

Reservoirs of *Ethos*: Symbolic Authorship and the New Media Adaptation

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From the banalities of the technical writing or advertising team, to the big-budget, big-return world of film and video-game adaptations, the practical intricacies of the individual author-as-genius are long dead. But the public desire for the mythology of the author persists in its absence; the trappings of the rugged individualist that belie the realities of collaboration surround us as auteurism has become part and parcel of our media culture. Given these multifarious manifestations of authorship, in what sense is Peter Jackson the author of *The Lord of The Rings*, or Sid Meyer the creator of the *Civilization* game series? These “authors,” each titularly identical but functionally distinct, are not hermetic, but exist in system of relationships, each author-figure depending upon others to fulfill their larger rhetorical purpose: to imbue the text with ethos, or the legitimacy of authority. This symbolic authority is not vested in individuals, but rather in symbolic phantasms or even venerated texts themselves, given life by the projected desire of an audience hungry for the mirage of direct, heroic authorship. This symbolic authority also suggests to us a set of complex dynamics that author-figures engage in when adaptation relationships are formed; if we are aware of the collaborative realities of new media texts, the additional wrinkle of those texts being adaptations lends to the dizzying complexity of audience responses. How gamers, film viewers, or even readers respond to new media adaptations depends on the relative cultural resonance, power, and authority vested in author figures presented by legal, corporate entities, as set against the cultural resonance, power, and authority of the model, which stands behind the adaptation like a poltergeist. All these relationships are linked across interlocking fields of both symbolic and material powers: the financial and legal owners of texts purchase rights to earlier texts (often ones already rich with credibility), imbue symbolic authors as vessels of authority for public consumption, and then task labor-authors with the work of producing those new media texts.

Figure 1 gives us a picture of the complex system of relationships that occur when we are presented with the realities of corporate and adaptive authorships. While much of our everyday economy of art circulates on the assumption of a straightforward relationship between an author and her work (whether it be the book’s author, the film’s director, or the video game’s designer), Figure 1 portrays a matrix of power, responsibility, and desire. But the figure does not simply represent the reality of corporate, new media authorship, but the dynamic that occurs when new media texts are adapted from earlier works in other modes. When a videogame adapts a film or novel, there may be several levels of perceived authorship and authority operating simultaneously. For example, when Electronic Arts released *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003), game director Glen Schofield was not the most prominent author of the text, despite his leadership of the design team as well as his recognition and credibility in the gaming community. Rather, Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* film, and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *Return of the King* novel, both lent credibility and cultural power to the game to which

they had been titularly associated. Different audiences would perceive each as having more or less credibility based on their associations with those modes; fans of the films would identify the marketing, packaging, and gameplay associations with the film and see Peter Jackson as the author, while gamers would see Schofield, while still others would be drawn because of their veneration of Tolkien's novel.

