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A Companion to  
Media  
Authorship

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## Authorship Below-the-Line

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When asked publicly about one's personal artistic contribution to a feature film or primetime series, production workers in Hollywood will routinely respond that they are experienced and good at their "craft" and that their main goal is to "serve" the overall story in any way the story demands. This official stance means deferring to their director, department head, or producer. Yet, once production is underway, many of these same workers inevitably face many openings and gaps – unanticipated in the control schemes of producers and directors – into which they inject their own stylistic ideas and technical solutions as part of workplace habit. This modest but contradictory under-the-radar posture – to habitually create and contribute artistically on set but to deny it in public – cuts to the heart of a question worth addressing in more detail: to what extent can "authorship," aesthetic "control," and "expressive creativity" be said to function below the level of management (i.e., the producer or director); and how is the expressive creativity among the crafts workers like or unlike those assigned to the traditional "auteur"?

This chapter outlines some mechanisms by which "authorship" and "creativity" are publicly invoked, industrially spurred, managerially dispersed, and profitably gleaned from among "craft," technical, and "below-the-line" workers in US film and television. My research places particular emphasis on the systematic ways that creativity is distributed and harvested according to longstanding craft distinctions, union contracts, and industrial precedent.<sup>1</sup> Although authorship among workers is clearly implicit within collective organizations like production companies and crews, crafts workers will seldom explicitly claim sole authorship in public (for political and career reasons), and will instead credit and defer to above-the-line producers and directors who habitually and routinely hoard creative credit for the work of hundreds of professionals on any feature film or primetime production. Why and how this authorial slippage happens are matters of some relevance to



anyone trying to understand the new “flexible creative industries” within which many production personnel increasingly work.

Understanding the authorial dynamics of workers means tangling with a series of forces: Hollywood’s craft origins in Taylorism and Fordism; obligations and rites of mentorship as a guiding context; “invisible” and “symbolic” labor economies among crew members; the gender and sexual politics within crews; the ways that individuals strategically sell off artistic credit for career advancement; differences in artistic credit practices within camera, editing, and effects communities; the nature and attainment of “journeyman” status; and differences between union and non-union work environments. On a basic level, authorship and artistic credit are “industrial” matters dictated by union policies and labor contracts. In other ways, however, authorship and artistic credit are explicit “cultural” phenomena within production, negotiated interpersonally and collectively through a wide range of socio-professional rituals and habitual workaday routines. My goal is to connect broader industrial schemes and labor conditions, on the one hand, with more complex and contested cultural terrain found in actual crews, work groups, and outsourced creative teams, on the other, to understand the artistic contributions of crews.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

“Below-the-line” (“BTL”) tends to refer to all of the workers involved in the “physical production” of unionized feature film and television, who work at fixed hourly rates, subordinate to above-the-line (“ATL”) “talent” and management. Popular uses of the term – such as “individuals considered below-the-line do not have any official influence on the creative direction of the film except at the discretion of the director” – confidently make below-the-line workers *non-authorial* by definition, thus rendering them apparently inappropriate for any book like this one on “authorship.”<sup>3</sup> Yet this de-authoring assumption glosses over the fundamental ways that physical production is in practice authorial. That is, for most production craftspersons successful employment on a daily basis necessarily means finding ways to be inventive in conceptualizing and generating textual and stylistic components – even if modest ones – that have not been planned for or foreseen in the grander production schemes mounted by producers, writers or directors in advance of a shoot. Recognizing how widely creativity is distributed among a crew is also a matter of some import to workers, management, and (hopefully) media studies scholars. This cultural downgrading of certain workers as non-authors survives as a legacy of basic binary oppositions established by management in the early years of the industry: “art” versus “craft”; “creativity” versus manual “labor”; “expressive vision” versus “crew work.” In these binaries, stylistic and narrative innovation supposedly takes place in the above-the-line world of director and screenwriter elites, while below-the-line crew members

exist only to fabricate and “render” someone else’s creative vision. This view is shortsighted at best, since scholars that employ it miss large areas of authorial expression they presume to describe.

In trying to flesh out authorial aspects of physical work in the pages that follow, one caveat is worth acknowledging up front: generalizing about “the industry” is a tricky business since the production world is far from the monolith that some have imagined. Much of what I say in this short chapter, therefore, applies differently to some sectors of production than others and requires accounting for industry’s specific localizable distinctions (union versus non-union; primetime drama versus syndicated reality TV; feature versus direct-to-video, etc.). The ever-fragmenting industrial situation in Los Angeles (the site of my fieldwork over two decades) makes theoretical generalizations slippery matters, but ones worth pursuing nevertheless.

Before examining production practice specifically, two foundational questions are worth keeping in mind. The first seems counter-intuitive: how can scholars *locate* authorship in an industry that conspicuously overproduces authorship for viewers and critics alike? For starters, given the fundamental need for corporations to achieve “integrated” industrial reflexivity today, the overproduction of authorship is almost unavoidable in the churn of dense, “migrating” paratexts that I have detailed elsewhere: DVD commentaries, bonus tracks, making-ofs, pre-views, behind-the-scenes programming, and Q&As at festivals and retrospectives.<sup>4</sup> In the face of the gush of reflexive paratexts that overproduce authorship, do industry’s effusive authorial self-disclosures represent gifts to the scholar – a sort of user-friendly pre-emptive critical analysis given freely by industry? Or are they merely smokescreens laid down by marketing departments? Second, if authorship assumes that artistic works are signed (explicitly, implicitly, or figuratively) what would a BTL artistic “signature” be? If signature conventionally refers to forms of written self-attribution, then scholars would pay particular attention to industry’s textual and paratextual claims of authorship. On the other hand, if we see production signatures from a different perspective – following the metaphor of the ballistic residue or unintended burn marking, used as evidence of an originating condition, my preference – then discerning below-the-line authorship is a more complicated matter of analysis indeed.

