Towards an Ethics of Uncertainty: 
Authorship and Techno-Scientific 
Challenges to Subjectivity in Modern Greek 
Science Fiction Novels

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Being ultimately linked to the various concepts of subjectivity, the notion of authorship is neither a universal nor a constant one. The concept of authorship in the 21st century will be probably challenged by ethical questions concerning the definition of the human subject as fashioned by the techno-scientific developments. This paper explores the depictions of the author figure in speculative technological dystopias through the lens of two Greek SF novels (namely, N. Panagiotopoulos, *The gene of doubt*, 1999 and N. Vlantis, *Writersland: The authors’ island*, 2006). The analysis focuses in turn on the cultural representations of biotechnologies (DNA, gene) and digital technologies (digit), their role in the codification of subjectivities as “informational patterns” and finally on the ethical and sociopolitical issues raised in the novels. By means of the narrative mechanisms undermining scientific determinism, uncertainty is featured as a core property of human subjectivity, of authorship as well as of democracy. The proposed concept of “uncertain authorship” involves a variable, relational and dynamic authorial subjectivity.

Authorship is neither a universal, nor a uniform, nor a constant notion (Foucault, 1994:811; Compagnon, 2006). The conception of the artist as historical subject varies through different periods as it is deeply linked with the mechanisms of the historical formation of subjectivity (Shiner, 2001). The historical study of authorship reveals that the modern configuration of authorship is related to developments in legal, political and various social discourses, to the spread of print technology and the socio-economic changes in the literary field. Literature itself always raises the question of the author and according to A. Bennett, the 20th century crisis of authorship is, in the end, the crisis of literature itself (Bennett, 2005:127). Challenging speculations about the nature and the functions of the author occur overtly in metafictional pieces, as for instance, in the famous Jorge Luis Borges’ short story
entitled “Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius”. According to the narrator, the author is claimed to be a rather fictitious subjectivity. His conception ranges from an impersonal and transcendental entity (“It has been established that all works are the creation of one author, who is atemporal and anonymous”) to a subjectivity totally invented by the critics (“The critics often invent authors: they select two dissimilar works — the Tao Te Ching and the 1001 Nights, say — attribute them to the same writer and then determine most scrupulously the psychology of this interesting homme de lettres...” [Borges, 1964:37]).

The interplay between subjectivity and authority has given rise to diverse combinations between the “impersonal”/“personal” author and the “transcendental”/“absent” authority as models of authorship. The medieval view of the author which placed him under the auctoritas of God provided a transcendental model of authorship, one promoting his omnipresence and omnipotence in the text (Burke, 1995:xv–xxx). The author’s greatly decreased subjectivity was accompanied by a great authority on the text: his/her writings were not original work but were cast as manifestations of an external inspirational force, an essentially public discourse of tradition and religion. Until the end of the 18th century, the impersonal model of authorship, based on highly dispersed authority to collective subjectivities was prevalent: the author was absent from the text as he was only one figure — among a collection of other skilled workers, such as the printers, copiers and publishers — which were equally involved in the production of a book, seen as the result of a collective work. A really subjective model expressed through increased individual subjectivity and authority can be observed only at the time of the Romantics where the power of the creative mind and imagination started to be recognised. The status of the author was such that he was proclaimed as the final authority on the text under his name, something which can be seen as another instance of the transcendental model. The 20th century modernist and postmodernist reactions to this transcendental tendency culminated with an attempt to eliminate the significance of the author’s subjectivity. The radical declaration of the “death of the author” pretends again to the impersonality of the discourse in the text. The post-structuralist critical debates over the author further dismantled the stable subject of the romantic era by upholding a decentralised, split and multiple subjectivities (cf. Bennett, 2005:103). The emerging cultural practices, such as digital literature, enhanced the quasi-dissemination of the author’s subjectivity and authority.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century, there is persistence on the theoretical importance of the figure of the author. Among other important political and ethical issues relating authorship to agency, authorship will probably be further challenged in this century by new questions concerning subjectivity and the nature of personhood, namely the redefinition of the human subject. In this latest phase of history, commonly called “posthumanism” the conception of the human condition is changing through the indiscriminate use or the abuse of science (Fukuyama, 2002; Wolfe, 2010). The new technologically fashioned subjectivities destabilise traditional
humanist values\(^1\) and generate new ethical or bioethical dilemmas\(^2\) concerning all areas of human life including artistic creation.