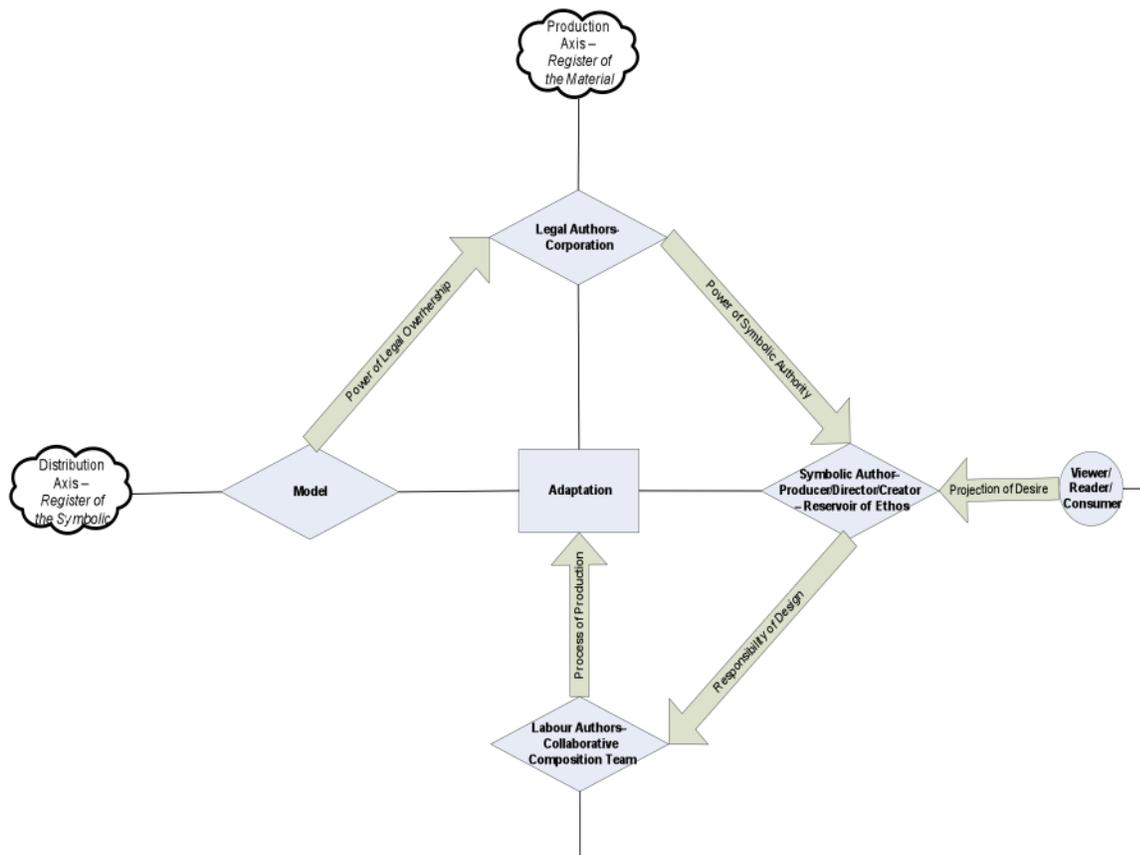


Figure 1: The Cycle of Adaptation Ethos

Model of New Media Authorship

In order to finally understand the way that adaptive *ethos* interacts with more conventional understandings of authorship, we should examine the model from the ground up. Much of our culture's assumptions about the philosophical and legal rights of authors arise from late eighteenth century conflicts about the relationship between art and artists. Many in the philosophical and aesthetic movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries attempted to conjoin the familial terms *authority* and *authorship*, vesting in individuals the responsibility and power of aesthetic creation. Philosophers and poets such as Kant, Goethe, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and many others sought to move conceptions of the artist away from those epithets they saw as more closely associated with medieval manuscript cultures: transcribers, archivists, or even transfusers. They sought to move towards a vesting in the artist of the power of genius and spontaneous creation. By privileging newness, solitary genius, and

aesthetic independence, Romantic theorists made the formerly straightforward act of borrowing and adapting earlier texts a perilous puzzle of competing authority. This notion of authorship as ownership forms the basis of our current understandings of intellectual property, as well as the veneration of authors that fill bookshelves, pack movie theatres, and drive videogame purchases. Yet digital technologies are exposing the cracks in the myth of authorship in ways predicted by both the New Critical movement of the early twentieth century, as well as the postmodern declarations of the author's death. Scholars such as Jeff Rice (2007) are noting that compositional processes such as web design are returning us to a pre-Romantic acceptance of borrowing and appropriating in the form of "sampling." The DJ, according to Rice, stands as the postmodern artist, exposing the complex matrix of authorship by weaving new art from old.

If we presume a pre-Romantic view of authorial rights, as Rice suggests—one where texts are created by arranging samples of earlier works into new forms, sometimes overtly associated with their antecedents and other times not—certain patterns of force emerge that explain how texts are produced and distributed. Kress and van Leeuwen suggest in *Multimodal Discourse* that all text is hinged on a series of four metaterms, or strata of practice, which operate simultaneously. These terms can be roughly diagramed into two axes: a production one (which would include aspects of both design and production), and a distribution one. For Kress and Van Leeuwen, design "stands midway between content and expression. It is the conceptual side of expression, and the expressive side of conception. Designs are uses of semiotic resources," while production is the "organization of the expression ... the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material production of the semiotic artifact" (2). Production requires skill in particular media and therefore requires labor suited to work traditionally associated with authorship: invention, composition, etc. Distribution, on the other hand, constitutes a re-coding of semiotic events for a range of purposes from recording to transmission. In other words, while design and production are text oriented, distribution's orientation is entirely toward the consumer/listener/reader. Its force moves produced texts toward dissemination.

While Figure 2 gives us a field in which to place the production-side life of a new media text, it is vague as to agency. We see that there are forces exerted to produce a text, and that text is molded and recoded for distribution, but who is exerting that force? What is the nature of those forces at play in text production? We can begin to fill in our model of new media authorship by identifying key agents and their respective roles. Yet, while we identify agents and participants in textual production, we must reconcile the legal and public perception of author/text relationship as a one-to-one correspondence, with the theoretical absence of the author; in other words, we must accurately represent the fragmentation in real-world text production. Therefore, we must turn to a representation of authorship that might accommodate such a multiplicity of agents.

Wayne Booth presents authorship as a fragmented body that spreads across elements of flesh and blood, imagination, text, and projections of readership. Booth's model goes some way towards a reunification of our practical and philosophical systems of authorial analysis. But more is at work than a shattered author-figure. Systems of force operate in new media design settings, foreseen by neither modern rhetoricians, nor postmodern critics. By corporatizing authorship, twenty-first century business has created a new system of textual production that redistributes the traditional roles of author and publisher into a consolidation of capital and power in the hands of an elite.