While textual analysis (of primary on-screen texts, like graphic title sequences, and secondary paratexts, like making-ofs and directors’ DVD commentary tracks) shows that media corporations tend to lead with and traffic in *explicit-signatures*, fieldwork (participant observation, set visits, or analysis of crew work interactions) can clarify and bring *tacit-signatures* into clearer focus. The current popular use of twitter by ATL directors or producers on set (to keep loyal fans in-the-know and up-to-speed about “what is actually going on” “behind-the-scenes”) is an explicit form of self-attribution and authorial signing. On the other hand, unauthorized BTL tweeting, leaking, or blogging by disgruntled crew members (texting, posting to social media, or uploading using pseudonyms) can function as *signature-nulling*

actions against producers and directors.<sup>5</sup> Even if BTL crew members' tweeting or blogging does not seek to undercut ATL authorship overtly, their very presence in cyberspace clutters and scatters authorial evidence and value down the production food chain. At the very least the presence of BTL workers online and in social media, and leaks from crew members, make it clear that creative agency is no longer the singular enterprise that both directors and academics (strange bedfellows) habitually make it out to be. Although some literary scholars, like Kristina Busse in this collection, argue that the academy has long taken the "death of the author" for granted, I would argue that the field of film studies largely pays collective "lip-service" to this supposed authorial death. That is, even though poststructuralism long ago ostensibly eclipsed the author privilege within academic theory, "cinophilia," "fanboy-scholars," and "transmedia" studies have all continued to resurrect the dead as the centerpiece of cult viewing, fan subculture, and blockbuster television franchises respectively.<sup>6</sup>

### The Problem of Collectivity

The contest just described, between authorized ATL tweets and "leaks" (intended to virally or pre-emptively market a production before it is finished) and unauthorized BTL tweets and "spoilers" from production personnel (sometimes leaked anonymously and surreptitiously because of crew or employee resentment), makes it clear that claims of media authorship are not something scholars have to work hard to find. Rather, explicit authorial claims and counter-claims are something that scholars should probably, at least initially, set aside as determining evidence, in order to better understand the production system as a whole. Questions about how to separate and assign "agency" to either the production individual or the production group cut to the heart of how we study production cultures. As it develops, "production studies" represents an unavoidable cross-disciplinary nexus between wide-ranging disciplines (cinema and media studies, political economy, industry studies, organizational sociology, cultural anthropology, etc.). As such, the individual-vs.-collective tension represents a foundational issue for BTL production studies. Scholars from the humanities (cinema and media studies, cultural studies) will tend to err on the side of individual agency in production accounts. Researchers from the social sciences tend to err on the side of collective explanations (comfortable as they are in locating agency in the organization, group, or system). Scholars, that is, tend to find what their fields look for in the first place.

Consider the methodological pressures and broad disciplinary models mounting against the individual agency assumptions of aesthetics/humanities. These include: the "division of labor" model from political economy;<sup>7</sup> "mode of production" from film history;<sup>8</sup> "distributed cognition" from cognitive science;<sup>9</sup> "distributed creativity" from production studies;<sup>10</sup> "situated" or "embedded cognition,"<sup>11</sup> "Actor-Network Theory" from organizational sociology;<sup>12</sup> "creativity-and-constraints research" from communication studies;<sup>13</sup> "intelligence of networks" from digital

media studies;<sup>14</sup> and “crowd-sourcing” from creative industries management studies.<sup>15</sup> All of these collectivist/distributed models can productively inform and resonate with current research on film and media production cultures, since they provide exacting terminologies allowing the critic or theorist to describe and explain the complexities of media production in far more detail than formalist or authorial aesthetics. I am not arguing that social science methods are superior to critical humanities methods in any way; only that integrating social scientific theoretical paradigms and methods within critical humanities and aesthetic studies can provide a much more useful foundation from which to understand the considerable complexities of media texts and their production.

I hope to drill down deeper in three areas to clarify the reasons the collective/distributed models just described are useful in better understanding BTL authorship: the *legal context* of “intellectual property” (IP); the *economic conditions* of BTL production cultures; and the *material conditions* of BTL production work.

### Legal and Contractual Constraints on BTL Authorship

Creators in the US film and television industries have few of the intellectual property (IP) rights granted by law to creators in other closely related (even allied) creative industries, like music or book publishing. This IP disconnect between film/TV and the other arts and media is now especially odd, since film, television, music, and publishing departments are all integrated and travel across divisions within each media conglomerate. Specifically, the classical Hollywood studios compelled screenwriters and directors to give up the legal rights to authorship in lieu of “work-for-hire” contracts.<sup>16</sup> To be fair, writers and directors went along with this scheme – thus functioning as “contract labor” – in part because they were so well paid for their creations in the classical and network eras. In retrospect, giving up IP rights to authorship in favor of contracted fees seems far more suspect today for two primary reasons. First, in the era of syndication and endless repurposing, screen content now potentially provides a “revenue stream” for the IP rights holder forever. Since both federal copyright law and longstanding contractual arrangements between the Writers Guild of America (WGA)/Directors Guild of America (DGA) and the studios define and recognize film and TV corporations (rather than human beings) as “authors,” the studios and networks (not individual screenwriters or directors) get to mine this “endless ancillary afterlife” of screen content. Second, the high fees and implicit job security offered WGA screenwriters in the 1930s and 1940s no longer make sense as a fair trade-off for losing copyright, given the explosion of non-union production, the over-supply of creative labor, and the technological reconfiguration of film and media creation. Writers and directors can no longer count on the sweetheart arrangements that supported them during earlier industry oligopolies, and can no longer control the scarcity (and thus increase the economic value) of their creative labor.

Even though this corporation-as-individual-author (and copyright holder) versus the screenwriter/director as work-for-hire model rules legal arrangements in the *above-the-line* world, the model also pre-emptively set the mold for all other creative workers below the elites in film and television. This is why authorship rights were never on the negotiating table for cinematographers, editors, and sound designers. In fact, BTL workers are far more likely to use metaphors like “day laborer” or “journeyman” to describe themselves. If an ATL creator or on-screen talent are in high demand, they can negotiate “above scale” salaries (beyond required guild rates), and “residuals” (or percentage “points” of equity in the production as a whole which allows them to share in distribution profits in perpetuity). For these ATL individuals, productions are “gifts that keep on giving.” Residuals in the BTL sector, however, do not work this way, since any residuals negotiated by an International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees (IATSE) member union are paid to industry-wide pension and health funds – not to individual workers. Thus, even as federal IP and copyright law cleanly erased authorship from individual workers, negotiated labor contracts have ensured that everyone BTL is officially stripped of authorial agency as well. As I discuss later in this chapter, even though unions ostensibly function to affirm the collective nature of work and production, unions are not themselves innocent of the de-authoring impulse that follows from earlier IP law and ATL precedent. Rather, as a result of contract negotiations, they are in fact complicit in legitimizing their own loss of authorial rights.

### **Economic Stimuli and BTL Authorial Discourses**

Beyond these “strategic” IP erasures and legal constraints in Hollywood (from the top), changing economic conditions help explain a countervailing force: the fundamental “tactical” ways (from the bottom) that BTL authorship is resuscitated, broached, and bartered in film and television. That is, actual BTL working conditions and socio-professional practices regularly undercut or unsettle the general strategic erasure of BTL authorship coming down from management (which itself was concocted through longstanding studio, federal law, and union contract collusion). At least nine general economic and labor practices seem to spur BTL workers to reflect and debate over artistry and authorship as a recurring *cultural* activity in production communities (Figure 18.1).

