Creativity Unbound

Rethinking Audiovisual Authorship in the Artificial Intelligence Era

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ABSTRACT

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has reshaped the debate on authorship in audiovisual media, challenging traditional notions of intellectual property and creative agency. This paper explores the evolution of authorship from early cinematic theories to the rise of collaborative and intertextual media contents, ultimately questioning how AI-generated creative products should be attributed. By analyzing case studies, including AI-generated films, TV shows and deepfake applications, we assess the implications of AI as both a creative tool and a co-author. Legal and cultural perspectives are considered, addressing copyright concerns and the function of AI in media production. Our study argues that while AI introduces new complexities in creative ownership, human oversight remains essential in shaping and interpreting AI-assisted content. Ultimately, building on the ongoing transformation of media creation in the digital age, we claim that AI's role in authorship must be examined on a case-by-case basis.

KEYWORDS

Authorship; artificial intelligence; audiovisual media; intellectual property; creative agency.

Introduction

The question of authorship in audiovisual media has been a longstanding subject of debate, evolving alongside technological advancements and shifts in creative practices. From the *auteur theory* of the mid-20th century, which positioned the director as the primary creative force, to postmodern perspectives that emphasize the collaborative and intertextual nature of media production, the notion of authorship has continuously adapted to new paradigms. However, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool for generating media content has reignited this discussion, presenting new challenges and possibilities for how we define creative agency and intellectual property.

AI-generated content, from deepfake-enhanced films to fully AI-scripted productions, disrupts conventional understandings of artistic creation. While AI is often positioned as a tool assisting human creators, its increasing ability to produce independent outputs raises critical questions: who – or what – can be considered the author of AI-generated works? Should authorship be attributed to programmers, users, or AI itself? And how does this shift impact legal frameworks, ethical considerations, and audience perceptions?

This paper examines the evolving concept of authorship in the AI era, tracing its historical foundations and analyzing contemporary case studies that showcase AI's role in media production. By exploring both media theories and legal implications, we aim to offer a comprehensive understanding of how AI is reshaping the boundaries of creative ownership. Ultimately, we argue that while AI-generated media introduces complexities in authorship attribution, human agency remains central in shaping, curating, and interpreting these works.

1. Authorship in Audiovisual Media: Foundations and Early Concepts

1.1. Rise and Death of the Cinematic Author

The concept of cinematic authorship appeared in critical literature for the first time in the early 20th century, as a consequence of the adaptation of literary and theatrical works (Brunetta 1996). During these years, the application of authorship to film was a necessary practice, as it served the dual purpose of elevating cinema to the status of an artistic medium and laying the foundation for the development of film studies as an academic discipline (Bordwell 1996: 4-6).

In the beginning, film production was quite trivial, consisting only of a physical object, the film reel, and of the person who was physically responsible for creating the object. Only a few years later, films started to be reproducible, and what needed to be ascribed to a person was not only the film reel, but most importantly the idea behind the film (Pescatore 2006: 30). Simultaneously, film production became more and more collaborative and professional roles more defined (Ropars and Sorlin 1990: 24), which further complicated authorship attribution.

In the 1950s, the "Cahiers du cinéma", drafted by François Truffaut and André Bazin among others, brought the discussion to a higher level. In these essays, *la politique des auteurs* or *auteur theory* started to be formalized, which claims that the author is aware of their genius and infallibility, and the intention behind the work needs to be reconstructed by spectators and critics (see Truffaut 1955). These features were fundamental to promote the convergence of the cinematic author into the film director. The essentialist approach brought about by *la politique* was highly criticized later, starting with the post-structuralist philosophers Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault.

To address the criticism moved to *la politique*, the title of the major essay written by Barthes is highly emblematic, "the death of the author". With this essay, published in 1967, a post-authorial framework is established in media theory, in which the empirical author disappears and leaves the floor to language, which has an anonymous power and is the expression of subjects rather than people. What's more, the pieces of the language can be brought together only by the recipient or, in this case, the viewer. More in detail:

> Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together', suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (Barthes, [1967], (trans. 1977): 145).