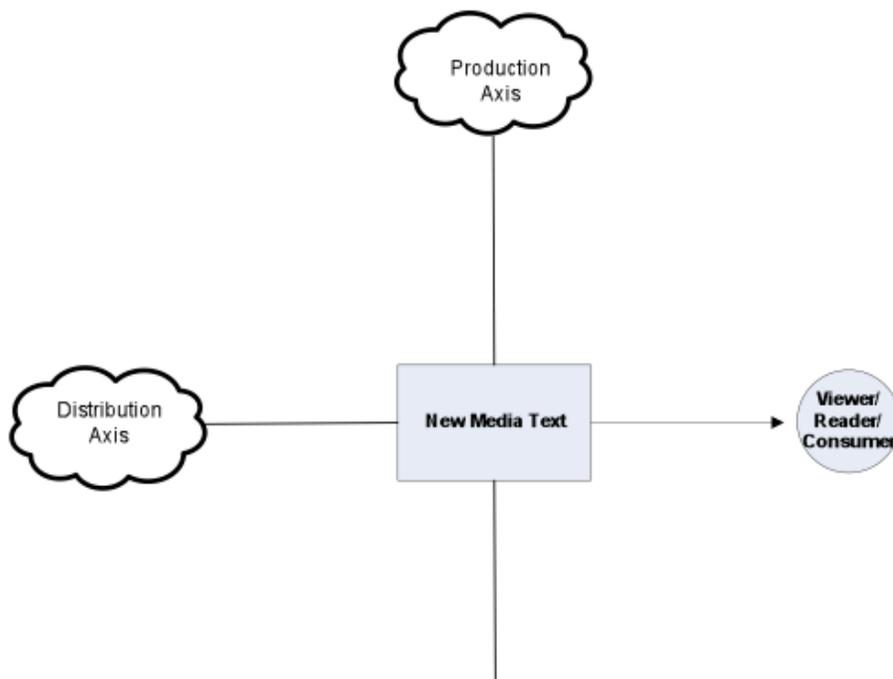


Figure 2: The Field of New Media Text Production and Distribution

Booth proposes five distinct levels of authorship,¹ two of which are relevant for our terms here. First, in a position that we might situate at the bottom of the production axis are the *labor authors*. These are the “real people” who compose and produce texts: “There is first a postulated flesh-and-blood person, a man or woman who writes only sometimes and who otherwise lives a more or less troubled or happy life. I shall call this ‘real’ person *the writer*” (Booth 268). Note the distinction Booth draws between authors (characterizations wielding rhetorical authority) and writers; as the nuts and bolts of the creative act are now vested largely in collaborative enterprises, groups of artists, from graphic designers to programmers, music directors to scriptwriters, all work in a coordinated effort under the watchful and responsible gaze of the producer/director/creator. In Boothian terms, these are called “flesh-and-blood” authors. In *Rhetoric of Fiction*, the flesh and blood author fits three criteria: 1) they are “immeasurably complex and largely unknown, even to those who are most intimate;” 2) they write for, or “postulate” possible readers; and 3) they choose “(consciously or unconsciously) to create an improved version, a second self (the implied author)” (428). These three criteria, when applied to the corporate system, generate certain lines of force that act on the textual production: specifically, labor authors are given the responsibility of design, and in turn, to fulfill this responsibility, must coordinate with each other to implement the process of production. These

¹ In *Rhetoric of Fiction* Booth attempted to reintroduce a more nuanced perspective of authorship by clearly demonstrating that a text has not one author, but five: the “flesh and blood” author (or the writer), the implied author, the teller of the tale, the career author and the public myth. Booth’s strategy was to fragment authorship, to unmask the authority of textual production as a complex system of material and symbolic figures; some of these figures (such as the writer) actively produce texts, some will be inferred from authority within (implied authors and tellers of tales) and *behind* a text (the career author), and some are direct projections of audience’s desire (the public myth).

lines of force that find their loci around the labor author must have origins (someone who has the authority to delegate this responsibility), and in turn, must move towards effect. That the responsibility is delegated and a finished product handed over points to other agents in the system who obscure the public's clear perception of the labor authors. That is, these groups of writers who operate behind the scenes, unseen by the public until the rolling of the final credits, are given significant quantities of data and demographic studies upon which they base their designs. Finally, their work contributes to the sustenance of the two other significant author/agents in the system.

At the top of the production axis sits the *legal author*. Authorship in a corporate environment (both in the sense of collaborative creation and multinational economic organization) is divorced and far removed from the actual creative act; legal authorship is defined in terms of the proprietary ownership of intellectual property. Legal authorship, or what Ede and Lunsford have identified as "corporate authorship" (139), exploits conventional perceptions of authorial genius and symbolically vests an employee with the public perception of authorship while institutionally retaining the legal and economic benefits of the product. While Booth has a great deal to say about labor and, as we will see, symbolic authors, he is unconcerned with the legal ramifications of authorship, but we would be remiss if we were to dismiss the importance of corporate, legal authorship as a factor in the textual life-cycle. In Foucault's "What is an Author?" he posits that when we speak of authors, we are not speaking of the people, as such, but rather four distinct "author functions" (344). Author functions are, he contends, "objects of appropriation" (344), suggesting that they are the property of figures external to the function itself. While Foucault's conceptualization of the proprietary nature of the author function is primarily concerned with the discipline exercised over writers near the end of the eighteenth century onward, his notion of the power and control the valuation of property gives over products and even author functions is generative. His suggestion that both the text and the author function are legally codified and configured as property may lead us to conclude that corporations function, more often than not, as the legal author which exerts control (and discipline) over the creation, dissemination, and reception of the new media text.

