance when I identify with my friend as a writer, even if I realize that I am already dead myself?

Second, and this is where Jane Gallop’s close reading becomes intertwined with queer studies, the reflection on the death of the author does not only link literary theory with issues of literary ethics, it also forces us to reconsider certain basic aspects of reading and writing itself. Most essential in this regard is the notion of “queer temporalities,” that is, the refusal of traditional (linear and hierarchical) ways of thinking time and the praise of “perverse” (i.e. non-canon-

ical, non-systematic, non-quantifiable) approaches to time that tend to blur past, present and future, continuous and non-continuous time, slowness and speed, and eventually life and death. For instance: Sedgwick reading an “in memoriam” for a friend dying of AIDS but not yet deceased, or Spivak’s attempts to maintain the continuously open and never-ending character of writing as a revolt against the deadening effects of the publication of a book. In both cases, Gallop proposes a very strong political interpretation of these queer temporalities, which she links with the defense of queer sexuality (for Sedgwick) and the haunting presence of Marx, whose thinking seems condemned to final oblivion after the fall of the Berlin Wall (for Spivak).

It is a pleasure to end this review by stressing the immense stylistic and demonstrative qualities of this book. Jane Gallop is no doubt one of the best readers of her generation, but with *The Deaths of the Author* she proves that her writing is unprecedented: sharp, brisk, with a great sense of rhythm, utterly sophisticated and yet perfectly clear, from the very first till the very last sentence.

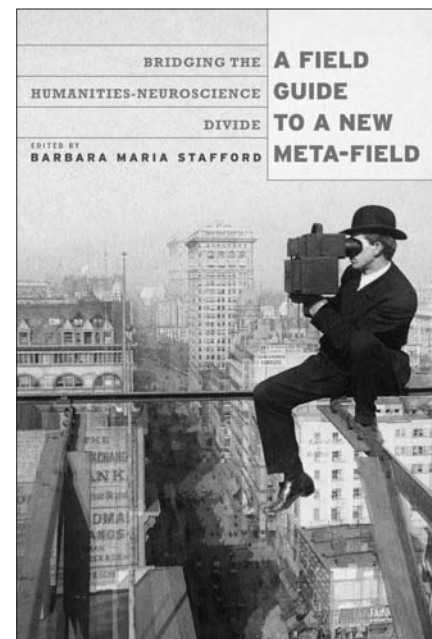
A FIELD GUIDE TO A NEW META-FIELD: BRIDGING THE HUMANITIES-NEUROSCIENCE DIVIDE

edited by Barbara Maria Stafford,
University of Chicago Press, Chicago,
U.S.A., and London, U.K., 2011. 368
pp., illus. Trade, paper. ISBN: 978-0-
226-77055-0.

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Any book that helps demolish the stubbornly ingrained gospel of Cartesian bifurcation is, indeed, welcome. This book is a fairly major contribution to this deconstruction project, not only exposing Cartesian fallacies but also suggesting positive, practical ways of putting “Humpty Dumpty back together again.” The humanities and the neurosciences are two powerful “ways of knowing,” and as all contributors to this volume agree, these two disciplines must start working cooperatively if we are to advance in unraveling the mysteries of existence and the part that our minds, brains and bodies play in this existence.

Stafford’s aim in creating this book was not to provide definitive guidelines



for bridging the humanities-neuroscience divide per se but to develop literally a field guide that would point the way for future research. She uses the term “Meta-Field” to describe this new approach: “In addition to being a field guide, this book serves as a primer to intellectual possibilities and best practices in a metadiscipline that does not yet exist” (p. ix).

A Field Guide to a New Meta-Field is a scholarly collection of essays from leading thinkers in both the humanities and brain sciences. As such it is not really suited to general, popular readership. The essays presuppose a broad knowledge of modern critical/cultural theory and at least a basic familiarity with neuroscience terms and principles. The book is illustrated with numerous black-and-white drawings, diagrams and photographs. There are nine wide-ranging chapters, preceded by Stafford’s own introductory essay, “Crystal and Smoke.” One thing that stands out from the research that produced the essays in this book is that the brain, mind and embodiment are far more complex than most researches ever dared imagine. As Stafford mentions:

A major message of this book is that one way of getting past what Damasio saw as the “abyssal [Cartesian] separation between body and mind” is for neuroscientists not to limit their cultural considerations to the evidence provided by grammatically complex symbolic languages. We know that our gesturing and tool-making hominid ancestors lacked such syntactical activity. What they had, and we still have, are sophisticated compositional structures for mirroring