Two broad conditions – the *over-supply of qualified labor and aspirants* and the *underemployment of professionals* – do more than just pressure successful practitioners to lower wages and bids in order to win contract work. These interrelated factors in the vast, anxious worker pool have also spurred industry to adopt cultural postures, by fueling the development of a comparably huge film/TV meta-industry or “shadow industry” adept at financially mining the zealous, overcrowded aspirant pool. I regularly joke that there are more people making livings writing “how-to” books on screenwriting and “making it” in Los Angeles

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| • Over-supply of labor and aspirants | • Underemployment of professionals           |
| • Contract labor and outsourcing     | • Crediting and discrediting                 |
| • Quid pro quo relationships         | • Barter-and-trade ("spec" work, free labor) |
| • Dues-paying                        | • Latent, informal, or off-book funders      |
| • Erased familial capital (nepotism) |  |

**Figure 18.1** Economic conditions that fuel cultural articulations of BTL authorship.

than there are professional screenwriters actually making it. There are seemingly more “experts” selling desperate aspirants production-related products (services, events, publications, memberships, workshops, DVDs) promising to “reveal” the hidden aesthetic and technological tricks of new digital production tools, than there are professionals actually making respectable incomes using those same tools. Although lots of money changes hands, nothing is actually produced in this shadow industry – other than endless, churning critical and theoretical reflections on the nature of technologies, how to achieve breakthrough performances, how to get representation, or how to create stylish, Sundance-capable first features with “no budgets.” Far from dismissing this shadow production industry because it is a market that aspirants have to pay to be a part of, I have argued that it is precisely the over-investment in shadow production by aspirants and the industry that makes this world a valuable site for scholars to research.<sup>17</sup> The costly seminars, trade brochures, and semi-professional rituals that make up this ancillary production world in fact provide cogent, ground-up vantage points from which to look at and understand the industry as a whole. The apparent law of this shadow industry? As the availability of creative work drops, the talk about creative work increases. After all, workers with job security have little need to justify or constantly theorize about what they are doing and why, or to claim that they are artists or “authors.” Yet under-employed workers and unemployed aspirants are stuck with the unenviable task of constantly convincing others about how and why they are artists; why their skills are exceptional even though they are not working; and why they bring creative distinction and deserve employment. Without actual work, that is, the well-oiled shadow industry stimulates – for a fee – the vast aspirant pool to master rhetorical justifications, imaginary productions, and personal authorial “brands.” More than just crude hustling and self-promotion, vocational auteurism lies at the heart of this now-obligatory rule, that everyone in production should develop a “personal brand.”

Although aspirants and the under-employed struggle in these ways to master vocational auteurism as self-promotion in order to make it out of Hollywood’s shadow industry into the “real industry,” even successful over-employed or overworked professionals must now increasingly perform self-authorship as well.



Specifically, the practice of *contract labor and outsourcing* FX and CGI work to non-union digital and post-production “boutiques” has changed the traditional balance between craft work and the rhetorical justifications that work in these sectors is artistic. Even as screenwriters gave up IP rights for ample pay in the 1930s, many CGI artists, animators, editors, and FX artists have accepted high daily rates as a consequence of working within Hollywood’s non-union “off-worlds.” That is, at least in Hollywood and among its North American and Western European partners, animation and FX labor can be incredibly lucrative for workers, even for digital artists in their twenties and thirties. As a result, pressures to organize and demand recognition even in the form of simple credits seldom move beyond the griping phase. Additionally, these “boutiques” are increasingly viewed as “sweatshops,” as I have detailed elsewhere, in part because there are few protections against long working hours and stressful conditions.<sup>18</sup> Because this huge non-union workforce is largely invisible, sequestered away in scores of subcontracting firms, those same firms have resorted to a range of innovative management initiatives that constantly intend to counter anonymity and alienation by underscoring that these workers are “artists” and not “laborers.” These aesthetic-managerial socio-professional rituals aimed at convincing the firm’s work “talent” to stay “on the team” include: free time on firm workstations to “experiment,” contests between workers to produce non-sponsored spec projects, mini-film festivals and shootouts, and sabbatical leaves to allow “burned out” 26-year-old digital workers to rediscover their inner vision as artists. Much as anti-union Walt Disney symbolically offered his workers “artist” status in exchange for low pay in the classical era, contemporary outsourced subcontractors cultivate their amply paid but overworked employees as “authentic” non-commercial artists defined by personal vision. The apparent management logic in this stressed sector: the more anonymous the work being churned out, the more essential it is to pay workers for their alienating overtime with the marks and individual distinctions of artistry and authorship. In this cultural “overtime” scheme, payment in “authorial capital” compensates for payroll in economic capital.

Directly related to this managerial trend toward paying for “outsourced anonymity with authorial attributions” is the widespread tension in Hollywood between “*crediting and discrediting*.” For decades, signatory agreements between studios and unions detailed requirements about who received on-screen credits in title sequences. Contract outsourcing severely undercuts the predictability of explicit, consensus crediting, and makes on-screen recognition a matter of project-by-project negotiation. As a result, lots of outsourced effects, animation, and post-production workers rarely get on-screen credit – even on productions ostensibly produced by major studios with union contracts. In the wake of this crediting insecurity, many workers place considerable emphasis on producing, editing, and circulating as widely as possible their “comp reels” (a rather straightforward selection of excerpts of productions they claim to have worked on), or “demos” (a montage of key sequences that demonstrate a worker’s distinctive stylistic skills as an editor, sound designer, Steadicam operator, FX artist, etc.). I describe

these trade artifacts elsewhere as “embedded texts,” and as keys to how a “flexible,” constantly re-affiliating workforce must constantly reaffirm and sell personal distinction and individual agency in order to survive and work again.<sup>19</sup>

While this cultural labor practice constructs and resurrects signature identities for employees hidden in non-union crews, digital sweatshops and “server farms,” the same dynamic percolates with even more anxiety and futility in the lowest rung in the production food chain: “tape loggers” in reality TV who labor invisibly in windowless off-world bunkers for one of TV’s cheapest (and thus most lucrative) genres.<sup>20</sup> Unlike their entry-level industry predecessors (unpaid interns and low-paid PAs) reality tape loggers will never rise up out of these actual sweatshops and “make it” in the industry, even after years of work. At least entry-level PAs traditionally worked in physical proximity to “real” producers and directors. Thus, they could potentially learn the trade by observation, and if successful and lucky enough to be recognized or anointed by a mentor, embark on an industry career themselves. Reality tape loggers have neither this close proximity nor any connection with legitimate “insiders.” Yet, true to form, the resolute physical isolation and alienation of reality tape loggers doesn’t stop these college grads and just-off-the-bus aspirants from writing “spec” scripts, plotting to make no-budget features, and attending costly “how to make it” workshops in Hollywood’s largely symbolic and virtual shadow industry. Perhaps as a form of compensating survival therapy, vocational hopelessness and dead-end industry sectors like this are in fact fertile breeding grounds that spur the often desperate development of personal authorial vision. Exercises in virtual or imagined authorship of this sort may be necessary for psychological survival among Hollywood’s “untouchables” in the lowest caste of the industry.