Barthes (1967) proposes to kill the author to let the reader live and thrive. However, if Barthes (1967) "destroys" anthropomorphic authorship, he does not suggest a way in which the reader can make sense out of the language. To reconsider the role of the author and to start to give shape to the role of the reader, Foucault (1969) conceives authorship as nothing more than a function of the discourse that works to ascribe and delimit creative contents, among other things. Authorship therefore is a source of further meaning and "it does not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects-positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals" (Foucault 1969: 113).

Barthes (1967) and Foucault (1969) highly revolutionized the concept of the author and were the first to open the discussion to the central function of the recipient. Two film critics who were crucial to attributing the recipient even greater powers were David Bordwell and Seymour Chatman. Both scholars posit that the text is self-sufficient, because it contains its own agency and intent, yet they conceive this self-sufficiency differently. On the one hand, Chatman (1990) thinks that an implied author still exists, yet different from the biographical author, working as a reference point for viewers when interpreting a film and therefore contained within the text. On the other hand, Bordwell (1985) goes even beyond in theorizing the self-sufficiency of a work by claiming that no trait is assigned to an implied author that could not be ascribed to the narration itself, thus rejecting the anthropomorphist approach to authorship attribution.

1.2. The Role of Television and New Media in the Debate on Authorship

The advent of television and new media has added a further layer of complexity in the debate on the relevance of *auterism* in contemporary audiovisual productions. This complexity can be unfolded by addressing three key properties of a modern audiovisual text – all of them intertwined with the increased presence of the viewer in the reflection on authorship attribution – that are: (i) intertextuality, (ii) relationship with time and (iii) collaboration.

Considering the first, in the previous paragraph we have acknowledged that an artwork is the result of the creative mixture of many texts. Most new media content is derivative or transformative works, that is the result of the appropriation of previous works through practices of rewritings, reusages and reproduction (Bettetini 1996). Therefore, new media represent the ideal space in which Barthes' (1967) definition of text expands: "A text is then a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes [1967], (trans. 1977): 146). Who needs to keep the threads together of an audiovisual text is the spectator, who might not necessarily be aware of the references and citations contained in an artwork.

As for the second point, new media represent the ideal space to concretize not only Barthes' (1967) theories, but also Foucault's (1969) theses: given that an author is a function of the discourse, a text is then a discursive entity and, as such, can change over time (Mittell 2015: 111). Gray (2013: 92) refers to a modern audiovisual text as a "continuous and continuing entity" because it requires authorial intervention throughout all its existence.

As far as the third identified property of a text, creation, other than being an ongoing process, is always the result of a collaborative effort: this concept leads Gray (2013) to define his theory of "clusters of authorship". In fact, as a consequence of the fluidity of the text creation, a multiplicity of individuals attends a given text and will contribute to its creation, which will never be completed (Gray 2013: 108). This model highly expands the number of people involved in the creation of an audiovisual text, considering, for example, the whole professionals listed in the credits, the marketing groups and, of course, the spectators. New media make manifest how audience can become active (Fiske 1987) and the ways in which they create these clusters, from mere hermeneutical practices in the construction of meaning, shaping "interpretive communities" around audiovisual texts (Fish 2004), to the creation of their own contents that originate from "official" ones. In the postmodern era, all media products are the result of a collective intelligence, or, in other words, of a participatory culture in which producers and users converge (Jenkins 1992, 2006). Fan productions represent the perfect expression of these new features that both the text and the audience have acquired, with several effects on the study of audiovisual authorship (see Jenkins 2019). For instance, research has shown that fan works have a great impact on the life of cultural objects through the engagement shown on social media, giving fans the power to cancel or renew shows and, more limitedly, to influence the diegesis through *fanon* stories (Bourdaa and Delmar 2016).