The aim of this paper is to study the potential depictions and challenges of authorship in a posthumanist era. Nikos Panagiotopoulos, *The Gene of Doubt* (1999) and Nikos Vlantis, *Writersland: The Authors’ Island* (2006) are two modern Greek science fiction novels involving as a central theme the question of authorship in future posthumanist technological dystopias.\(^3\) The authors’ characters depicted in these novels are seen as emblematic of the human condition. Through them, the ethical issues posed by the abusive use of technoscience can be illustrated, namely the alleged “objective” decodification of human subjectivity. As the latter is claimed to be essentially an “informational pattern” (Hayles, 1999:xii), the narration explores the attribution of authorial identity to an individual via scientific processes. These novels on authorship in future dystopias are chosen as case-studies because each of them provides an insight into the two major techno-scientific paradigms of the conception of subjectivity as an “informational pattern”.

The analysis is implemented through the examination of the cultural representations relating to the scientific “decodification” of the empirical author, namely through genetics (genes and DNA in Panagiotopoulos’ novel) and digital technologies (digits in Vlantis’ novel). Subsequently, the ironic textual mechanisms which imitate and subvert the symbols of scientific determinism are highlighted. Finally, through the texts, there emerges a basic claim as to the necessity of sustaining a conception of the human but also of the authorial subjectivity as fundamentally “uncertain”. It is claimed that it is precisely by subverting and overcoming transcendent, absent, over-determined and impersonal models of subjectivity that agency can be maintained. Uncertainty mounts a resistance to totalising techno-scientific discourses and their privileged claim to the truth.

Of course, this paper does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis of these science fiction novels. The focus, instead, is on those parts of the plots in which the depictions of authorship involve technologically fashioned subjectivities and their implications — and as such, the novels themselves could contribute, as relevant case-studies, to the ongoing (since the 20th century) critical dialogue about challenging conceptions of subjectivity and authorship.

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\(^1\) Concerning conceptions of the Self beyond the unitary subject position upheld by Humanism, see also, Braidotti, 2013:15–54.

\(^2\) A fundamental question for Bioethics is to identify the “defining and worthy features of human life” so as to determine whether or not those features are put at risk by scientific innovations, Da Costa & Kavita, 2008:391. cf. also, Pollard, 2009:18–23.

\(^3\) Although Panagiotopoulos’ novel has been translated into French, German, Italian, Chinese, Portuguese and other languages, no English translation exists yet. The translations of the passages of the novel quoted here are mine. The same applies for Vlantis’ novel, as it has not been translated into English. One may find an extended summary of the novel in English written by the author online, at http://www.vlandis.gr/english/?page_id=28
Attempting to “decode” the author: The poetics of subversion of the scientific authority in the novels

A. The “death” and the “return” of the author at the end of the 20th century

The speculations on the alleged scientific decodification of the human subjectivity seem to push the 19th century’s biographical approaches’ desire of determination of the author’s subjectivity to the limits. On the other hand, such a reductionism of the author’s identity to a scientifically “detectable” property could also be viewed as an extreme fictional version of the 20th century’s anti-humanist critical thesis about the “death of the author” as a biological subject.

One further important reason to select these novels as pivots of the current discussion is that in both of them the dramatised authors are the leading characters who are facing the threat of the “death of the author” in correlation with the issue of attribution of authorship in technological dystopias. Panagiotopoulos’ novel treats the manuscript of a dying writer who refused to prove himself as an author by a DNA test, and Vlantis’ novel narrates a serial killing of the potential authors of an anonymous manuscript in Writersland. By bringing literally on scene the “death of the author”, these texts could provide a metacritical material to the intense 20th century debate on the author.

It would be useful at this point to recall briefly the main lines of the critical debate that has promoted the transgression of the empirical author in the second half of the 20th century. The death of the author seemed to be a consequence of the death of individual subjectivity in the era of capitalism, automatisation and increased mass production, during which, along with the individual products, the artist’s creativity and subjectivity are also abolished. In his famous text on the “The Death of the Author” (1968) — a major contribution to the anti-intentionalist thesis — R. Barthes claims an impersonal, decentred, linguistic subject in the textual body. This claim alters the temporality of the relationship between author and text which was traditionally conceived as similar to a relationship between father and child: here there is no longer question of “paternity”, since the scriptor is rather “born simultaneously with the text” (Barthes, 1977:145) in the act of enunciation itself. The uncertainty of the origin of the voice in the text transfers the authority granting unity to the text to the equally impersonal reader (Burke, 1995:129).