*Quid pro quo relationship-building and maintenance* also play a part in fueling the cultural performance of BTL authorship. BTL employment is seldom long term and almost always “project-specific,” lasting only as many days or weeks as it takes to shoot (or edit) the production at hand. Crew work is anxiety inducing in part because workers must constantly look for their next jobs even as they start on their current job. The start-stop-look-for-employment rollercoaster that results creates a highly flexible migratory labor workforce. This start-up/wrap cycle creates an employment churn that requires that workers do something beyond simply looking for work, recommending friends for work, or hiring workers as a way to payback those that have helped them in the past. The migratory churn also requires constant collective reflection on the artistic value of any potential worker to each new firm/production. Way below the level of ATL and studio marketing, the “key” employees that head each BTL production and craft department constantly (even if implicitly) negotiate the aesthetic and technical value of the slowly morphing family or network of colleagues and subordinates that they bring to each shoot or production.

The last four economic conditions that help spur cultural assertions of artistic and authorial agency can all be usefully understood under the broader framework of *production’s invisible economies*. Without question, the budget numbers and math

reported in the trades about the costs of a production seldom represent reality. And this factor goes beyond the term “Hollywood accounting,” which cynically presupposes the habitual ways that studios hide and charge their long-term (non-project-specific) infrastructure costs in the guise of line-item costs on project-specific production budgets. I refer instead here to all the unnamed forms of “social capital” (value from social networks, organization, and interpersonal relations) and “cultural capital” (value from marks of cultural distinction, class origins, and educational pedigree) that producers leverage to make a film or television series economically viable today. Executives, producers, and their accountants never quantify these invisible social and cultural economies in public – nor do they admit they exist. Yet they do.

*Barter-and-trade* labor practices provide one form of invisible capital to a wide range of productions. Because of the over-populated and desperate job market, and the importance of cultivating informal hiring networks, many workers volunteer or donate their work or expertise to productions that may: (1) give them higher marks of cultural distinction (e.g., a low-budget art feature intended for Sundance, or a social issue documentary with award potential); or (2) implicitly require the recipients of their donated labor to reciprocate by giving production labor or expertise back to them (the pre-emptive giver in the future). Both the shadow industry described earlier, and the real industry, are flooded by “spec” projects (written or produced without funding) and free labor (given to projects, sometimes in exchange for meals and credits, or to simply add to one’s CV or filmography). Accountants do not convert this value – derived from social relations and interactions – into economic capital, even though social and cultural capital clearly allow for increased levels of production value. Another work-world practice, *dues-paying*, also produces excess value that can be gleaned and used to enhance production. The career premise behind it: grovel and suffer endlessly now for the chance to score big later. As Erin Hill has documented, entry-level “assistants” open themselves to overwork and abuse by producers and agents in exchange for the long-term chance to learn the secrets of ATL authorship.<sup>21</sup> Since few assistants actually advance to the top levels of industries and receive the pay and rewards hoped for, however, these same producers’ assistants master self-rationalization to justify their mutually exploitative predicament. One undeniable lesson of dues-paying is that almost every ATL player in a production is propped up by many more invisible, lower-level minions who actually do ATL work. *Latent, informal, or off-book funders* represent a third type of invisible production economy. Tens of thousands of individual aspirants in Los Angeles, from their twenties through middle age, are only able to survive and pursue deferred career gratification because they are secretly supported by unacknowledged patrons. Beyond “trust funders” and “kept” individuals, this category includes the adult children of wishful parents, stage mothers (and fathers), and the partners of girlfriends, boyfriends, and working spouses. The very availability of this large labor force to production companies results from the ubiquitous infusion of unacknowledged

off-book capital that production accounts never itemize. A fourth and final variant of production's invisible economies comes in the form of *erased familial capital*, frequently embedded in production budgets as a result of nepotism. Examples of this are numerous, although nepotism is almost always denied. If familial capital is acknowledged, it is frequently construed as something less sinister than nepotism, as a type of fortunate mutual or informal learning effect.

These nine economic and socio-cultural practices all suggest that the BTL work sector functions figuratively as a kind of "authorship brokerage." Following this paradigm, "value" (economic capital) is pursued by leveraging: (A) cultural capital (marks of individual distinction, crediting, and scarcity); and (B) social capital (informal networks based on patronage and payback). This "tactical" world of BTL authorial affirmation must be seen in the context of the broader system in which it works: that is, as a countervailing set of actions that undercut the incessant blurring and strategic erasure of individual signatures by ATL figures in the system as a whole.

### **Material Conditions: Forces of Authorial Disorder**

The third broad area that impacts how BTL authorship is distributed below-the-line involves the material conditions of physical production. Three changes in physical production spurred by the adoption of new digital technologies have had a direct impact on the relative degree of BTL creative agency. Digital technologies have brought many revolutionary breakthroughs and stylistic benefits, but they almost always function as business "shortcuts" that disrupt conventional crafts organization. Three recessionary tendencies in particular dramatize digitalization's disruptive force, as I have described in more detail elsewhere:<sup>22</sup> *blurred and collapsed workflows*, *accelerated on-set work speed*, and *multi-tasking* expectations.

