

From the Death of the Author to Critical Aesthetics of AI: Generative Narratives

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This paper examines differing narratives about literary authorship and readership in the wake of the advent of ChatGPT, interrogating authors' and critics' new roles in light of "post-artificial" textuality (see Bajohr 2024). My point of comparison is Barthes's critique of autonomous authorship and the critic's role in "The Death of the Author" (1968), which appears to anticipate many characteristics of the current issues related to authorship under the conditions of generative AI (see e.g., Slater 2024).

My major example will be the 95% AI-generated detective novella *Death of An Author* (2023) by Aidan Marchine (!), pseudonym for the "collaboration" between AI and Canadian technology journalist Stephen Marche, which features a literary scholar as detective in its remixing of theory and genre fiction. In the afterword, Marche stylises himself as a "literary curator" in the age of LLMs, where "[e]very producer becomes an archive" (2023, n.p.). I shall lay out its differences to completely human-authored narratives that revolve around the same metaphor such as Gilbert Adair's postmodernist *The Death of the Author* (1992) and Nnedi Okorafor's speculative the debate on the critic's role between imagining a "textpocalypse" (Kirschenbaum 2023) and acquiescence to post-artificial texts (Bajohr 2024; Henrickson 2021, 62), which, in turn, reframes issues of the divide between post-/structuralist (Slater 2024; Henrickson 2024) and rhetorical-hermeneutic approaches (Phelan 2024; Hayot 2024). A rhetorical analysis of the idea of the death of the author will lead me to consider the implications of narratives on/of generative AI – "generative narratives" – for the roles of reader and critic in aesthetic terms. The history of aesthetics has consistently addressed issues of autonomy, fictionality, and reader response. In a FRIAS project, I suggest to reframe generative narratives through a framework of critical aesthetics, and will present initial ideas for an aesthetic vocabulary grounded in earlier constellations of machines, reading subjects, and writing subjects.

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