M. Foucault’s essay “What is an Author?” (1969) marked the second most important critical line concerning the empirical author’s elimination —this time more historically and culturally involved. As he criticises the theoretical possibility of the author’s disappearance from the text, a clear distinction was made between the “real writer” as an actual historical individual, causally and legally responsible for the text, and the author as a “function” or “figure” in connection with literature. The latter is the one entitled to be the object of critical interest. For Foucault, the author is still

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a “principle of a certain unity of writing” who brings together and explains its contradictions, a constraining but necessary figure of authority. He does not, however, refer either to an empirical, or to a single individual. The author is rather “a variable and complex function of discourse” (Foucault, 1998:212). Nevertheless, although a number of subtle critical terms have been used for this implied author, it is not easy to defend an absolute distinction between the real “writer” and the “author” as a function (Kindt & Müller, 2006:8; Nehamas, 1981:133–149; Nehamas, 1986:685–691).

The acceptance of the empirical author’s “death” should finally mean the embarrassing absence of a thinking subject as well as of a situated position in the discourse. Furthermore, the “principle of unity” and the subsequent authority have been alternatively discovered in the other factors of the literary communication (the text, the language, the reader or the context). Thus, recent criticism records the empirical author’s “persistence”, his “survival” or even his “return” to literary studies (Compagnon, 1998:99; Bennett, 2005; Burke, 1995). On the other hand, as new concepts of subjectivity through post-structuralist thought are currently being explored, this “return” to a personal author could not be considered as a setback to the romantic individualist, autonomous, unitary and authoritative notion of the author.

B. Attributing authorship: From the text’s genesis to the author’s genetics

Michel Foucault, taking into account the constant changes in our society, conjectured that if the author-function disappeared it would be replaced by “another mode, but still with a system of constraint — one that will no longer be the author but will have to be determined or, perhaps, experienced [expérimenter]” (Foucault, 1994:811; 1998:222). The science fiction novels under discussion, by exposing the implications of the transference of authorship and authority to technoscience in future dystopic societies, could offer a field to experiment with a potentially different mode, another “system of constraint” which regiments the texts. In Nikos Panagiotopoulos’ novel, entitled The Gene of Doubt, the plot is situated in a dystopia where science has made everything measurable. After centuries of debates and questionable judgements, the determination of talent is assigned to scientific methodology. The biologist Albert Zimmerman invents a genetic test which classifies the examinee beyond any doubt: an artist is confirmed as such only if he carries the “gene of the artist”. James Wright, the main character, is a writer who refuses to submit himself to Zimmermans’ test. Subsequently, he is socially and professionally excluded and lives in uncertainty about his authorial identity until the end of his life. Although the writer finally took the

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5 Even Barthes recognises the persistence of the author: “mais dans le texte, d’une certaine façon, je désire l’auteur: j’ai besoin de sa figure (qui n’est ni sa représentation, ni sa projection), comme elle a besoin de la mienne (sauf à ‘babiller’)” (Barthes, 1973:39).
test in the hospital before dying, the uncertainty is sustained beyond the end of the novel. His doctor, Dr Clause, who was in the possession both of the results of Wright’s genetic test and of his literary manuscript, made contradictory claims: in his Foreword to the main novel he declared that James Wright’s genetic test was positive. On the contrary, in the Addendum to the novel, signed by N. Panagiotopoulos himself, it is asserted that Dr Clause has finally discredited his statement.

In Panagiotopoulos’ dystopia, the determination of authorship is attempted through factors completely outside the context of the literary communication. According to the represented scientific discourse, the author is supposed to be an autonomous entity, utterly determined by genetic factors. The deciphering of the text is now transferred directly to the author, and the hermeneutical process is literally applied to him. The quest for the meaning as the “hidden treasure” becomes then the quest of the author’s essence which lies in the determination of the “appropriate” gene in his DNA. In this way, the dramatised author in Panagiotopoulos’ novel meditates about the loss of meaning of the word “talent”:

one more little word, hackneyed and misused through the ages, the word talent, acquired a concrete meaning, denoting now something measurable and tangible, but at the same time, as was to be expected, losing a part of its dark charm; that was probably the reason why it so quickly became obsolescent.” (p. 96)