Traditional workflows between production and post-production involved a linear, serial sequence of discrete tasks and progress benchmarks. Shooting followed set-building and lighting, logging followed recording or filming, fine-cutting followed rough cutting, effects were added late in post, etc. Digital technology confuses this sequencing through *blurred and collapsed workflows*, allowing post activities to bleed into earlier production phases, and production activities to seep into traditional post-production environments. Now, visual effects supervisors commonly meet and plan with a producer and director at the earliest stages of a project's script development. With this pre-emptive invasion of *post* functions into *pre*-production, who now can claim to be responsible "for the overall look of a production"? Traditionally this role was standardized and claimed (in different ways) by two longstanding crafts: the DP (director of photography) and the production designer (or art director). Adding the VFX supervisor to pre-production, however, means that there are now frequently three cooks in the kitchen wrestling over the stylistic recipe – and thus three major forces struggling



over BTL authorship. Computerized efficiency and speed in post has, ironically, also ramped up the *pace of filming and work speed* on a set. As long as production's workflow was tied to 35mm film, DPs and directors advanced their careers by mastering low shooting ratios using fewer shots. This efficiency allowed for formulaic coverage on the set and predictable cutting in post. Computerized AVIDs and then FCP systems, however, allowed the same sized team of editors to view, process, and manage far larger amounts of raw footage. This volume capability on the back end of a production encouraged directors and DPs to experiment and shoot far more – using multiple hand-held cameras and long takes – on the set of many primetime dramas. The result, ironically, has been that drama production has become more like *improvisational theater*, (over)shot in a *documentary* mode acclaimed by television critics for its edgy *cinematic* (or what Ethan Thompson terms “*comedy verité*”<sup>23</sup>) qualities. This new, shortened-and-accelerated improvisational shooting mode only works, however, if directors are willing to distribute or delegate more framing decisions (authorial agency) to hand-held operators and more shot choices (authorial agency) to editors. Two forces – editing's computerized sophistication combined with recessionary pressures to reduce physical production costs and shorten shooting days and schedules – have made it extremely difficult for directors to control all aspects of production (and thus artistic agency) in real time. Third, digital creates greater industry pressures for *production multi-tasking*. As post-production and effects work have shrunk to computer “workstation” scale, and digital filming and dailies have morphed into data management, individuals using the new equipment face a set of options unheard of under the old labor agreements. As they have always done, unions continue their push to segregate and distribute tasks among post-production workers (thus atomizing authorial agency), so that rough-cutters cut, sound designers do sound, effects artists make effects, timers time, and online editors finish program masters. Yet, recently, a countervailing force has pushed back in the opposite direction. Hardware and software companies have loaded each computer workstation and software package with a mind-numbing assortment of options and once-segregated tasks. While top film/TV crafts workers succeed by showcasing their narrow specialties, legions of other production workers in lower-caste genres and lower-budgeted productions constantly cut across and confuse once-segregated artistic task lines.

The results of these three changes in physical production differ depending on location and context. Some modes of production continue to maintain heightened authorial hierarchies, in systems where BTL authorship is downplayed. These include studio feature film production in unionized Hollywood, and “blockbuster TV” in network television, which vigilantly maintain their systems in the face of workflow, workspeed, and workscope changes. Other modes of production make BTL authorship more important, by “flattening” traditional authorial hierarchies in favor of various forms of overt collective creation. These include: direct-to-video indie-exploitation features (where half the crew may be marginally trained novices who learn by roaming across craft lines), non-profit documentary groups (like Kartemquin Films, Chicago), public broadcasting series (which delegate script

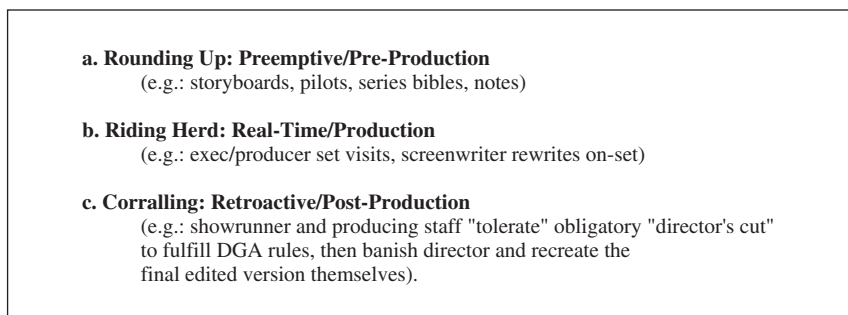
generation to large boards of National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) series advisors, as Dornfeld has researched),<sup>24</sup> and the direct-to-video/first-run syndicated reality TV schlock (as Mayer has documented with “Girls Gone Wild”).<sup>25</sup>

Given this wide range of physical production practices, the best way to study BTL authorship is not to look for some essential BTL authorial trait or profile but to look at each production as a dynamic process involving tensions and struggles between “strategic” ATL “control schemes,” and “tactical” BTL “counter-measures.” New technologies generally bring the potential for further delegation of artistic agency to a department or crew. Yet media companies inevitably find ways to discipline this distribution and creative delegation in order to maintain authorial control. The transition from the “video-assist” to the “video village” is one example of this. Originally, the development of the video-assist allowed others on a set to “see” what the camera was seeing as it filmed. Thus, real-time “seeing” was a privilege once reserved solely for the camera operator, since even the director could not know for sure whether the shot “worked” or not until he or she viewed the dailies the next day. Initially, this delegation of the look allowed many department heads to monitor whether the shot achieved the goals of their department, and thus enhanced the sense that creative work was distributed across the crew. Eventually, the widespread presence of video-assist monitors was corralled into something called the “video village” (a bounded area with multiple video-assist monitors and rows of chairs for directors, other ATL figures, and their friends). While the original video-assist scattered the agency to look during a shoot (a BTL dynamic), the video village re-aggregates and localizes those looks into what is essentially an ATL “command and control” center, with strict rules about who can enter and view in the village. Even the new frantic, multi-camera “ensemble” shooting mode described earlier, while fracturing and distributing artistic agency to many more figures on a set, has been corralled by the ATL “video village” – a term that sounds open and collectivist but in fact has become just another bounded on-set hierarchical zone policed by producers, directors, and DPs. While directors historically focused on blocking and directing actors, many directors in the video village today are locked only onto their video monitors, seemingly disinterested in relating directly or interpersonally to actors in a scene. With multiple cameras shooting long takes simultaneously, video village myopia is arguably the only way that a director can actually monitor all that is going on in front of a camera, the only way to ensure which shots and takes work as required. In some ways, then, the video village has displaced the traditional use of film “dailies” – which collectively and retroactively “put everyone on the same page” on a production (the director’s page, that is). In this sense, the video village allows for the greatest amount of top-down control possible in a system that seems increasingly complex and on the verge of over-delegating and losing control.

This tension between video-assist (scattering/leveling) and video village (command/control) provides a useful metaphor for broader forms of ATL vs. BTL authorial tension. Other practices beyond the video village tend to keep authorial

agency at the top, in ATL management, and these can be thought of as “strategic authorship control schemes” (hereafter SACS). These strategic moves can be mapped according to production phases. During *pre-production*, for example, producers and directors serve to “herd” story or project development in a “pre-emptive” fashion, by strictly controlling development and narrowing options via storyboards, pilots, series bibles, and “notes.” All of these function as strict control measures, from which BTL workers stray at their peril. The unruly collective pre-production process is thus “anchored” by key pre-emptive trade artifacts.