The intertextual, ongoing and collaborative efforts behind every modern audiovisual content consolidates the idea of the author as a discursive element. Hence, if a person behind an artwork ought to be identified, this would be a fictitious figure embodied into an "inferred author function", "a viewer's production of authorial agency responsible for a text's storytelling, drawing on textual cues and contextual discourses" (Mittell 2015: 107). By bringing Chatman's (1990) theory of the "implied author" to a higher level, Mittell (2015) suggests that spectators perceive that audiovisual narrations are too coherent and elaborate to be the outcome of a teamwork, hence they posit an "imagined authorial power" in charge for narrative complexity. What plays a crucial role in inferring an imagined authorial figure is the exploitation of paratexts by many modern media productions, in the form of interviews, behind-the-scenes videos, billboards, posters and so on. These texts have contributed to the reinforcement of the mythical agency of the showrunner in the American mediascape, the one to which media scholars Gray (2013) and Mittell (2015) are referring to[1], and of the director in the European context.

Within this scenario, however, little has remained in showrunners or directors of the *intentio auctoris*[2] theorized in the *Cahiers.* Quite the opposite, they have become brands or trademarks (Pescatore 2006: 109): the word *d'auteur* applied to films or TV series has come to serve the purpose of an aesthetic framework (Mittell 2015: 107), embodying a tag to orient audiences' expectations in terms of values such as genre, tone and style. Emblematically, in contemporary franchises, creative production originates from studio-owned intellectual property, that is the "managerial expertise", rather than individual creative contributions, which constitutes what Kidman (2021: 3) referred to as "corporate auteurism".

2. Copyright of Media Products and the Establishment of AI as a Content Creator

Media research has therefore theorized an anti-authorial framework. Authorship is now embodied into a discursive function that does not cor-

[1] For an analysis on how authorship was paramount to promote *Quality TV* communication in *HBO*'s marketing strategy, see Steiner (2015).

[2] Eco (1979) identifies three intentions behind an artwork: *intentio auctoris, intentio lectoris* and *intentio operis.*

respond to a physical person but to a fictitious figure that viewers should reconstruct through paratexts, neglecting the collaborative effort that lies behind and reducing the concept to a trademark.

Despite its fluidity, we believe that it is still necessary to insist on the concept of authorship when conducting research on audiovisual texts for two main reasons: first, rejecting the idea that there is at least one physical author behind an artwork suggests that its intention has not to be claimed to the creator but to the act of receiving it, which would not consider the political and sociocultural identity of the text itself[3] and, second, given that artworks are intellectual properties, a property must be attributed to someone's. Moreover, intellectual properties are protected from abuse by copyright, which in French is called "droit d'auteur", hence one or more possessors of a media content ought to be identified.

Copyright is defined as: "a set of intangible and exclusive rights on ideas that are expressed in human creative activities. It is granted to authors and artists to protect expressive works against unauthorized reproduction or distribution by third parties" (Gloglo 2014: 126). As can be deduced, copyright is an economic notion, and, more specifically, a utilitarian theory (Ballardini et al. 2019: 11), that has two main functions: (i) to incentivize the innovation and the creation of ideas and (ii) to guarantee an optimal degree of access to let these ideas circulate, yet in the protection of the intellectual property (Gloglo 2014, Hediger 2013).

If identifying the agency of a physical person behind a media content was already challenging when human beings were the only legitimate creators, the advent of generative artificial intelligence further complicates the scenario. Artificial intelligence is described as: "[...] the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. These processes include learning (the acquisition of information and rules for using the information), reasoning (using rules to reach approximate or definite conclusions) and self-correction." (Rouse 2018).