But the public has a fondness for heroes, and corporations do not meet the public standards of what an author looks like. Obviously, the final goal of the entertainment industry is to produce a commodity that will sell. This is the essence of the distribution axis: companies create means and modes through which they deliver the produced text to the paying public. The issue becomes the various means by which credence is bestowed upon the title. Products need an image upon which they can be hung in order to complete the movement from the labor authors, to the corporate legal author, and finally to consumer, and neither design teams nor corporations retain enough rhetorical power to persuade based on *character*. Therefore, the desire of the audience and the willful actions of the legal authors manufacture the figure of the *symbolic author* as the repository of all the romantic ideals associated with the figure of the author. Hence, the distribution axis serves to provide a face of authority to the public: a type of branding by proxied authorship. In reference to conventional authorship, Booth calls this type of figure, "The Public Myth," or

a kind of super-author, a fictitious hero created and played with, by author and public, independently of an author's actual works. Our only current word for this is "image," but I resist contributing to the corruption of this good old word; it still has

so many other duties to perform. "Character," in the old sense of "reputation," comes close to what I have in mind. (Booth 271)

What is significant here is Booth's use of the associated terms "image," "character," and "reputation." He is speaking overtly of the classical presentation of *ethos*. In other words, the symbolic author is the repository of *ethos* generated by the labor authors in their composition, the legal authors, in their ownership, and just as significantly, the desire of the audience. Mark Rose points to such an authorial phantasm as being vested in "the name." He suggests that the "the name of the author—or artist, conductor, or, sometimes, star, for in mass culture the authorial function is often filled by the star—becomes a kind of brand name, a recognizable sign that the cultural commodity will be of a certain kind and quality" (1). Thus, in place of (or in concert with) the corporate brand, the carefully crafted image of the author becomes a reservoir filled at both ends, by both corporation and buying public.

This contribution by the public cannot be understated—the creation of the reservoir of power that is the symbolic author is not simply a matter of image manipulation by cynical PR people, but a direct result of an audience's desire for a figure upon which their veneration can rest. Alan Wexelblat refers to this as a dual/symbiotic principle, heightened by new media technology. Even traditional, non-interactive texts produce symbolic authors where the figure of "the author is constructed by fans through the text created by the writer, where the primary interaction medium between author and fan is the text" (209). But with new media and the possibilities of perpetual interaction between author-figures and the public, the relationship becomes even more powerful and personal "as writer and the fan jointly construct an author by means of dialog in the new media. . . . The dialogue participants work from partially shared models of what the author should be and relate their interpretations to this model, which they co-construct" (209). The new media model of symbolic authorship then offers considerable new power to the system of authorship, vesting it not only with an absent presence, in the Derridian sense, but with a very personal relationship. This connection between the constructed image and the desirous consumer produces the fanatical devotion to the romantic vision of authorship we see in the public.

But significantly, this widely embraced romantic vision is at odds with the truth that texts in an age of new media are produced by collaboration, owned by corporations, and promoted by manipulated images. This unwillingness to recognize what is known points to Pierre Bourdieu's representation of the power of the symbolic order. Symbolic power is one of displacement and misrecognition: it has

a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force. (170)

Symbolic power, or in this case, the power of the symbolic author, is created by a relationship between those with legitimate power (legal authors, with the authority of the state supporting their claim to authorship) and those without (the audience's desire for a homogeneous author-figure). Simply, the power of the symbol is achieved through a belief in a misrecognition.

Thus, the symbolic author, publicly referred to as the producer or designer (in gaming circles) or director (in film), often stands between the composition/production team and legal status of diffuse corporate ownership. This inheritor of the romantic, "auteurist" movement of

the mid-twentieth century has become a hybrid of middle management and marketing insofar as the director/designer has direct, public responsibility for the success of the product and stands in as a single, symbolic reservoir for the authority of the legal authors in consumer-perception. It is this position which is of the most interest for us, because it is this position that retains the rhetorical power of authorship, yet is the most ephemeral in real world terms. Simply, the symbolic author is a semiotic abstraction with a physical form.

Perhaps the best way to present this rather conflicted form of authorship, the one often mistaken for the true, legal author, is by a more careful examination of the function of rhetorical ethos. *Ethos*, quite unlike its frequent compositional invocation as character, is not an attribute vested in authorship, but a constantly fluctuating relationship between text, audience, and perceived authority: “ethos is not an attribute but an interpretation based on the way a rhetor behaves in presenting an appeal and the manifold of reactions an audience has to these behaviors” (Hauser 94). In other words, rhetors not only demonstrate their character through their texts, but also through a repeated sequence of texts—the process is forward looking and “concerned with the interpretation of character formed through the patterns of interaction that occur in the actual rhetorical event” (Hauser 94).