Once shooting starts during the production phase, however, ATL executives police their authorship status by “riding herd” on a moving collective of creative workers. These second *production-phase* SACS strategies are based more on face-to-face interactions (executive/producer set visits, on-set screenwriter rewrites, etc.), than on the preemptive physical artifacts (storyboards, series bibles, etc.) intended to “lock-down” the ATL vision during the earlier pre-production phase. Finally, even the post-production phase involves ATL control schemes. For example, even though contracts with the DGA require that producers allow directors of primetime dramas a “director’s cut,” this turns out to be little more than an unfortunate obligation tolerated by producers and executives. This token deference or tolerated obligation applies more to television directing (which is heavily controlled and constrained artistically by the creative executive writer/producer) than to feature film directing (where many directors do in fact function like creative totalitarians over all aspects of a production). After granting the director the few days needed to fulfill the contractual obligation in television, the showrunner and producing staff banish the director and re-edit, corral, and re-create the final edited version of the episode or drama themselves. In these ways, ATL-SACS are not subtle or tacit phenomenon. I’ve chosen the animal husbandry metaphors here (herding, riding herd, corralling) to describe strategic authorship



**Figure 18.2** ATL Strategic Authorship Control Schemes (SACS). The metaphors I have chosen to employ here in this model (related to animal husbandry and cowboy-ing) are not articulated consciously by practitioners, even though workers are very aware of the organizational impact these control schemes have as they are deployed within their production work spaces.

control schemes, since they resonate with the persistent anxiety and insecurity that defines many shoots, whose unpredictability, snags, and excesses always threaten control – making all productions potential “runaways.” In each production phase outlined here (pre-, prod-, and post-) SACS re-anchor and attempt to lock down ATL authorship in ways that are both concrete and symbolic.

Of course the best-laid ATL strategies and control schemes cannot fully erase BTL authorship even though they constantly work to do so. Tripping up the top-down schemes is a series of mostly unintended BTL “tactical authorial counter-pressures” (hereafter, TACP, see Figure 18.3), including: *production gap-filling*, *location problem-solving*, and *below-skill set resentment*. First of all, on a very general level, the fast pace of production creates lots of unanticipated “gaps” that allow (or implicitly beckon) crew members to “fill in” with creative ideas and gestures. In the manic multi-camera ensemble mode of production described earlier, for example, as shoots become faster, more control must inevitably be delegated to others. This kind of BTL authorial gap-filling proceeds in a clockwork-like, under-the-radar fashion as part of workaday habit.

Second, physical production – by definition and historical precedent – requires perpetual on-site “problem-solving.” Lighting, location shooting, and blocking schemes are, in this way, no more than forms of wishful thinking by the ATL executive cadre, at least until shooting begins. At that point nothing gets done, or gets done efficiently, unless scores of crew members succeed at logistical, stylistic, and narrative problem-solving. Studios identify successful producers and directors as those that can complete more “lighting set-ups” or “camera set-ups” per day, and bring a production in on or under budget, and this cannot be achieved without widespread, delegated problem-solving. Finally, everyone on set and in a production firm believes they are working way below their “skill set” and at unfair wage levels. Lots of NYU alums and Harvard grads, for example, are “still getting coffee” and working as poorly paid assistants long after their career road maps projected they would be moving up. This results in pervasive forms of individual dissatisfaction and resentment – which in turn creates an undercurrent of often unspoken adversarial pressures during a production. Like flack, these tactical ATL pressures can covertly obscure or undercut upper-level control schemes and authorial fantasies.

Finally, on many successful shoots a symbiotic relationship tends to develop between the studio or production company and the workers they hire. The “keys” or department heads who hire individual workers need help managing

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. BTL "Production Gap-Filling"</b></li> <li><b>2. BTL "Location Problem-Solving"</b></li> <li><b>3. BTL "Below-Skill Set Resentment"</b></li> </ol> |
|--|

**Figure 18.3** BTL tactical authorial counter-pressures.



the inevitable unruliness of the BTL workforce and the intended and unintended counter-pressures that come with them. In turn, the signatory unions provide that kind of (de-authoring) stability to both studios and department heads by keeping all workers “in their place” and “segregated” to the greatest extent possible. It would be wrong, therefore, to construe unions as an authorship-manufacturing enterprise. Unlike Taylorism, collective, distributed authorial agency of the sort that I am proposing does not necessarily serve the long-term interests of the unions, which include keeping as many members of the craft employed as possible. In this sense, ironically, unions can sometimes be complicit in the strategic ATL top-down authorial control schemes rather than in BTL tactical counter-pressures put forward from below by their own members.

The largely anonymous, workmanlike nature of the basic BTL tactical authorial counter-pressures that I have outlined in this section largely remain under the radar, at least until some nasty inter-craft contention or conflict spills forth into the online arena, thus putting BTL artistic contributions very much on the radar for a wider public. When Christian Bale erupted in quasi-psychotic outrage and relentlessly attacked his cinematographer during the shooting of *Terminator: Salvation*, surreptitious recordings of the nasty verbal assault and takedown were posted by other BTL crew members.<sup>26</sup> The result? Fairly widespread solidarity with the DP among BTL workers and denigration of ATL hubris. Pushed back on his heels by the online backlash, Bale and his publicists were forced into an extended period of feigned *mea culpa* and damage control on showbiz reports, press junkets, and trade accounts. The net result was a collective public reflection of the difference between a top-down control model (artistry as narcissism) versus a ground-up, blue collar model (creative work as interpersonal negotiation) of authorship.

Finally, consider another leaked, and outed, ATL vs. BTL tiff over authorship. This one involved the following cease and desist order circulated widely online as a clear warning to any BTL malcontents gossiping illegitimately about those from the set or production company who create clearly above their pay grade:

We are counsel for Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens. It has come to our attention that a copy of our clients' screenplay “The Lovely Bones” has unlawfully been placed on this tracking board without the consent of our clients, whose copyrighted works are being illegally exploited. A secret ID word has been imbedded [*sic*] in each copy of the screenplay and we are presently investigating the source of the leak and appropriate action will be taken . . . We hereby demand that the webmaster of this tracking board immediately remove the screenplay from the site and that all individuals immediately cease and desist from any further dissemination of the screenplay.<sup>27</sup>

Based on a worker leak, Defamer.com quickly counter-posted and mocked the ridiculous and illogical pretense of producer/director lawyers with the following retort:

