

Ghostwriting,

*An Essay on the Affection
of Authenticity*

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My name is Stefán Stefánsson, I am 27 years old from Reykjavík, Iceland and this is my graduation thesis from the graphic design department of *The Gerrit Rietveld Academie*. It has been a long and confusing research that I have put into this essay. Even though I mostly stuck to articles found online or texts and essays sent back and forth through emails I feel like I can only start by explaining the long time it took me to actually write anything. Since I was young, I have always been fascinated in writing, and my initial idea of going to an art academy was to help me conceptualize my writing. I actually thought graphic design to be the perfect medium. Communication and a deeper aesthetical knowledge was something it could provide and was much needed in my own practice. I wasn't long into my studies when I figured out that making art and design is in many ways the same thing as writing a text. Of course, it is a different medium but the goal is in many ways the same. I appreciated that in art you could skip the long amount of describing scenarios or building up characters and get straight to the topic. The research, the message and/or the pun, could all be there in one place and the audience can spend long hours in front of it or few seconds but the impact could still be the same. The further I got with my studies, the further away from writing I got. I actually tried to avoid it as much as I could. Even this thesis is not written by me.

When thinking about authenticity in the modern world, there is a tendency to present ourselves by emphasizing our best traits and concealing our worst. We, as the audience can be critical towards the author's authenticity from an ethical point of view but in some scenarios, it is not as apparent.¹ It is a fact that many great athletes and actors use ghostwriters for their autobiographies. We know from famous presidential speeches that those are often not written by the presidents themselves,² and when writing script for many Hollywood movies there is always a team of writers that get lesser acknowledgement for their creative writing and even on the internet where the blog world along with other social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook that blatantly use ghostwriters for marketing and public relations under the impression of another person.³ ⁴ Even though it is not always the case, ghostwriting is often a secret between the client and the buyer. We can only guess that perhaps many of the great literature that has been published might be ghostwritten.

We as the audience seem to accept ghostwriting in a specific context but not the other, what makes that difference? One might think that for example a ghostwriter for a fictional story might be socially acceptable but not a

¹ Knapp & Hulbert, 2016

² Knapp & Hulbert, 2016

³ www.twitter.com, www.facebook.com

⁴ Farnworth, 2016, Montell, 2017

major politician but that does not seem to be the case. In this essay I will try to look into the ethics of ghostwriting by taking examples from writers, artists and designers and use the term ghostwriting as a tool to describe the act when a person publishes a text or a work under the assumption that he or she wrote the text when someone else actually did the writing and try to look deeper into the effects it has on the audience once it is figured out or made public. Asking the question: Is it perhaps inauthentic to consciously present ourselves to be affected by authenticity?

THE GHOSTWRITER

Ghostwriter by definition “is a person whose job is to write material for someone else who is the named author.”⁵ In a way, a ghostwriter is like a technician that offers his or her services to make the client’s needs fulfilled. Most of the time, the client is the actual author and conceptualizer whilst the technician strings together the words and meanings and puts together, in the end, a wholesome object.⁶ In today’s society, a lot has changed in the book and publishing market in a short time. With websites like Amazon taking over the publishing market and offering their own way of self-publishing at the same time.⁷ With

⁵ Ghostwriter meaning – Google Search, n.d.

⁶ Ghostwriters in Popular Culture, 2014

⁷ www.amazon.com

that fast development in technology, a new type of business model has climbed to the surface. The self-called ‘entrepreneurs’ publish a lot of books in a short time. Most of these books are educational or self-help books. They use ghostwriters to find the content and help them produce a big amount of books in a short time and then by using various tools to push the ratings and visibility of their own works for a larger group of audience who hopefully will buy them. The reason for this is mostly to make money.⁸

It is fair to say that the market for ghostwriters has changed a lot over the years. With the internet and all its possibilities of reaching out, the market has taken a big turn. Ghostwriters were paid royally for the contribution with proper contracts.⁹ Now by using websites like Fiverr,¹⁰ the standard industry rate has gone down and possibly the standard of writing as well. This is often the case and especially in the realm of Amazon. The writers are often not so interested in the content rather the word count because once the book is sold their achievement is reached.¹¹