This repeated exposure that constitutes *ethos* is called *hexis*, or disposition. In ancient Greek rhetoric, one’s *hexis*, or patterns of behavior, created a character for the public to observe and a means by which new addresses could be interpreted. “As we observe [the rhetor’s] public behavior, we see their habits revealed in the choices they make. From observing their habits, we draw inferences about their character, or ethos” (Hauser 97). The *hexis* is constantly produced by action; it is simply synonymous with being—“a permanent condition as produced by practice” (Miller 1974, 311). But character, sometimes portrayed almost as an ontological certainty—an authored identity—is not fixed. Rather, “the nouns habit and character are not static—are not states or conditions of existence, but rather they can be only dynamic states, that is, states involving action” (315). These dynamic states are created deliberately and emerge from a desire, or goal. Presuming that the individual desires the public good and chooses to act from that desire, she will, in turn become a vessel for the attributes of public virtue.

Similarly, the auteurist sensibility depends upon this process of character creation in order to perpetuate itself: “creators” who produce successful games are more likely to make future quality games. The habitual production of particular kinds of games induces an expectation in the audience—an expectation of a general *hexis*, manifested by individual instances of *ethos*. When Firaxis games announces the impending release of the latest edition of *Sid Meier’s Civilization*, strategy game junkies everywhere take notice because the first four *Civilization* products and their accompanying press releases produced an impression of who Sid Meier was, and perpetuated a mythology as to his abilities and control over product development. Simply, as a *Civ* fan, I will buy anything to which Sid Meier attaches his name because I have played all the games he has designed (*Railroad Tycoon*, *Civilizations 1, 2, 3* and *4*, and *Alpha Centauri*), read interviews with him and reviews of the games, and I am persuaded by my repeated experiences with his work that he can be trusted to produce games with elements that I have come to expect. In our model of new media authorship, Sid Meier would obviously be considered the symbolic author whose name is associated with a series of titles, around whom a mythos has been created, whose very titular association with a product is enough to ensure success, whose repeated successes have generated a “virtuous” *ethos*, and over time produced a positive *hexis*. Firaxis games, the corporation to whom *Sid Meier’s Civilization* belongs, would

have us see Sid Meier as the wiz-kid creator, or even to the most knowing of new media users, as the inspired product manager whose leadership translates into gold. But, as we've seen, the success or failure of a product is far less dependent upon the single manager of the team than the process as a whole. So what is the "creator" doing?

The simple answer is that the creator functions as a single, fixed point upon which the public can focus. While the corporation is legally treated as an individual author, the public perception is otherwise (plus, *ethos* depends upon a perception of virtue, and even the crassest capitalist grants the corporation, at best, amoral status). The design team, unlike a sports team, has no direct marketability, as corporate design has no sense of fixedness—sports teams draw their audiences from a form of tribalism, a unity surrounding a location, or set of core principles. The gaming auteur is necessary as a type of brand that transforms a *hexis* into dollar signs. The "creator," quite literally, becomes a symbol, a brand name that inspires trust and projects a set of core virtues.

This process of branding is one whereby *ethos* is carefully cultivated and funneled through a single, symbolic unit, or the brand. David Machin and Joanna Thornborrow describe it as a set of discursive forms, a "contextually specific knowledge about a social practice" (454). Invoking the social semiotic principles of Kress and van Leeuwen, they point out that each brand has a set of values and legitimations to which it ultimately appeals. They produce clusters of associations—lifestyle, ideological, and actual satellite product associations that all create an impression of both the brand and the linked terms—selling the network by means of overarching concepts. In the case of gaming auteurs, each of these great names is associated with an array of values, usually specifically associated with the games to which they are attached. Sid Meier, as identified earlier, co founder of Micropose, whose series *Civilization* has been hailed as the greatest single game series of all time by *Computer Gaming World* (the first magazine devoted exclusively to computer games) and many others, is renowned for his detailed and complex simulations. In fact, his name has become so synonymous with *Civilization* that after the success of the first installment his name was added to the official title of the series: thus, *Civilization* became *Sid Meier's Civilization* (or *CMS*). Additionally, in the third installment, the symbolic author-image of Sid Meier becomes a significant character in the game as well. One of the appeals of the series is that players can seek the assistance of advisors to guide their nation building. In the first version, the advisors took the form of traditional help-style hyperlinks—primarily text/icon based interactions. The second game added the feature of quick video clips of stylized advisors in various forms of costume befitting the state of technological advancement of the player (i.e. civilizations with roughly enlightenment level technology would have advisors in Elizabethan costume). But in *CMS 3*, Sid Meier himself becomes the animated advisor to the players. The symbol of the author, vested with the trust of the audience and authority of the "creator" is iconically represented in his own creation. This direct interaction of course highlights Wexelblat's observation about the power of intimate contact between symbolic authors and their audiences. The creator symbolically interacts with his audience, thus reinforcing his own, albeit abstract, power while at the same time obscuring the precise nature of the game's creation and ownership. Thus gaming auteurs, like brands, become specific discourses of cultural associations that allow the legal authors to divest themselves of public authority, yet gain capital return. Simply, game "creators" become yet another marketing weapon in the corporate arsenal.