The Jackson camp should probably take pains not to throw too big a scare into the assistants; if the entire script-covering underclass finds itself too paranoid to touch *Bones* for fear they're holding a copy with the "secret ID word" embedded within (we're guessing it's something like "fucknewline"), negotiations for the sale might stall indefinitely as annoyed studio execs are forced to actually read the screenplay themselves.<sup>28</sup>

This sorry, but symptomatic, interchange exposes the complete illogic of the industry trying to regulate and control authorial information that the industry has first *deliberately* placed into a commercial viral environment defined from the start by wild forwarding and excessive downloading. The Jackson cease and desist case exemplifies many of the issues raised by this chapter, including the extent to which first, important creative work is regularly and widely distributed to the BTL "underclass"; second, networks of BTL workers continuously provide critical input, gap-filling, and commentary about their ATL bosses and potential partners; and finally, the way authorship in Hollywood continues to function as acutely contested industrial terrain. On the one hand, for decades producers have been crowd-sourcing the development of their creative work to low-level minions (who collectively add un-credited value to projects through constant, anonymous script coverage). On the other hand, producers – like many academics – continue to cultivate (and to litigate if need be) authorship as a proprietary, above-the-line form of exceptionalism.

## Conclusion

In reviewing the history and legacy of authorship studies in cinema and media studies, I wonder what was lost when our field avoided questions of production *labor* in order to "find" or philosophically determine how film and video *texts* or creative executives embodied authorship. Production research might offer a far better, clearer, and more immediate picture of authorship than critical analysis. Shifting from textual analysis and philosophic speculation to fieldwork within the communities that actually produce the texts that we puzzle over makes one thing perfectly clear: authoring dynamics are fundamental parts of the BTL vocational skill set, even in lowly physical production environments. The many manifestations of distributed creativity in film and television force authorship scholars to at least take manual labor and physical production seriously. Such things are necessary factors in anything that might be reasonably construed as a film or television production "signature."<sup>29</sup>

One aim of this chapter was to show how BTL authorship does not just include the distributed creativity of writers' rooms, camera crews, and post-production teams. Because of changing industrial, technological, and economic conditions, public and cultural demonstrations of creative agency and authorship among BTL workers have become just as essential for vocational survival among

crafts workers. No longer just a textual practice, *authorship theorizing* (marketing, self-branding) is something BTL workers do in public as well: to get work, to keep work, to build informal social hiring networks. In this sense, all of the public talk about production artistry among workers today evokes contemporary “creative industries” research and agendas, where artists are only successful to the extent that they can produce “portfolio careers” (professional identities, based on documented serial innovation, that can “travel” from job to job). The sunny creative industries fantasy that all workers now aspire to artistry, however, must also be viewed in light of the much darker image of the same phenomenon carried in theories of the “precariat.” While BTL workers have long mastered patient, incremental artistry through distributed creativity arrangements, current economic and industrial instabilities and labor over-supplies mean that these same artists labor anxiously in very precarious authorial circumstances.

Finally, Foucault argued that the “author function” in science differs dramatically from the author function in the arts and humanities.<sup>30</sup> While the arts and literature peg and index authorship to evidence of marked individuality and innovation, science does just the opposite. Far from favoring acts of individual distinction, scientific authorship is obsessively incremental and collective, where each act of scientific authorship means adding but one small footnote to all previous published scholarship in the discipline or sub-discipline. In effect, the sciences are aggregate, slow-moving fields that transcend the individual, and spurn novelty and abrupt jumps in innovation. Individuals don’t author the field, that is – the field authors individuals. In some ways, then, the literary model reverses this logic and discourse.

As I have discussed it in this chapter, BTL authorship can be mapped usefully around *both* poles of Foucault’s “author function” model. On the one hand, traditionally segregated unionized work in BTL crafts functions more like Foucault’s notion of authorship within the sciences than the arts.<sup>31</sup> In effect, the technical field, the “craft,” the “trade” specialization and its historical conventions, author and “write” the individual worker’s creation, not vice versa. In this tradition, critics and scholars seldom award most BTL workers with authorial status even though such workers fulfill the “distributed” author function found for centuries in scientific disciplines. By contrast, the unstable, volatile, and precarious economic conditions and over-supply of labor in the current production job market have simultaneously spurred widespread public and trade discourses about BTL authorship more typical of Foucault’s *literary* author-function model. For many workers, the labor pool today involves a contradiction. That is, surviving as a BTL production worker means marketing and branding oneself to the greatest extent possible as distinctive, as an innovator.<sup>32</sup> After the cultural dust settles from this kind of job-seeking and career-keeping self-promotion and marketing, however, most BTL workers feel fortunate and lucky if they get something far more provisional: to be recognized for the very small footnotes they add to the collective genius and long-term accomplishment of Hollywood’s bigger industrial

hive. In an odd sort of way, therefore, many BTL workers assure labor legitimacy through tacit *self-discrediting* postures (deference to the craft traditions within the broader system), but struggle for career longevity against competing professionals by *self-crediting* postures within the narrowly specialized craft labor market.

## Notes

- 1 See in particular: John Caldwell, Michael Clarke, Erin Hill, and Eric Vanstrom, "Distributed and Harvested Creativity in Film and Television," in *International Handbook of Media Studies: Media Production*, ed. Vicki Mayer (Malden, MA: Blackwell, forthcoming).
- 2 For pragmatic reasons, throughout this chapter, I associate and sometimes interchange the written text-based term "authorship" – the stated focus of this book – with "artistry," "creative work," or "creative agency." This follows from my longstanding suspicion about film studies' traditional appetite for paradigms and theoretical schemes imported from literary theory rather than the much more closely-aligned paradigms and perspectives from visual studies. See the critiques of "scopophobia" and "neo-Gnosticism" within written text-informed film theory in the "Postscript" of my *Televisuality: Style, Crisis, and Authority in American Television* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995).
- 3 This popular definition, of BTL work as "not creative," is from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Below\\_the\\_line\\_\(filmmaking\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Below_the_line_(filmmaking)).
- 4 See my work in "Second Shift Media Aesthetics: Programming, Branding, and User-Flows," in *New Media: Digitextual Theories and Practices*, ed. Anna Everett and John Caldwell (New York: Routledge/AFI Series, 2003), 127–44; "Programproduktion som Kritisk Teori – Eller TV-Teksten som Industriel Iscenesaettelse," *Medie Kultur 35* (2003), 48–62; "Critical Industrial Practice: Branding, Repurposing, and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts," *Television and New Media 7.2* (2006), 99–134; and *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 274–315.
- 5 For a good example of a "signature-nulling" move followed by a "signature-reclaiming" online counter-move, see the discussion of how the Hungarian government pulled Angela Jolie's film permit to shoot her "directorial debut" feature (based on rumors about the script leaked from the production accusing the director of exploiting a "misleading history"), and how Jolie counter-attacked in her online defense in the story by Stephen M. Silverman, "Angelina Jolie Defends Her Controversial Movie-in-Progress," *People*, October 15, 2010, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20434587,00.html>.
- 6 On this latter point, what I am referring to as the resurrection of the authorial dead in scholarly contemporary transmedia studies, see Denise Mann, "It's Not TV, It's Brand Management TV: The Collective Author(s) of the *Lost Franchise*," in *Production Studies*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 99–114; and Michael Clarke, "Tentpole Television" (PhD diss., UCLA, 2010); among others.
- 7 Chuck Kleinhans and Manji Pendakur, "Learning Together: Synthesizing Economic and Cultural Analysis in the Marxist Study of Third World Film and Video," *Jump Cut*