⁸ Finch, 2017

⁹ <https://raventools.com/blog/truth-about-ghostwriting/>

¹⁰ www.fiverr.com

¹¹ Samuda, 2016

The Death of the Author

In Roland Barthes essay *The Death of the Author* from 1967, Barthes speculates about the rules between the author and the reader. The essential argument is that the author has no predominance over his own words, images or sounds et cetera. They belong to the audience or the one interpreting it. Meaning it does not matter what the artist intended with the words themselves but that the text is deciphered by readers and “since function of the text is to be read, the author and process of writing is irrelevant.” The essay highlights the notion that meaning is not something retrieved or discovered since it was there the whole time but instead something unpremeditatedly generated when reading the text. The essay tries to explain that the reader should not just read any text any way the reader likes but rather he suggests that reading involves some writing or rewriting of the original contents meaning. The essay was directed towards traditional literary criticism that was mostly focused on retrieving the authors’ steps in intentions and meaning and suggests that as a reader you should focus on your interaction rather than the writer which would open up doors for more interpretation and make the text more fluid in its meaning than previously thought.^{12 13}

¹² Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image / Music / Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 142-7.

¹³ Cultural Reader, 2017

There is a lot we can take from it in terms of ghostwriting. When we expect the writer to be honest even when working with fiction we risk part of our own interoperation based on previous writings, background or other peoples' opinions on him or her. The notion of a ghostwriter in that perspective shouldn't alarm the fact that the book is being read and interpreted by the most important figure: the reader himself. There is, of course, another criticism on that way of thinking that you can not really get away from this kind of interpretation as long as there is a name, to begin with. But the possibility of any work being ghostwritten already creates an atmosphere where the connection between the described author and the sometimes nameless ghostwriter are not so clear thus making a way for a different interoperation.

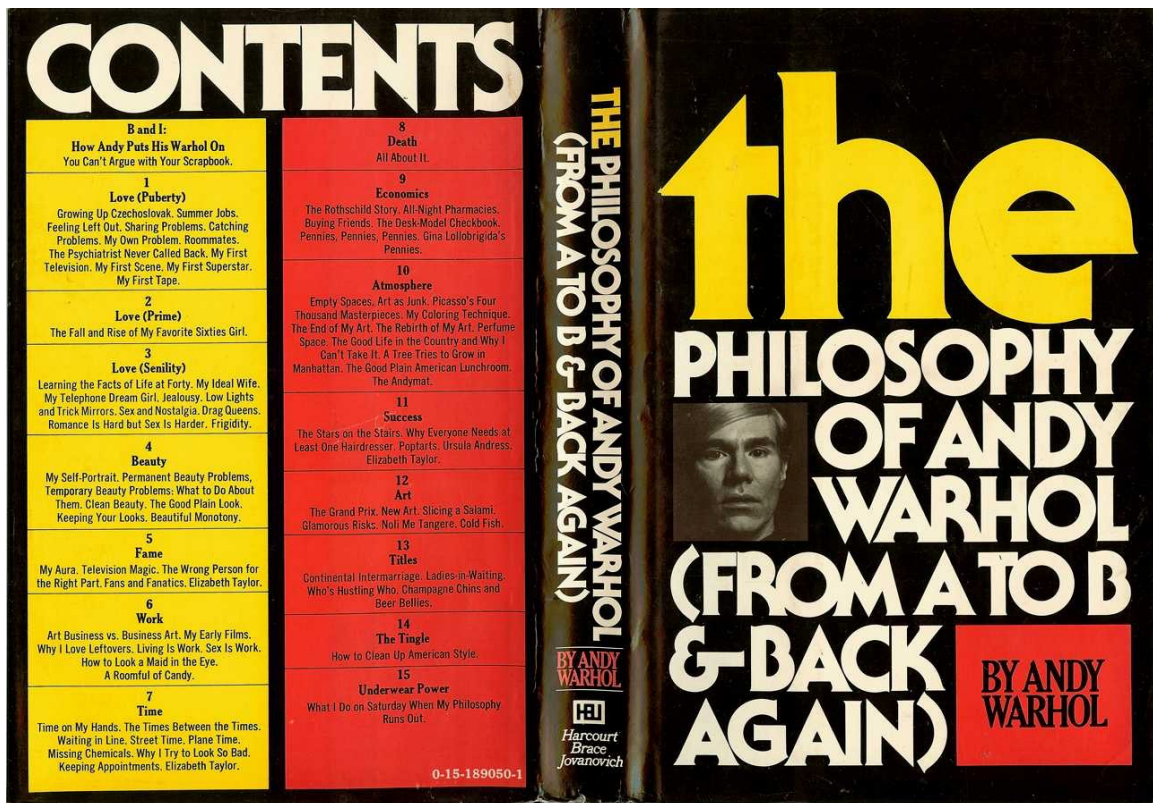
*...writing is the destruction of every voice, of every point of origin. Writing is that neutral composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body of writing.*¹⁴

THE AUTHOR AND THE WRITER

Andy Warhol's autobiography called *The Philosophy of*

¹⁴ Barthes, Roland. "The Death of the Author." *Image / Music / Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1977. 142-7.

Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again), written in 1975 was ghostwritten by Pat Hackett and Bob Colacello. It was based on interviews with Andy Warhol himself conducted by the ghostwriters who were never mentioned in the book and their contributions did not get revealed until years later.¹⁵ The book takes an interesting angle on many subjects and honesty and authenticity are part of them. Warhol or the ghostwriters also express their



thoughts on honesty in terms of working and writing. The book is full of contradictions where for example Warhol states that he cannot be alone but later in the book describes himself as a loner. In one chapter he says that “People used

¹⁵ The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, n.d.

to say that I tried to ‘put on’ the media when I would give one autobiography to one newspaper and another autobiography to another newspaper. I used to like to give different information to different magazines...”¹⁶ It is evident that Andy Warhol as an artist used methods of copying and pasting that makes his autobiography being ghostwritten not so surprising.¹⁷ The ghostwriters themselves did not know they would not be credited until seeing Warhol on the cover of New York magazine in a closet with a typewriter under the title “Andy Warhol’s greatest Secret: He Likes to Write.”. Even though the book is based on interviews it is not quite clear what comes from himself and what comes from the writers. The book is abstract in its construction and can leaves the audience baffled over what the point actually is. The fact that the actual writer was a secret until it was discovered later perhaps makes the work a more valuable asset. Warhol as an artist made art that constantly challenged the idea of authenticity. The fact that Warhol wrote an autobiography without revealing that he actually did not write it at all and probably knowing that one day it would be revealed gives a good example of his idea of authenticity. Warhol declined the notion of truth and honesty determining that it would be defining his authenticity in arts too. He tricked the audience by giving misleading information and actually succeeded as

¹⁶ Singh, 2007

¹⁷ Kamholz, 2013

an artist and a pop culture figure.

Hip-Hop and the Ghostwriting Taboo

Nowadays, it is an interesting turn in hip-hop music since a lot of contemporary artists are calling out other rappers for working with ghostwriters which emphasizes the taboo that it is with in the culture.¹⁸ It is believed that a lot of hip hop's most famous songs have been ghostwritten.¹⁹ The paradox lays in the fact that being a songwriter or ghostwriter is a legitimate career in most musical genres, however, in Hip-Hop, ghostwriting remains a taboo and something that is mostly hidden. This maybe has something to do with the influence and meaning of Hip-Hop and its empowerment influence. A member of the Hip-Hop group Public Enemy, Chuck D, was the one who characterized Hip-Hop as "CNN for black people".²⁰ And if we look at this characterization, we can understand why ghostwriting remains a taboo in the world of Hip-Hop since what Hip-Hop stands for is not merely a musical genre, but a

¹⁸ Hiatt, 2017

¹⁹ Thompson, 2014

²⁰ Thompson, 2014

philosophy and something that is personal. It is connected with the ego, and even the critically acclaimed rapper Kendrick Lamar mentions that his 2017 album *Damn* is a story of the ego.²¹ And the ego will not allow you to admit having a ghostwriter because it is the representation of oneself and one's ideas that are out in the open. If it gets revealed that a rapper has a ghostwriter, his words lose meaning and he loses the respect of others. This is why ghostwriting remains a taboo in the world of Hip-Hop. Underground UK rapper Jehst said: "We expect it to be personal, we expect it to be from the heart and straight from that individual's experience". Grandmaster Caz is even harder on rappers who hire ghostwriter: "It's a travesty, anybody who calls themselves an MC and doesn't write their rhyme – no way you can even stand in the same room as an MC if you don't write your rhyme, plan & simple".