As we have seen, copyrights are released as incentives to protect the intellectual property behind creative contents. In the case of AI outputs, it is impractical to incentivize machines or algorithms *per se* and, if copyright is infringed, a trial between a person (the infringer) and a machine (the right holder) would not be feasible. Considering that the goal is to foster innovation within the field, the natural people responsible for the works should

[3] See Sellors (2007) for an aesthetic reflection on media authorship.

be claimed as authors (Ballardini et al. 2019: 7), discarding machines. The three parties who could claim rights over AI contents could therefore be programmers, business owners and end users. To decide on these three parties, we should recall the centrality of the social benefit that the party needs to derive from copyrights (Hristov 2016: 443). Hristov (2016) argues for an adaptation of the terms of "employer" and "employee" within the *hire doctrine* of the US copyright law, outlined as:

> An employer is considered the author even if an employee actually created the work. The employer can be a firm, an organization or an individual. Just as the term "author" may be applied to various entities (an individual, a firm or organization), and the term "writings" is an all-encompassing word (Hristov 2016: 447).

According to this doctrine, authorship is ascribed to programmers or business owners, thus leaving little space for users. However, just as human beings can be involved in many different roles in the creative and productive processes of a media content, so does AI in AI-generated artworks and, to continue to reflect on the creative role of AI in audiovisual production and on whether this role is in line with the legislative role outlined above, we need first to briefly describe the part that it has acquired in the contemporary mediascape.

3. The Role of Artificial Intelligence in the Media Industry

Artificial intelligence has catalyzed a significant transformation within the media production landscape (Ciruskabiri and Mousavi 2023), evolving from a mere tool to what can be considered a co-creator (McNamara 2023). This shift is reshaping the roles of traditional creatives and necessitating a reevaluation of the creative process.

AI's integration into the media extends from the early stages of content development to post-production and distribution. In game development, AI algorithms are now used to generate complex environments and non-player character behaviors, enhancing the gaming experience with environments that react and evolve in response to player actions (Safadi et al. 2015, Seidel et al. 2020). In the film industry, AI is used for everything from script analysis – predicting audience reception and potential success – to special effects and even editing, where AI can compile raw footage accord-

ing to the director's style and preferences (Chow 2020, Datta and Goswami 2021, Huang et al. 2023).

The role of AI in these industries is not just as a backend assistant. It is becoming a source of inspiration and innovation, affecting the narrative and aesthetic elements of media (Sugiarto and Widiastuti 2021). In advertising, AI's ability to analyze vast quantities of consumer data allows for the creation of highly targeted content, predicting and molding to viewer preferences and behaviors (Kietzmann et al, 2018; Li, 2019).

However, this integration of AI brings with it challenges, particularly in terms of trust. For creatives, relinquishing control to an algorithm can be daunting. There is concern over the authenticity and originality of AI-assisted content and whether it can truly replicate the nuanced touch of a human creator. For consumers, the trust extends to concerns over privacy (Hutson et al., 2023) and the personalization of content, as well as the overall quality and relatability of AI-generated media.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits are compelling. AI can handle repetitive and time-consuming tasks, allowing human creators to focus on the more intuitive aspects of their work. Moreover, AI's capacity to process and learn from large datasets can uncover insights and patterns that might not be immediately apparent to human minds, potentially leading to groundbreaking concepts and storytelling techniques.

Ultimately, the role of AI in media production is still being defined. As AI technology advances and creators learn to collaborate more effectively with these systems, we are likely to see a new era of media production—one where AI and human creativity are interwoven to a degree that blurs the lines between tool and partner, perhaps even challenging our concepts of authorship and creativity. This partnership promises to redefine storytelling and audience engagement in profound ways, as long as industry professionals navigate the ethical and practical implications of this technological shift.

4. Authorship in the Age of AI: Case Studies

4.1 Deep Fake Love

Deep Fake Love (Netflix, 2023) serves as a stark examination of the ethical boundaries pushed to their limits in the realm of reality TV, leveraging AI not for whimsical entertainment but as a tool for emotional manipulation. This Spanish dating series tests the strength of relationships by showcasing

individuals in serious, committed relationships, some of which are on the cusp of marriage, only to subject them to artificial scenarios of betrayal.