The implications of the hypothesis of an objectively proved talent as a genetically determined essence of the author can be explored through this novel. This absolute reductionism of human subjectivity can be seen as a new instance of the “author’s death” by conferring this time a transcendent authority to impersonal science. N. Panagiotopoulos’ as well as N. Vlantis’ novels discuss a scientific speculation about the reduction of the human subject to his/her elementary elements. In cybernetic dystopias, like the one portrayed in Vlantis’ novel, human beings infiltrate in their brains digital memories and are themselves coded and decoded as digital holograms. The human subject is considered as “information”, as a series of data, which are transmitted either genetically through the genetic information contained in genes and DNA, as depicted by Panagiotopoulos, or digitally through digits and chains of codes as in Vlantis’ novel. Such projects to fully decode the human subject raise critical, ethical issues about their aims which are highlighted in the discussed novels.

For a debate centred on the vision of selfhood in the 21st century, issues of post-human technologies — such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and genetic engineering — should be taken into account. These new technologies can be used to alter the basic biological and cognitive form of humanity, and therefore they could constitute the primary engine of highly effective public institutional surveillance in the future. In these terms, not only our conception about the private and public sphere would change considerably; the possibility of a democratic society could also be seriously endangered.

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C. Questioning the “paternity” of the text: Scientific determinism and ironic subversion

In such conditions, the “return” of subjectivity seems an ethical imperative. As Burke points out, “to refuse totalizing histories or accounts of human nature should be itself to refuse the impersonalizing consciousness that purportedly enables such stories to be told” (Burke, 1995:xxviii). M. Foucault attempts in his later works to recover private space and democracy by exploring subversive techniques of the body and the language against the development of a “surveillance society” (Abrams, 2004:241–258). A subversive strategy in these speculative science fiction novels is expressed through irony, which repels morally dangerous — metaphysical or scientific — certainties (cf. Suvin, xiv). The “ironists”, according to R. Rorty, “are aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves” (Rorty, 1989:74). The failure of the project of reduction of the author’s identity to a basic element is depicted by an ironic orchestration of the rhetoric, the plot and narrative structure of these novels which are duplicating the very symbols and mechanisms of scientific determinism in order to subvert their efficiency.

The gene and the DNA are the basis of the main pattern of identification, but also the pattern of reproduction of the identity. Being the main paradigm of subjectivity, they are deemed as the basic symbolic reserve of scientific and ideological change in the 21st century. The cultural representations of genes and DNA use the available cultural terms and models which in their turn introduce a set of specific values and ideologies. As J. Roof claims, there is no representation of genes and DNA which is devoid of a joint cultural idea, even on a subconscious level. If the main idea, for example, is the possibility of mapping the whole human genome, the representational choice of the outcome would be something like the code, the alphabet, the blueprint or the “book of life” — which could refer to a scientific or practical manual or even to a mystic text (Roof, 2007:2). The “textual metaphors of the DNA” by representing it as a complex text to be deciphered, approach science to art, and scientists to critics, providing models for ideas of authorship and ownership that have been attached to DNA and genes since the 1980s (Roof, 2007:89).

Nevertheless, the gene is a boundary object, in the sense that it traverses the boundaries of different discourses and connects different fields, such as those of biologists, lawyers, data banks or pharmaceutical companies. Such boundary objects are, by their function as focal points, subject to a polysemy allowing their own rhetorical subversion. This ironic rhetoric is activated in Panagiotopoulos’ novel by the undermining of the “gene” as a symbol of the determinist view of human nature. The novel itself is eloquently entitled as “The Gene of Doubt”. This title is used as a synecdoche for the artist — and ultimately stands for the human being — who in the end is intractable by all deterministic projects, such as the genetic test for the supposed “gene of the artist”. The same goes for the “digit” and the digitisation of the
information in Vlantis’ technological dystopia where human beings are digitised in the form of holograms. The streams of analog information are supposed to be safely codified into digital bits of 1s and 0s. Nevertheless, a computer expert in the novel named Socrates — echoing the father of the subversive rhetoric of irony — created a virus untraceable by technical security controls which was able to simulate the digitised transmitted information in order to produce fake identities.