The Hip-Hop cultures ideas of ghostwriting expect a lot of authenticity. Maybe it has something to do with the background of the culture as a whole. Hip Hop was and is the medium that echoed from the American ghettos and the idea of a street credit shines through to the music identity. It seems though interesting that if being personal and true is so important but the idea of dreaming of a better world or creating a character with a different story could be frowned upon. Hip-Hop music lives in a two way street where it is

²¹ Hiatt, 2017

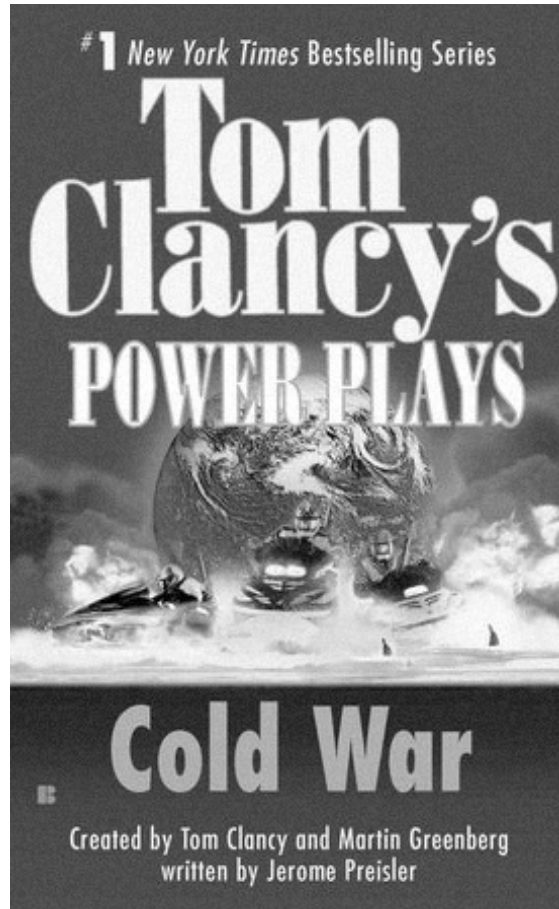
evident that a lot of it is actually ghostwritten which leads to musicians calling them out as fake and inauthentic creating two different sides but only the ghostwriters and the people using them choose not to comment on it.

Tom Clancy and the Tom Clancy Effect

The author Tom Clancy is famous for his military-science books that have turned into a big franchise over the years. He always used to acknowledge the ghostwriters he worked with who could be transforming from short sentences describing a specific till to a major collaboration on a book. When looking at some of his book covers you can clearly see Tom Clancy's name in capital bold letter and then in considerably smaller letters, written by... Even though those names are often pseudonyms, Clancy is not taking all the credit and as the creator and founder of the brand, it makes sense.²² It is interesting to look at from the authentic point of view as his books didn't lose any attraction for this. Clancy and his business partner Steve Pieczenik created three book series in the name of Clancy. These series were Net Force Explorers, Op-Centre and Net Force and none of these books were actually written by either of them. Clancy also collaborated with Martin H. Greenberg on the Tom Clancy's Power Plays which was a launching

²² Haynes, 2012

platform for a lot of the video games and board games that were released under the Tom Clancy brand. As productive



of a brand that the Tom Clancy circle is it is perhaps no surprise that many of his later books were made in collaboration with other writers most of the times fans of his and it doesn't seem to affect the brand. It has to be said though that Tom Clancy himself said that "Collaboration on a book is the ultimate unnatural act."²³

²³ Sanker, 2012 P. 9

GENUINE FAKES

There is an interesting story when a young man retyped Jerzy Kosinski's novel "The Painted Bird". It was about 10 years after the original had been published that this young man started sending the retyped version with a new title to a lot of American publishers including the publisher of the original novel which all rejected it without recognizing it. The story does not end there. A journalist found out a couple of years later that Kosinski could not have written "The Painted Bird" in English as he was at the time a recent immigrant to The United States and his English was too poor at that moment. It was suggested that perhaps he wrote the book in Polish and had it translated or that he used an assistant that he outlined the book too. Either way, it would not be Kosinski's own pyrotechnics. It also came to the light of day that the novel was maybe based on or plagiarized from the writings of another unpublished Polish writer who had died during the Second World War.

In the text *Genuine Fakes* from the book *Kermic Traces*, Elliott Heisenberg wrote: "*The Painted Bird* is a classic case of how authorship determines reception. The memoir of a small boy in war-torn Poland, it would have been enveloped in an almost unbearable pathos if it had been the work of the murdered Pole. As it is, although the text remains the same, its importance diminishes according to the identity of its author, in the following order: "Kosinski

as original writer, the translation the translator, the assistant, Kosinski as plagiarist, the young re-typist. As Salvador Dali said, the first person to compare a woman's cheeks to a rose was undoubtedly a genius; the second person to do so could easily have been an idiot."²⁴

So, taking another person's idea is also seen as plagiarizing, but there is a thin line present there. For example, if I was to have an idea about a book and I tell my idea to another person who manages to write a book about it, how can I claim that as theft? Every idea in the world has millions of minds thinking about it, it is the interpretation of the idea and its let's say writing, that truly matters.