- 33 (1988), 82–90; Toby Miller, Nitin Govil, John McMurria, and Richard Maxwell, *Global Hollywood* (London: BFI, 2001).
- 8 David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, and Janet Staiger, *Classical Hollywood Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).
- 9 Edward Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Bradford: MIT Press, 1996).
- 10 Caldwell, Clarke, Hill, and Vanstrom, “Distributed and Harvested Creativity.”
- 11 Philip Robbins and Murat Aydede, eds, *Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3–10, 55–78.
- 12 Latour, Bruno, *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
- 13 See James Ettema and D. Charles Whitney, eds, *Individuals in Mass Media Organizations: Creativity and Constraint*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1983), particularly Joseph Turow, “Unconventional Programs on Commercial Television: An Organizational Perspective,” 107–29.
- 14 Pierre Lévy, *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace*, trans. Robert Bononno (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- 15 Jeff Howe, *Crowdsourcing: Why the Power of the Crowd Is Driving the Future of Business* (New York: Crown Business Edition, 2009).
- 16 Matt Stahl, “Privilege and Distinction in Production Worlds,” in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 54–67.
- 17 See Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 316–44; and John Caldwell, “Hive-Sourcing is the New Out-Sourcing: Studying Old (Industrial) Labor: Habits in New (Consumer) Labor Clothes,” *Cinema Journal* 49.1 (2009), 160–7.
- 18 See Caldwell, *Production Culture*, 160–7.
- 19 See my “Appendix 1: Method” in *Production Culture*.
- 20 The task of “tape loggers” – who are among the most poorly paid and most invisible employees in reality television – is to view the mountains of raw video footage produced in any reality TV production, and log or make itemized notations of time-code numbers of the best shots. This allows higher-level producers and editors to go back and find and cull the best shots or takes to use in the final cut of the episode as a whole (this mind-numbing logging task is akin to “finding a needle in a haystack”).
- 21 Erin Hill, “Hollywood Assistanting,” in *Production Studies: The Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 220–4.
- 22 See my article, “Breaking Ranks: Backdoor Workforces, Messy Workflows, and Craft Disaggregation,” *Popular Communication: The International Journal of Media and Culture* 8.3 (2010), 221–6.
- 23 Thompson, Ethan, “Comedy Verité? The Observational Documentary Meets the Televisual Sitcom,” *The Velvet Light Trap* 60 (2007), 63–72.
- 24 See Barry Dornfeld, *Producing Public Television, Producing Public Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 25 See Vicki Mayer, *Below The Line* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).
- 26 Accounts of this tirade are widespread on the Web, including: <http://www.t TMZ.com/2009/02/02/bale-went-ballistic/#.TuaXuJgryes>; and a fairly critical thread found at: <http://www.gearsclutz.com/board/post-production-forum/362842-batman-goes-bale-istic-profane-tirade-crew-5.html>. As Bale was being knocked back by the online

crowd a number of ATL types, fan sites, and celebrity bloggers “bravely” but tentatively went to Bale’s rescue, including Bruce Franklin, an assistant director and associate producer on *Terminator: Salvation*, who justified Bale as a “consummate professional” who was not off-base in his reaction to [DP] Hurlbut’s intrusion into his scene. See: <http://blog.zap2it.com/pop2it/2009/02/christian-bales.html>.

- 27 This cease and desist warning was quoted in “Peter Jackson’s Lawyers Don’t Want Unapproved Assistants Reading ‘The Lovely Bones,’” *Defamer.com*, May 7, 2007, <http://defamer.gawker.com/257257/peter-jacksons-lawyers-dont-want-unapproved-assistants-reading-the-lovely-bones>.
- 28 “Peter Jackson’s Lawyers.”
- 29 See Caldwell, Clarke, Hill, and Vanstrom, “Distributed and Harvested Creativity.”
- 30 Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 124–7.
- 31 About this point, whether the collective/distributed authorship I am proposing is institutionally more like authorship in the sciences rather the arts, Derek Johnson has raised the provocative question: “Couldn’t we problematize this metaphor in the context of BTL and ATL authorship? Aren’t there lab assistants and other BTL science workers who aren’t credited with authorship? The office assistants in the science departments?” Of course, it is the nature of capitalist corporations and organizations to alienate and separate almost all workers from the results of their labor. I am merely arguing that media scholars need to account for – or at least acknowledge the existence of – the full network of human agents involved in the production of film and television. This does not just include those workers that we typically think of as “below-the-line” craftspersons (gaffers, grips, ACs, editors, electricians, PAs, carpenters, location scouts, etc.); it also includes vast numbers of “clerical” workers, assistants, and support staff that labor anonymously within corporate and network environments who receive even less financial or symbolic capital than the BTL workers on the lot or on set. Latour’s “actor-network theory” provides one viable model for incorporating the full range of human agents involved in the production of any product or service, including film, television, or scientific applications. My point, therefore, is not to set the score straight by arguing that other crafts workers are *more or less* authorial than producers or directors. Rather, I hope to continue mapping and developing a more patient approach – a distributed, cultural systems model – to media creation that allows for us to better describe and consider the full range of complex interactions between the agents, networks, institutions, and processes used to produce film, television, and new media texts. In this sense, then, personal assistants, clerical staff, and “erased labor” of all sorts certainly must be factored into any higher-level account of a culture of production. Vicki Mayer, in *Below the Line*, does a particularly good job of problematizing the scholarly/industrial appetite for “erasing” production’s actual labor force in lieu of singular, artificially celebrated forms of authorship.
- 32 In effect, longstanding labor traditions and union agreements routinely subsume individual BTL signatures (since workers are expressions of the system, not vice versa) even as longstanding expressive, cultural, and meta-critical practices in the same crafts groups constantly peg the value of any craft group or worker through critical speculation embedded in the trade community.