According to J. Baudrillard in *The Vital Illusion*, the determination of the true core of human nature would be, if any, precisely the one that escapes identification processes and manipulation:

> But perhaps we may see this as a kind of adventure, a heroic test: to take the artificialization of living beings as far as possible in order to see, finally, what part of human nature survives the great ordeal. If we discover that not everything can be cloned, simulated, programmed, genetically and neurologically managed, then whatever survives could truly be called “human”: some inalienable and indestructible human quality could finally be identified. (Baudrillard, 2000:15–16)

Furthermore, not only in Panagiotopoulos’ but also in Vlantis’ novel the literary representation of the DNA mechanism seems to provide a main structural principle. The DNA as the mechanism which stores, reproduces and which is supposed to transmit with accuracy and high fidelity the biological information is related to genetic issues, such as the “identification”, “paternity”, “reproduction” or “cloning”. These genetic issues are transposed from the scientific to the literary field. They are also reflected by the narrative simulation of the DNA’s spiral structure in both novels, which is produced by the alternation of the manuscripts of different authors. Even if this effect of imitating the genetic processes is supposed to give the impression of fidelity of discourse transmission, its intention is fully subversive. The aim is to question, through the alternation of authors, the notion of “authorship”, concerning both the authority over the text and its “paternity”. Panagiotopoulos’ novel, *The Gene of Doubt*, is composed in three different parts: the core autobiographical text of the fictional writer, James Wright, entitled “The portrait of the artist as a dying man” which is preceded by a Foreword of his doctor, Dr Clause, who published James Wright’s manuscript one year after his death. “The portrait of the artist as a dying man” is also followed by an Addendum with the eloquent title “The Praise of Doubt” signed by Nikos Panagiotopoulos himself. This Addendum, which blurs the boundaries between real writer and author-figure, is supposed to be written 30 years after the opening of the testament of Dr Clause. It casts doubts about the paternity of James Wright’s manuscript, attributing it to Dr Clause.

A similar narrative mechanism of three intertwined texts is displayed in Vlantis, *Writersland: The Authors’ Island*. The novel presents a future technological dystopia, where people live in oppression by digital technologies possessed by the privileged ones. In a remote island named “Writersland” there lives an isolated community of writers, who digitally reproduce texts as classic authors’ “doppelgangers”. They are copyists adapting to their times the works of Baudelaire, Dumas, Duras, Poe and
Rimbaud among others. They not only take on the name, but also the character, the appearance and the ideology of the writer they are copying. The main plot is intertwined with an unaauthored manuscript entitled “Alcibiades unbound” which narrates an insurrection in a futuristic Athens against a techno-fascist totalitarian regime similar to the novel’s. The task of attributing authorship to this manuscript leads to the death of several authors. Jeffry Eugenides’ doppelganger-writer, in an attempt to usurp the authorship of this manuscript, murders successively the plausible authors until he is himself killed by one of them. In this way, the manuscript with the suggestive title, “Alcibiades unbound”, stays “unbound” and unaauthored until the end. Furthermore, its clandestine publication through the web triggers a revolution in Writersland’s dystopia which results in a new era of democracy. The Epilogue, written three centuries later, informs the readers that these events are reported in the PhD thesis of Thucydides’ doppelganger-writer, who found an unaauthored manuscript, the entire novel itself. This tripartition of the narration, as in Panagiotopoulos’ novel, promotes the contestation of the paternity of the text. The intertwining of different texts through the DNA paradigm raises further questions about a supposed absolutely individual and unified subjectivity of the author. In sum, the ironical rhetoric about gene/digit metaphors as secure information repositories, the central theme of the failure of a secure identification as well as the subversive simulation of DNA structure in the plots, result in a critical discussion on the possibility and the aims of a fully determined subjectivity of the author.

The necessity of an “ethics of uncertainty”: Authorship, ethical and sociopolitical issues in the novels

The tumultuous correlation between science, art, ethics and politics is mainly reflected in these novels through the interplay between scientific overdetermination of human subjectivities leading to “surveillance societies” and the maintenance of uncertainty as an act of resistance. According to Bourdieu, “the ‘profession’ of writer or artist is, in effect, one of the least codified there is” (Bourdieu, 1996:227). The torturing uncertainty of the self-determination of authorial identity in Panagiotopoulos’ novel is related to the dubious presence of talent and it is dramatised by the recurrent identity crises of the author’s character: he is constantly self-questioning about his talent when challenged by negative criticism of his work, intermittent writer’s blocks or the loss of his readers. The possibility of a genetic test confirming his authorial identity would have relieved the author from doubt and would have led to incontestable aesthetic judgements about his oeuvres. The well-known debate between art and science concerning the possibility of accessing truth and value as presented in Gadamer’s Truth and Method (2006:73) seems reassessed in these novels through the literary representations of artistic talent as a factor of indeterminacy.