One of the most famous sagas, *The Harry Potter* books and movies have changed a lot of lives around the globe. I know I caught myself growing up with this book and imagining myself in the wondrous world of wizardry, chivalry and bravery. And you can not put a price on imagination, as it is one of the most beautiful things in the world, to imagine a whole world within you. If a book managed to allow me that, how can I judge the one who wrote it, even if that person did steal the idea from another book?

The author J.K. Rowling has been accused of stealing the

²⁴ Genuine Fakes, Weinberger

plot idea for the book from various books like *Larry Potter and Lilly*, and *The Adventures of Willy the Wizard* being part of them.²⁵ The similarities truly exist; however, all claims have been cast away. The court ruled in favor of J.K. Rowling. Even if Rowling, the debate which I shall not enter here, did get the idea from one of these books, one cannot claim her work to be plagiarism since she wrote 7 brilliant books. Furthermore, her writing skills are not comparable to those of these authors as they are way better and she used her imagination to create a whole new amazing world. The fact is that an idea as an idea, or a concept as a concept, cannot itself be seen as a claim to something that blossoms out of that idea by the creation of another person. It is preposterous to even think like that; because all that we know as people are things we have learned through our interaction with other people and history. It is genes and knowledge passed on by others that we build our characters from and when we do, we contribute a little something back to society, something that will ensure that future generations continue on the road of discovery. We can not claim an idea as always belonging to us; ideas are universal and if we did operate in that manner, progress would be slower and people would not have the freedom to loosen their imagination. And where is the fun in that? We can't assassinate the imagination.

²⁵ Harry Potter plagiarism case dismissed against JK Rowling, 2011

PRESIDENTS AND POLITICS

Forgery is based on authenticity, and both of them are jokes. But it is authenticity, not forgery, that is the cruelest joke of all.²⁶

It was the American president Franklin D. Roosevelt that held a famous speech during the Great Depression in 1933 where he said the memorable line “Let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” It is most likely that this speech was written by Raymond Moley, a then White House ghostwriter even though another speechwriter by the name of Louis Howe and even Roosevelt himself have also been credited. Another famous speech is the “Ask not what your country can do for you, ask rather what you can do for your country,” from President John F. Kennedy. It was said that this speech was written by Ted Sorensen who was Kennedy’s speechwriter. He has always claimed though that he and Kennedy

collaborated.²⁷

An interesting case of ghostwriting a book for a President is the case of Schwarz and Trump prior to Trump's candidacy for the President. In 1987, Tony Schwartz wrote "The Art of the Deal", a book that made Trump look like the brightest and best solution to every problem that ever existed, a book that crowned him into the king and now, into the President of the United States. Less is known that prior to the release of the book; Trump was in serious debts and at the doors of bankruptcy.²⁸ Upon his candidacy, a crowd gathered in the lobby of the famous Trump Tower. Trump, laid out his qualifications: "We need a leader that wrote *The Art of the Deal*. Schwartz replied with a tweet saying: "Many thanks Donald Trump for suggesting I run for President, based on the fact that I wrote *The Art of the Deal*"²⁹ The book crowned Trump as we know him nowadays, he isn't a winner, he just had a great ghostwriter. The former editor and publisher of the New York Times, Edward Kosner, had an interesting say: "Tony created Trump. He's Dr. Frankenstein." It is a known fact that Tony wrote the book which is what made him upset that Trump was now claiming that he is the writer and basing his candidacy on someone else's idea. Tony felt lost and scared

²⁷ Knapp & Hulbert, 2016, page 7

²⁸ Mayer, 2016

²⁹ Mayer 2016

for he was to blame for creating a mythical entrepreneur out of Trump. He said: “I feel a deep sense of remorse that I contributed to presenting Trump in a way that brought him wider attention and made him more appealing than he is.” Tony says that Trump was always obsessed with publicity, a thing quite visible at the moment. Trump sold the story of a successful entrepreneur in a way to present himself as the savior of the US economy. A book “Temples of Chance” by David Cay Johnson portrayed Trump’s wealth from 1990. Trump was in debt almost 300 million dollars more than his assets were actually worth. He was heading for bankruptcy. In 2004, Trump became a figure of the show “The Apprentice” where he also portrayed himself as the fierce entrepreneur. Trump also presents himself as a great philanthropist, and he said he would donate most of the money that he earned through “The Art of the Deal” to charities, but the reporters from Washington Post found out that Trump did no such thing, and also that he donated around ten thousand dollars for seven years.³⁰

Currently, Donald Trump is the President of the United States. The end!