So our fully illuminated system of new media authorship would look something like Figure 3:

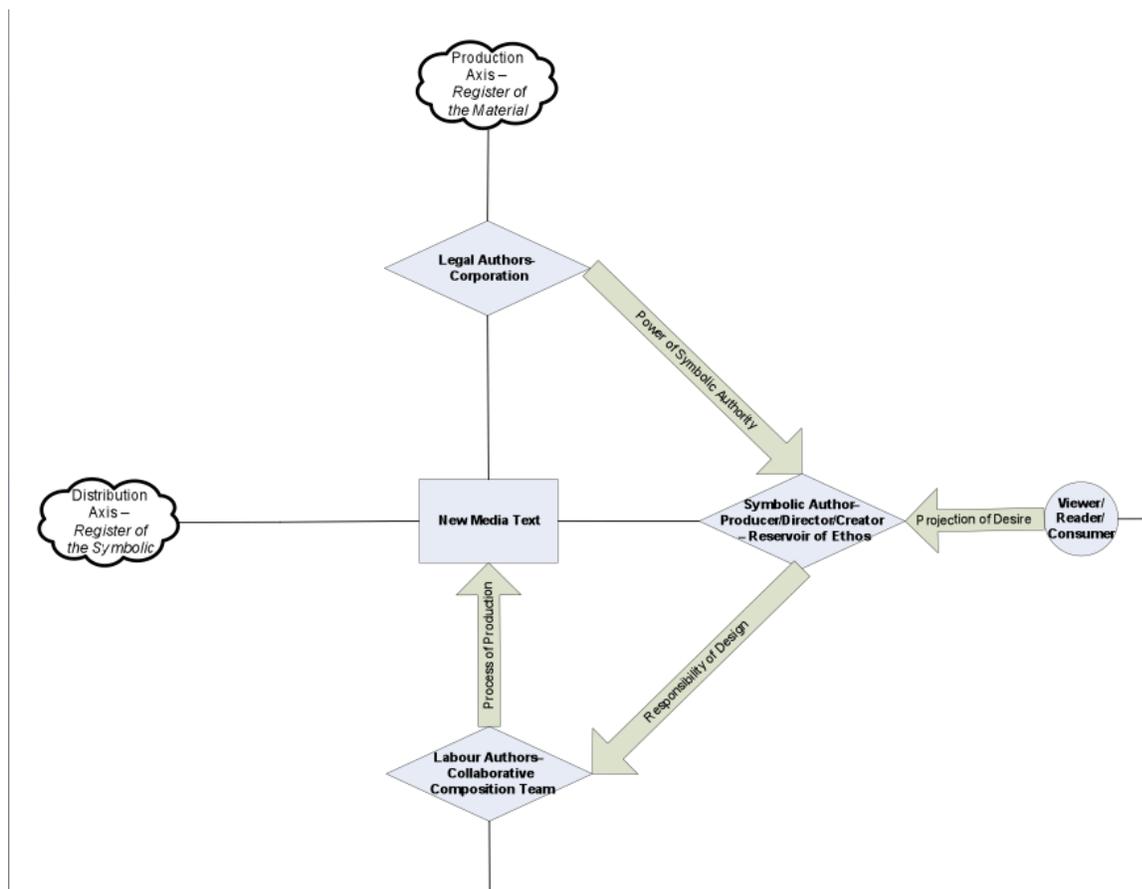


Figure 3: The Fragmentation of Authorship of the New Media Product

Yet we should note that successful authorship of the new media text is not only a matter of *hexis*—of repetitious success—but also of struggle against the very audiences who clamor for the heroic author figure. The attraction of the video-game text, in particular, is largely the opportunity for audiences to become, at least in part, authors of their own customized texts. Strategy games are particularly enticing in this respect. As Cover points out, there often exists a struggle for authority in the seemingly open-ended structure of the game. Using Eco’s model of open and closed texts, Cover suggests that while video games ostensibly promise an open form, a system whereby authorship is shared between the designer and the gamer, the designer wrests final control and authority from their audiences by limiting options available to gamers (186), or through a presentation of affordances and constraints which either produce interactive opportunities or limit use at the level of design (Norman). The game process, in the case of *CMS* series, is “goal-driven” insofar as gamers are given a range of game play options but towards a larger, pre-determined, meta-narrative. In the case of *CMS*, it is the eventual human escape to Alpha Centuri (conveniently setting up another game by Firaxis: *Sid Meier’s Alpha Centuri*). Claudio Fogu suggests that this seemingly open, but procedurally limited affordance of audience-authorship configures Sid Meier as a “procedural author” who, rather than creating narratives in the conventional sense of authorship, creates “procedural models of external or

imagined systems” and imposes “sets of rules that create particular possibility spaces for play” (118). This clarification retains the notion of the symbolic author, as Fogu clearly stipulates that it is the designer who is “the author.” Yet this nuance helps us understand that the new media audience’s desire that creates the symbolic author is not uncomplicated or uncontested.