For a critical philosophical overview of the notion of uncertainty, see Anker, 2009.
versus scientific determinism. In Panagiotopoulos’ novel the narrator confesses his initial dilemma:

> Upon graduating from high school, I faced the first serious dilemma in my life. Was it better to follow a positive science, keeping myself safe from the chaos of theoretical uncertainty, to imprison myself in the solid world of experiments and proofs, or should I instead launch myself into the sea of doubt, into the abyss of art, as was the desire of my heart? (p. 42)

Since the Enlightenment, scientific activity has been viewed as the only authority providing measurable and thus objective results. Art has been excluded from truth and knowledge and confined to the area of aesthetics and mere phenomena. Nevertheless, according to Gadamer, the goal of objectivity is unachievable since meaning is created through intersubjective communication and agreement. The same can be claimed nowadays for science, which also consists of historically and socially bound “systems of thought” in the sense of Foucault.

By admitting that the criteria of acceptability and validity in art evaluation “are determined not through objectively and universally valid principles but through intersubjective agreement among the members of the relevant interpretive community” (Nehamas, 1985:85), the attribution of any artistic identity must imperatively pass through the institutional power of art curators, museum directors, art managers, sponsors, collectors, critics, theoreticians, a range of individuals who possess a well defined identity and constitute what could be described as the “world of modern art” (Daskalothanassis, 2012:317). In Panagiotopoulos’ description of a brave new world, any form of evaluation of the literary work which passes through the “literary field” (Bourdieu, 1996) has become irrelevant, as subjective and biased. Even the diachronic, more reliable but long-term, evaluation provided by the literary canon has been replaced by an instantaneous and irrevocable scientific verdict of the author’s validation.

### A. Genetic determinism and bioethical issues in the literary field of future techno-scientific dystopias

Such a utopia of “objectivity” through the process of genetic control could generate a number of serious bioethical issues in the literary field as depicted in Panagiotopoulos’ novel. Similarly to the way in which the Christian transcendental model of authorship praised the author’s saintliness in order to prove the value of the text (Foucault, 1998:214), here authorial validation replaces the evaluation of the work. Subsequently, the joint question of literary meaning becomes irrelevant as well as the aesthetic properties of the works themselves. The main question is the scientific validation, the “objective” distinction between those who were “positive” or “negative” on the “gene of the artist’s” test. As noted by the narrator in Panagiotopoulos’ novel:

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8 In the discourses of human sciences, validity has always been a “limit question” of research, one that can neither be avoided nor resolved, given its intractability, cf. Lather, 1993:673–693.
This task has been taken over by the DNA reading laboratories, which had simplified it to an outrageous degree. For many years, the Art stock market had not experienced any significant fluctuations. The pyramid had been levelled. There were no geniuses, great, good, moderate or bad writers. There were writers or not. In this new reality, criticism, in its turn, was called upon to rearrange its role. Evaluation has perforce ceded its place to book presentation. (pp. 160–161)

The gene as an elementary part substitutes not only for the body but also for all other personal traits in the creation of subjectivity. The absence of a “valid gene” of the desired artistic property leads to genetic discrimination and is subject to a stigmatised identity (Goffman, 1963). In the Gene of Doubt the genetic test has caused a totalitarian discrimination by condemning to exclusion from the literary field not only those who did not possess the “artist’s gene” but also the ones, like the narrator James Wright, who, although being already highly praised authors, have refused to take this test. An authoritarian redistribution of value in the literary field has taken place as per the results of the genetic test. The authorial credit, although confirmed in a few tested authors (called the proven), is attributed in advance to new-born babies (referred to as the wise babies) and is withdrawn from published authors who failed the test, which therefore are called the cancelled.

