

author()

DAVID E. MILLARD, University of Southampton, UK

Writing produced with artificial intelligence is routinely dismissed as slop (not the author's voice, and not really *theirs*) even when the ideas, the argument and the vocabulary are the writer's own and only the sentences were generated. The reaction locates authorship in the act of composition, in the forming of the words. In this talk I argue that authorship was never located there, and that generative AI, far from dissolving the author, obliges us to recover what the author was to begin with.

Foucault's author-function [4] describes authorship as a social and legal construction that assigns responsibility, rather than a natural fact of writing. It arose, historically, from accountability, from the need to identify someone who could answer, and be punished, for a discourse, well before authorship became a matter of ownership. The author as solitary producer and proprietor is a later artefact of the printing press and of copyright [7, 8] – in other words, not a law of the universe, but a technical and legal construct. AI breaks this productive account of authorship; but production was never the core principle.

Recent scholarship converges on that core from several directions. Floridi makes *answerability*, the standing and duty to give reasons for a work's claims, the criterion of authorship [3]; Adamo recasts the writer working with AI as a meta-author, an *accountable* architect who sets constraints and specifies ends [1]; and my own distinction between poet and potter [6], echoed in Floridi's distant writing [2], describes the practice: the *human as designer*, working through prompting, constraint and iteration. On each account, authorship is earned through *intent and epistemic control*, of which answerability is the product.

This turns the prevailing anxiety on its head. Editorial bodies bar AI from authorship precisely because it cannot be held responsible (for example, the ICMJE [5]). Read positively, the same criterion certifies the human: if answerability disqualifies the machine, it qualifies the person. The distant author, writing in their own voice through the machine, is not a diminished author but an author on the oldest available grounds.

Two problems remain. First, the distinction between the author and the abdicator (who merely instructs the machine and signs the result) is genuine, yet outside the professional settings where challenge and consequence test it, we lack the norms to mark it. The vocabulary already exists: to say I wrote it with AI is to claim accountability; to say the AI wrote it for me is to disclaim it. The subject of the verb does the work. What is missing is the discipline to use the verb honestly – and the relationship it marks will outlast the disclosure of the tool, since once all writing is AI-assisted, “written with AI” will signify nothing. Second, what remains at the far pole (text with no answerable author) need not be read as failed writing. It may simply be a different medium that merely shares writing's surface: closer to the meme, authorless yet not without value. This is AI slop as a new cultural artefact: listless and homogenised, yet a genuine reflection of the culture that produced it. The task is not to police the boundary but to name it, and to recover the author on one side, and on the other to recognise what may be the first native medium of the machine.

References

- [1] Stefano Adamo. 2026. From Scribe to Architect: A Practitioner's Reflection on Teaching Academic Writing in the Age of Large Language Models. *Philologist – Journal of Language, Literature, and Cultural Studies* (June 2026).
- [2] Luciano Floridi. 2025. Distant Writing: Literary Production in the Age of Artificial Intelligence. *Minds and Machines* 35, 3 (June 2025). doi:10.1007/s11023-025-09732-1

Author's Contact Information: David E. Millard, dem@soton.ac.uk, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK.

- [3] Luciano Floridi. 2026. AI and the Future of Publishing: Not Detection, but Answerability. *Philosophy & Technology* 39, 3 (July 2026). doi:10.1007/s13347-026-01148-8
- [4] Michel Foucault. 1977. What Is an Author? In *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Donald F. Bouchard (Ed.). Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 113–138.
- [5] International Committee of Medical Journal Editors. [n. d.]. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors. <https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html>
- [6] David E Millard. 2025. *The Shadow of the Machine: Hypertext in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*. Chicago, IL.
- [7] Mark Rose. 1993. *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.
- [8] Matha Woodmansee. 1994. *The Author, Art & the Market – Rereading the History of Aesthetics*. Columbia University Press, New York, NY.