Ethos and Adaptation

But the purpose of this prolonged discussion of corporate, fragmented authorship is to understand how adaptation in general, and gaming adaptation in particular, function semiotically and rhetorically. How does adaptation—the literal addition of authors to an accruing text—alter the model of new media authorship? What rhetorical terms can we use to describe the power generated by the creation of an adaptation? What will become apparent is that the adaptation produces an analogue to the symbolic author along the distribution axis. That is, while most texts have only their symbolic author (along with the machine of corporate promotion) to produce ethotic power, the adaptation draws upon the legitimating power of its model. Thus, just as the adaptation produces a textual accrual, irrevocably altering the concept of the model and producing a network of associations that contribute to our interpretation of both, so the principle of authorship is similarly expanded and networked. This networking of associative links between adaptation to adaptation, and adaptation to model, seeks to monetize cultural capital, based on the value of the linkage. Simply, the overt connection an adaptation signals through its association attempts to garner an added dimension of legitimacy, analogous to the symbolic author. Depending on the *hexis* of the source, the adaptation’s cultural capital and its *ethos* are improved—the audience’s desire for the source is channeled through the adaptation. But the process of accrual is not a simple matter of addition—any number of texts have attempted to capitalize on the *ethos* of culturally resonant tales such as *Lord of the Rings*, but do not live up to the dual pressure from both the audience’s desire and the standard of the model. Thus, while accrual allows culturally resonant texts to grow, adding to the totality of a larger work, those works are vetted by means of agonism. Longinus suggests that Plato could not have achieved his brilliance “if he had not, like a young antagonist breaking the lance with an established champion, eagerly contended with Homer for the first place, over ambitiously perhaps, but certainly not without profit”(13). The relationship between adaptation and model, then, is a battle fought for the acceptance into a canon, adjudicated by the audiences who are both drawn by an adaptation’s association with a revered model, or drawn to a model by the excellence achieved by the adaptation itself.

The agonistic dynamic of authorship and adaptation is highlighted by Dmitry Puchkov’s “translations” of *The Lord of the Rings*. Famous in Russia for his “cynical adaptations,” Puchkov uses piracy and illegitimacy to overlay revered works with cutting political satire, commentary, and puerile ribaldry; *Lord of the Rings* was chosen over *Star Wars* because “Tolkien’s rather sentimental narrative offered more ground for sarcasm and parody” (Rulyova 627). The process is a large-scale challenge to official dominant discourse of the Russian culture and politics. But from an adaptive perspective, it highlights the ways that adaptation is both contextually specific, insofar as its success depends, not upon its faithfulness to a “source,” but rather, an *eurhythmic* fit, or the way the adaptation conforms to a new audience, purpose, and context. Puchkov’s cultural resonance is greater than that of either Tolkien or Jackson; his adaptations are a better fit to the audience and context of modern Russia than either western artists’ works are without his alterations. Yet we must note that, based on the selection criteria, Puchkov conveniently ignores the fact that it is Jackson’s film, not Tolkien’s book that is adapted. Jackson’s *ethos* is brushed

aside and ignored in favour of the presumption of “Tolkien’s” text. Thus, the agonistic relationship between author-figures depends on the audience’s cultural associations with the texts in question. Puchkov’s adaptive work is only subversive if he targets a revered and venerated text, even if he has to conveniently forget which text he is adapting.

In order to best address how adaptation operates in an interactive new media context we can continue to look to *The Lord of the Rings*’ sustained influence and adaptive power in the interactive modes as well. The film and game industries are now so closely linked that it is unusual to witness the release of a blockbuster film without a corresponding adaptation for PC, Xbox, Playstation, or Nintendo game systems. Consequently, when Peter Jackson’s long awaited version of Tolkien’s classic work was released it was no surprise to find that video games soon followed. What makes this instance unique is several factors: first, rarely have film/game crossovers had such a rich backstory—not only of three, three-hour films on which to draw, but countless stories, drawings, paintings, books, and a vast body of criticism. Second, two competing versions of *The Lord of the Rings* were released to video game to capitalize on the success of the films—one, associated with Peter Jackson and New Line Cinema, the other with the estate of J.R.R. Tolkien and the classic novels. And third, the direct and financially successful connections between the game and the film (as opposed to the game and the novels) highlight the distinction between the principle of an adaptive model (as a point of reference with significant cultural capital) and the fruitless notion of an origin. The audience of the video game culture has a long established connection with film, and filmic conventions, but comparatively less with the linguistic textual tradition. So while Tolkien’s *ethos* is still present and powerful enough to merit notice, the relative proximity of the media gives Jackson’s *ethos* more cultural resonance with gamers than does Tolkien’s.