Each episode unravels with couples, already experiencing some friction in their relationships, being separated into two houses – aptly named 'Mars' and 'Venus'. The twist lies in the traumatic climax of each day, where participants are confronted with videos depicting their significant others in seemingly intimate acts with others. The reactions, ranging from shock to heartbreak, are visceral and distressingly real – only for the participants to learn, post-reaction, that what they saw might not be the truth.

The unsettling crux of *Deep Fake Love* employs deepfake technology to transplant the faces of faithful partners onto acting singles, crafting scenes of false infidelity. This act of digital puppetry, where words never actually spoken by the participants are mouthed by actors, showcases a disturbing application of AI capabilities.

While AI's integration into media has opened up new frontiers for creativity and engagement, *Deep Fake Love* prompts a necessary discourse on the symbiosis between AI-generated content and human emotion. It challenges the creators of human-centric media products to consider the impact of AI on real people's lives, to recognize the difference between content that entertains and content that harms.

This series raises questions beyond the ethical considerations of deepfake technology; it delves into the responsibilities of content creators in an age where digital and reality converge. The power of AI to create and to destroy must be wielded with caution, ensuring that innovation in entertainment never comes at the expense of human dignity and trust.

4.2 Nothing, Forever

Nothing, Forever (Twitch, 2022-present) is a groundbreaking, endless stream on Twitch, showcasing an AI-generated homage to the classic sitcom dynamics of *Seinfeld* (1989-1998) in the guise of a perpetual 1990s computer game. It features four characters – Larry, Fred, Yvonne, and Kakler – caught in an eternal loop, engaging in the mundane banter reminiscent of Jerry, George, Elaine, and Kramer's iconic conversations.

Powered by OpenAI's GPT-3 technology, the dialogue flows continuously, with a "director" algorithm developed by Mismatch Media orchestrating the integration of speech and action into a cohesive show. However, the AI-driven spontaneity of *Nothing, Forever* encountered a challenge when

the character Larry, propelled by the AI's scripting, delivered controversial and offensive jokes, inadvertently touching on sensitive social topics. This incident not only halted the laughter but also prompted an immediate suspension and a deep dive into the AI's operational integrity.

Investigation into the malfunction revealed a switch from the Davinci model to its less sophisticated predecessor, Curie[4], during a service outage, leading to unmoderated and inappropriate content. Despite OpenAI's content moderation tools, which had been effective with the Davinci model, the fallback to Curie exposed a gap in the system's ethical safeguards.

Nothing, Forever thus stands at the intersection of innovation in live streaming and the necessity for human oversight. The project pushes the boundaries of what continuous live streaming can achieve, demonstrating that AI can indeed facilitate creative processes that surpass human stamina. However, this technological feat does not diminish the importance of human authorship in guiding and refining AI output to adhere to ethical standards.

The incident underscores the delicate balance between creative freedom and responsible supervision in the realm of AI-generated content. It highlights the essential role of human curation in maintaining language appropriateness and ethical boundaries, ensuring that AI systems do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes or propagate misinformation. The suspension of *Nothing, Forever* due to the offensive joke serves as a cautionary tale about the need for vigilant creative oversight. It showcases the crucial responsibility authors and creators have in supervising AI's creative processes, ensuring that innovation does not come at the cost of social sensibility or ethical integrity.

4.3 Sunspring

The short film *Sunspring* (Sharp, 2016), conceived by filmmaker Oscar Sharp and technologist Ross Goodwin, marks a foray into uncharted territory where the realms of artificial intelligence and human creativity intersect. At the heart of this experiment lies an AI named Benjamin, fed with a diet of iconic sci-fi scripts to craft its own screenplay. The creative process began with a set of inputs provided to Benjamin: the title *Sunspring*, a dystopian future setting, and a vivid opening scene to stimulate its digital muse.

[4] Curie is a less advanced variant of OpenAI's GPT-3 model family, overshadowed by the more capable Davinci model. It can still handle text comprehension and generation tasks, but operates with more limited depth and versatility compared to Davinci.