This use of the practices of eugenics — the accreditation in the literary field only of genetically validated authors — aims to secure the quality of aesthetic production by reducing the risks of “natural selection”. But as it happens in nature, where the eradication of the evolutionary processes of adaptation and of “natural selection” endanger the survival of the species, in the novel such tactics are presented as jeopardising the literary oeuvres and the authors. In fact, in art, the very process which constitutes the literary canon could be seen as a “natural” or rather “cultural selection”, the survival in time of the “fittest” oeuvres through the random and often confrontational processes of criticism, the readers’ expectations, the publishing houses and the media promotion, the socio-economic instances, the dominant aesthetic models etc. (Guillory, 1993:291–295). Thus, precisely because the authorial property is related to a set of loose social and cultural parameters, the failure of some scientifically accredited young writers (wise babies) to produce satisfactory novels has led the publishing houses to a forgery of identity by hiring ghost writers to write on their behalf. “Ghost writers” are acknowledged authors — like James Wright — who have refused to take the test and have been excluded from the literary field. By imitating the style of the genetically determined writers, they are replacing and by producing best-sellers under their signature the ghost writers are used as a technique of “identity disguise” in the sense of Goffman (1963:90). In Panagiotopoulos’ novel, the narrator, James Wright, proudly admits his effort to create uncertainty about the attribution of authorship while working as a “ghost writer”:

In a world where doubt has been banished, in a world where surprises had been prohibited by law, I had performed above and beyond my duty and the time had come for me to get going. (p. 199)
The limits of the author's identity are also blurred in Vlantis' technological dystopia where the digitised classical literary works are adapted and signed by Writersland's “doppelganger-writers”. The latter have adopted not only the name, the work and the style but also the personality of their author-model. Finally, in Panagiotopoulos' Postscript, the same mechanism is implied to have ultimately been used by Dr Clause. The doctor has probably produced the core manuscript of the novel by faking James Wright's identity.

B. Towards an uncertain authorship

The starting point was Michel Foucault's conjecture that, as our society changes, if the author-function disappeared, it would be replaced by “another mode, but still with a system of constraint” that has to be determined or experienced (Foucault, 1994:811). Science fiction, as a genre of speculative fiction, places important issues in speculative settings to encourage thinking beyond our current social and technoscientific condition. In this way, it could push our critical concepts to their limits (Suvin, 1979:67; Freedman, 2000:19, 22–23; Bould et al., 2010:17–18). The question of authorship, as a major issue in the plot, emphasises its lasting importance in the literary communication beyond the 20th century's “death of the author” hypothesis. If it is then an ethical necessity and a tenable critical position to uphold the “return” of the empirical author, it is also crucial to consider authorship as “uncertain”, situated in what we can call a “ghost zone”, which is metaphorically illustrated in the novels under examination by the presence of ghost writers and doppelganger-writers and by the rhetoric and narrative structures blurring the limits of authorship.

In the same spirit, authorship in poststructuralist conceptions of subjectivity is considered to be “relational”, “in perpetual becoming” and “variable” (often “collaborative” and “multiple”). Such claims keep the author's subjectivity open and underline his/her “disseminated authority” in the literary field (cf. Bennett, 2005:96–98, 103, 118).

A multiple authorship model and a collaborative model of writing seem to be promoted in both novels by the intertwined or juxtaposed manuscripts which are attributed to different authors. Several critics, such as Harold Love, in their various attempts to attribute authorship, have even begun to suggest that collaboration is not an exceptional state of textual production but may be conceived as a primary mode of composition (Love, 2002:220). This position for authorship ranges from a conception of collaboration that maintains some distinction between individuals within a collaborative culture — as was broadly the case in 16th and 17th century theatre production — to a poststructuralist conception which suggests that individuality

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9 Concerning the radical instability of the concept of the autonomous author, cf. Rose, 1993:8. See also, Burke, according to whom authorship should be rather seen as "a situated activity present not so much to itself as to culture, ideology, language, difference, influence, biography" (1995:xxvi; Burke, [1992] 2010:201–206). Concerning situatedness as a characteristic of the subject's understanding of the world, cf. also Pile & Thrift, 1995:29.
itself is split or dispersed within a digital literary culture that is radically multiple and fundamentally collaborative. The collaborative model of blurred authorial identities in the novels, which is combined with the recurring theme of the paternity of the texts, does not aspire to impersonality but to a degree of uncertainty of the author’s subjectivity and of the “dispersal” of author/ity (Masten, 1997:19).