However, as I have noted elsewhere (“Myths, Monsters, and Markets: Ethos, Identification, and the Video Game Adaptations of Lord of The Rings”), while the video game adaptations of significant texts, like those of the *Lord of the Rings* films, align themselves narratively and overtly with the texts from which they attempt to draw the most credibility, they tend to cleave to well-known gaming models at the same time. While their initial hail uses the authority of their ostensible narrative model, their operational *ethos* is created by structural associations to a successful gaming platform. For example, the popular *Battle for Middle Earth* series, the Electronic Arts adaptations of the battle sequences from *The Lord of the Rings* are real-time strategy games, unlike their more traditional narrative-driven adaptations of *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*. Using a god-like position over battlefield events, gamers control strategic resources in order to act out scenarios that occur throughout the film series, giving gamers the opportunity to change the story line if they are victorious in the “evil” option. The point is that while the narrative overlay is cinematic (primarily created by pre-set cinematic moments from the Jackson films that link events), the pre-formatted game structure and software framework, otherwise known as the “game engine,” is identical to a previous EA title, *Command and Conquer: Generals*; the appearance and play is *Command and Conquer*’s. In other words, while gamers have relatively little connection to the linguistic models of *The Lord of the Rings*, they do have profound connections to the game development cannon that undergirds *The Battle for Middle Earth*; not only is *Battle* an adaptation of Peter Jackson’s text, but an adaptation of *Command and Conquer*. For all practical purposes, the adaptive model of *The Battle for Middle Earth*, just as its spectrum of authorship, is a contested site.

Of concern for our model of new media adaptation, then, is the association of *ethos*, not only with authorship in the figure of the symbolic author, but also with textuality in the symbolic source. Common use of the term *ethos* inextricably links it with identity, personhood, ontology; authors have *ethoi* through texts—the texts point to and reflect their author(s). But of course, this presentation of the author/text relationship is extremely problematic. So, when we recognize the reality of the absent author, or at best the symbolic author, we realize that the text produces *ethos* for itself. It is the texts in which we have faith: we project authorship as a result of that faith. This presentation of *ethos* as a location, a vessel, rather than an identity is in keeping with a classical understanding of the term. Arthur Miller points out, “the basic denotation [of *ethos*] is not character, but ‘an accustomed place’ and in the plural may refer to the ‘haunts or abodes of animals’” (310). Thus, *ethos* is not limited to human agency, but rather to the larger rubric of habituation. Audiences imbue authority to a model, be it a text or a projected agent, and that model then carries with it authority—the source itself becomes a symbol. Bourdieu calls these symbols “objectified symbolic capital” (277), or objects that resonate with and stand for the relationship between powerful and powerless. The model becomes a physical manifestation of projected and misapprehended power of authorship—a tactile analogue to the author-figure itself. So when we turn our perspective to the *Lord of the Rings* series and all its complementary emanations, we begin to see that the cultural power and authority of the adaptations is gleaned, in part, from the authority—the *ethos*—vested in the model. This condition does not eliminate the independence of the adaptive text. Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* success is not enslaved to the model, for if the adaptive relationship were that simple, the rather unwatchable Rankin/Bass adaptation of *The Return of the King* would have enjoyed some measure of success. No, the source/adaptation ethotic structure is not fixed, but rather dynamic and relational. In the same way, authors may grant new texts a measure of notoriety on the basis of their branding, so the model adds credibility to the adaptation. We would, by and large, be more likely to grant an unseen version of *Lord of the Rings* a viewing/playing/listening than *Kull the Conqueror*, simply because of the authority of the model.

Conclusion

Linda Hutcheon, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, suggests that the best way to begin detangling the complex web of adaptation is to first answer: “who adapts?” We find that when it comes to the interactive new media text there is no single answer to this seemingly obvious question; rather, the new media author is fragmented into three distinct components: the legal author, the labor author, and the symbolic author. So if the author of the collaborative new media adaptation is fragmented, how is the authority vested in authorship distributed amongst these parties? *Ethos*, or the negotiated credibility between authors and audiences, becomes a complex system, but most of the credibility for the new media text is housed in the symbolic author. Furthermore, when we add the specter of the adapted text into our matrix, we find that we have competing author-figures in that each new instantiation must, at a certain level, agonistically compete with the model it adapts—each symbolic author must, to one degree or another, supplant the preceding author figure and claim some measure of credibility. When the audience’s projected desire for the single, harmonious author meets the realities of corporate, collaborative, and adapted authorship, the result is a symbolic figure, a stand-in that takes both the praise and blame for the complex authorial relationships that jockey for position behind the scene. The symbolic author becomes the placid and tranquil projection of the corporate process, a scarecrow standing in for tempestuous and agonistic process of authority.

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