The AI's role was to generate the script, weaving a narrative from the prompts fed by Sharp and Goodwin. Despite its complex neural network, Benjamin's understanding of the emergent plot was limited to the information within its programmed dataset, lacking the consciousness or intent that traditionally drives storytelling. Nevertheless, its output was a script complete enough to be performed and transformed into the quirky, enigmatic short film *Sunspring,* featuring actor Thomas Middleditch.

The production of this sci-fi film illustrated a unique collaboration between AI and human actors, directors, and interpreters. While Benjamin provided the text, it was the director's vision, the actors' performances, and the production team's interpretation that breathed life into the screenplay, shaping the AI's abstract output into a tangible, cinematic experience.

This project also taps into deeper questions of authorship and creativity: it challenges the conventional notion of a singular author. Instead, it proposes a distributed model of authorship where the AI, though not an author in the traditional sense, is a central figure in the creation process, complemented by the interpretative roles of human collaborators.

In line with Michel Foucault's thoughts on the function of the author's name (1969), *Sunspring* provocatively navigates the boundaries of the author function. The AI, by naming itself Benjamin, adds a twist to the notion of authorship, infusing it with a blend of automation and autonomy, and suggesting a network of interactions defining the work rather than a single creator's vision. Moreover, this case raises legal and ethical questions regarding the ownership of AI-generated content. The current legal framework emphasizes human authorship for copyright claims, but the AI's involvement muddles this clear attribution, calling for new definitions and understandings in the era of AI-assisted creativity.

In summary, this film is a testament to the potential of AI as a tool for innovation in storytelling. Yet, it serves as a reminder that the essence of narrative – the soul of a story – remains quintessentially human, even as we explore the boundaries of AI as a creative partner.

4.4 Black Mirror

The advent of AI in the realm of creative writing, particularly in scriptwriting, brings to the forefront intriguing debates about originality and creativity. Charlie Brooker, the mastermind behind the provocative series *Black Mirror* (Netflix, 2011-present), conducted an experiment that strikes at the heart of

this discussion. Known for its critical examination of the consequences of technology, *Black Mirror* became the subject for Brooker's exploration into the capabilities of AI with ChatGPT in generating script ideas for its sixth season.

In his candid interview with Empire magazine, Brooker shares his first-hand experience with the technology. His initial attempt to use ChatGPT to generate a *Black Mirror* episode yielded something that seemed plausible on the surface but fell apart under scrutiny. Brooker's reflection reveals a critical limitation of AI in writing: the lack of genuine originality. He noted that the AI appeared to rehash existing *Black Mirror* synopses, combining elements without introducing new, original thought.

Brooker's experiment underscores a significant challenge in AI-generated content: the tendency to produce derivative work that lacks the nuance and freshness of human creativity. He describes the output as "boring" and "derivative", a regurgitation of information "hoovered up" from various sources, such as Wikipedia. This not only illustrates the current limitations of AI in content creation but also serves as a commentary on the essence of original storytelling – a domain that, for now, remains distinctly human.

5. Collaborative Creation: The Evolving Role of AI in the Redefinition of Authorship

The case studies presented illustrate how AI both broadens creative possibilities and complicates questions of authorship. In *Nothing, Forever*, AI continuously supplies scripts but needs constant human oversight to avoid unethical or offensive content, underscoring a partnership model rather than complete AI autonomy. In *Deep Fake Love*, the deployment of deepfake technology highlights the ethical risks of manipulating participants' emotions, emphasizing the creators' responsibility to uphold human dignity and viewers' trust. By contrast, *Sunspring* reveals a more harmonious dynamic: although the AI "Benjamin" generates the screenplay, the director, actors, and production team remain vital in shaping the final result. Lastly, *Black Mirror*'s experiment with ChatGPT shows that while AI can replicate familiar tropes, it struggles to produce genuinely original ideas, reinforcing the pivotal spark that human creativity contributes.