The scientific quest for the determination of a fixed essence of the author’s identity is undermined in the sense proposed by Deleuze, who questions “fixed identity”, putting emphasis on becoming, rather than being (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:256–341; Colebrook, 2002:125–145). This uncertainty concerning authorship is enhanced by its dynamic conception in these novels, where it is represented both as “relational” and in a status of “perpetual becoming”. The poststructuralist modes of thought, echoing the ideas of Heisenberg’s “uncertainty principle”, provide an alternative paradigm for understanding the complex dynamics by means of which various phenomena interrelate. The focus shifts from conceptions of subjectivity and authorship as “structure” — as DNA itself — to ones as “organisation”. Organisation models are characterised by the “interrelation” of structures that change over time. No single point is seen as necessarily elemental or primary and observers and operators are included in their understandings of how these systems work. For instance, in The Gene of Doubt, the active role of the readers is evoked in the process of the author’s formation or in the attribution of authorship. Not only James Wright’s readers, editors, publishers and critics constantly intervene in the writing of his fictional novels by their suggestions, comments, approval or disapproval of his choices, but the overall structure of the novel and its rhetoric of perpetual doubt opens up finally through the empirical author’s Postscript to the real readers, involving them in this uncertainty about the author. Authorship thus — devoid of essence — remains through its multiple facets elusive, an open process of continual formation of the identity with an uncertain result.

These conceptions of authorship could lead to more dynamic considerations of the evaluation processes and namely of the literary canon. Even if the latter is more bound to institutions than to individuals, such a revision of the concept of authorship and authority could enhance its conception as a “process in becoming” — acquiring, as noted by Dean Kolbas — “a continual social confirmation over time” (Kolbas, 2001:60). In that case, the literary canon would be less conservative and fixed, more open to revisions and to the doubtfulness of its absolute authority. The strong connection between the author’s subjectivity and the literary value is illustrated in Nikos Panagiotopoulos’ Postscript, where the narrator claims that the discovery of the fraud committed by the ghost writers led to a major revision not only of the ghost writers’ previous works, which were reread and reevaluated accordingly, but also of the literary field established by then.

The ethical issues raised in the literary field through techno-scientific totalitarian authority are further connected to the current interdisciplinary dialogue between the humanities and the sciences. The preservation of a degree of uncertainty about
authorship is ethically vital. In both novels, the process of attribution of authorship in the societies of technological surveillance literally led to the “death of the authors” as a violent act of repressing the freedom of self-determinacy. Behind the desire for an author fully decodable, and eventually technically reproducible, there lay the risk of essentialism and fundamentalism which were equated with totalitarianism. According to these novels, totalitarian world-views can be avoided through creativity, transformation and democratic values.\(^{10}\) The dramatised author is depicted as a symbol and as a figure of resistance to the societies of surveillance by his ability to escape from determinism, like the polysemous literary text he produces, and by engaging actively in the preservation of dialogue and the civil rights of democracy. As narrated in Vlantis’ dystopia, although initially the writers were retired in the Writerland’s island in order to avoid the atrocities of the totalitarian regime in the cities, “by nature most of the writers are anti-establishment” (p. 64) and when the revolutions started “all sorts of victimised and expatriated artists played a fundamental role in the insurrections” (p. 360).

Undecidability has been shown through the examined science fiction novels as the sine qua non condition for art, interpretation, evaluation, ethics and politics. According to Derrida “there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without the experience of some undecidability. If you do not experience some undecidability, then the decision would simply be the application of a programme, the consequence of a premise or of a matrix” (Derrida, 1999:66). This paper attempted to reveal the contribution of speculative fiction, as science fiction, to the dialogue initiated by critical theory concerning authorship and subjectivity, and namely, the eventual techno-scientific challenges to these conceptions in the 21st century. Through the discussed science fiction novels — via the dramatised authors, the subversive rhetoric, the plot and their entire structure — what is highlighted is that the polysemous field of art and literature remains critical for elaborating an “ethics of uncertainty”. To embrace an ethics of uncertainty is anticipated as a means to preserve the vital space for decisions, the becoming, the freedom and the ethical responsibility towards self-determination and agency.

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\(^{10}\) According to Anker’s position, which draws on Derrida’s notion of “democracy-to-come”, democracy should always be open to becoming, otherwise it risks the closure of totalisation. So democracy is not about individualism but about an agreement that things change continually as if to create an opening for the individual to engage in continual decision-making (Anker, 2009:24).
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