Taken together, these examples point to a model of "co-creation," where AI does not replace humans but expands their toolkit—accelerating produc-

tion, suggesting script elements, and sometimes driving more experimental storytelling. At the same time, they raise various concerns. First, there is the ethical dimension: creators and producers must establish clear guidelines and filters to prevent offensive, harmful, or privacy-invading outputs. Second, the issue of clarifying roles emerges: when AI contributes to the creation of certain components, it is crucial to specify who holds ultimate accountability and to maintain transparency throughout the creative process.

In this regard, some guidelines (as seen in OpenAI's policies) encourage explicit disclosure of AI's involvement: even when an AI algorithm has generated part of the content, the work should still highlight the indispensable role of human creators. Indeed, the human author remains the ultimate "curator": not only selecting and refining what the AI suggests but also bearing ethical and legal responsibility for the result. Thus, AI functions as a catalyst for ideas—a generator whose outputs are subject to the human author's sensitivity and judgment. This entails a heightened sense of responsibility in scrutinizing generated material, correcting biases or inaccuracies, and bearing the consequences if something goes wrong. In *Nothing, Forever*, for example, even a simple switch from the Davinci model to Curie led to inappropriate content, demonstrating how quickly oversight can fail.

Overall, AI-facilitated co-creation reframes the concept of "the author," moving away from the single "genius" originator toward a more collective process, where algorithms act as a supportive or inspirational tool. The human "voice," however, still serves as an essential filter: without it, AI risks producing content (as in *Black Mirror*'s trial run) that is derivative or potentially harmful (as *Deep Fake Love* demonstrates). The future challenge lies in balancing the advantages of automation and augmented creativity with the need to preserve integrity, responsibility, and ethical standards at every stage of media production.

Conclusions

In this contribution, we have reflected on how the concept of authorship attribution in Media Studies has evolved from the first cinematic productions to new media contents, highlighting how it needs to be further reconsidered to encompass the creative outputs generated by artificial intelligence. Moreover, through an in-depth focus on some examples generated by AI,

we have seen how these tools present great potentialities in the creation of audiovisual contents, while still preserving many challenges.

It is only a matter of time before AI tools reach complete sufficiency in generating contents: in the meantime, contemplating whether AI could be held accountable for the authorship of these audiovisual texts is required. While the issue is predominantly urgent from a legal viewpoint more than from an artistic one, we believe—as media scholars—that it is similarly crucial to reflect on the implications that AI entails for the creative agency of media production.

We propose to split the two angles from which AI authorship can be analyzed: legally, it is still compulsory to identify a natural person behind these outputs due to copyright issues, and the employer-employee system in the hire doctrine described above could be of high value to enhance the legislation (Hristov 2016). However, given the economic nature of the concept, *right holder* would be a more appropriate term than author. From a media perspective, however, things are more complicated. We have seen that authorship within the media debate revolves around two semiotic poles: authorship (i) as collaborative, ongoing and capable of creating intertextual contents and (ii) as an imagined figure.

Considering the first, these outputs fit perfectly within the wake of new media contents: AI-contents are collaborative, both as a consequence of the input data realized by disparate creators and of the teamwork of developers; ongoing, in the sense that their reproducibility allow others to intervene on works which might have been judged complete by creators; and intertextual, based on the training data that they require. In this sense, the natural evolution of research on AI authorship is to investigate AI's ability to generate artworks as part of the production studies, along with other appropriation and derivative practices of human artists (Karakaidou 2019: 69). As for the second pole, AI can be masterfully designed as a fictitious figure, perhaps even with anthropomorphic features, which keeps everything together according to viewers and becomes a brand, a guarantee of a style.

However, through the examples that we have illustrated, AI tone is not unique and is also under evolution. Keeping in mind the two semiotic poles identified from the literature, we claim that deciding on the AI authorship behind these contents should be based on an in-depth analysis of each case, with the awareness that this scenario could undergo severe and drastic changes in the blink of an eye.

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MENTIONED WORKS

Black Mirror (Netflix, 2011-present)
Deep Fake Love (Netflix, 2023)
Nothing, Forever (Twitch, 2022-present)
Sunspring (Sharp, 2016)

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