DAGNY TAGGART

³⁰ Mayer, 2016

As mentioned before in this essay, ghostwriting exists in almost any way of writing. Be it fictional writing, political speeches, songwriting and even in autobiographies but it also exists in study books. With the coming of Amazon³¹ and the concept of self-publishing online, the book market has rapidly changed in the last ten years. At the same time as it has never been easier to publish your own content and make it possible for millions of users to read there seems to be something worth worrying about in terms of the Amazon self-publishing. The story of Dagny Taggart is an interesting one in that context.

Amazon in today's society is a huge empire, founded by Jeff Bezos in 1994 as an online bookstore and now is the world largest online retailer. Even though they have expanded to selling almost everything their bookstore is still a huge part of their identity with their huge amount of eBooks and a really 'user friendly' business model. They're even a publishing house and users can publish their own content for a low fee and no authority compared to finding an actual publisher. There is a bad side to all of this and Amazon is not really making an effort to resolve it. To this day if you look at the top selling lists for almost any country besides The United States, you shall find huge amounts of fake books. These books are most likely powered by some kind of click farms and their content is more and less gibberish and taken from a bad google-

³¹ www.amazon.com

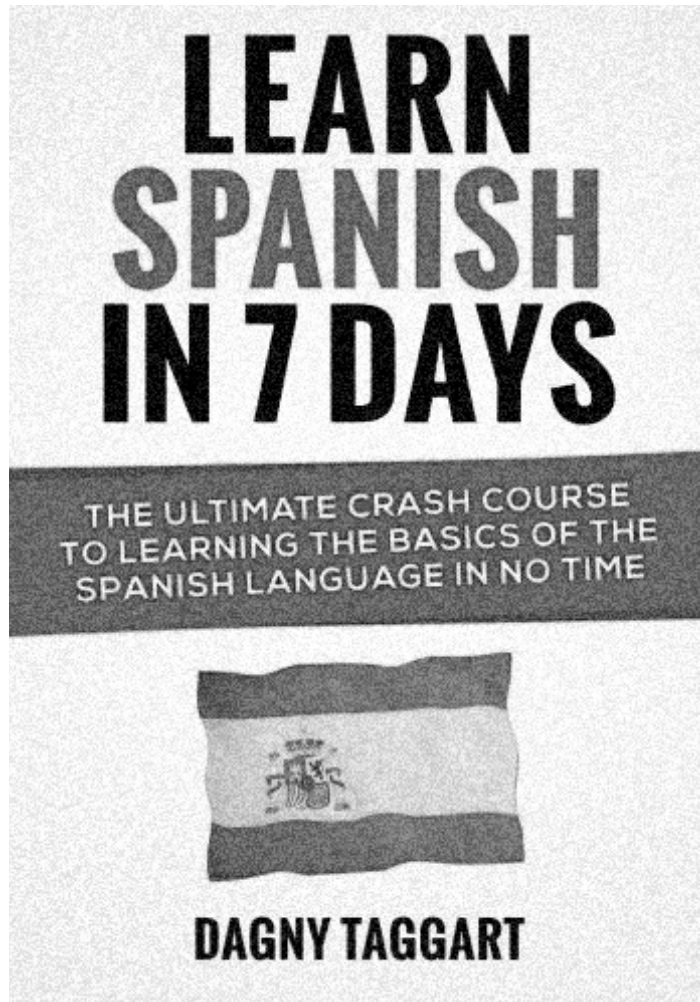
translate and totally out-of-context. Some of them have around 2000 pages and when google searching the author not even the mentioned book comes up.

These fake books is a well-known money scheme and YouTube³² and various blogs all over the internet offer ‘an easy way to get fast money’ tutorials. After uploading, you make the book free for a couple of days and with a variety of bots and fake accounts the book suddenly hits the top 20 list amongst more known authors and then they start charging for the book.

Danny Taggart is an author who has written 84 books about learning languages and travelling. She managed to write about one book every five days in 2015 and publish them on Amazon. In all her books under ‘About the Author’ is written:

“Dagny Taggart is a language enthusiast and polyglot who travels the world, inevitably picking up more and more languages along the way. Taggart’s true passion became learning languages after she realized the incredible connections with people that it fostered. Now she just can’t get enough of it. Although it’s taken time, she has acquired vast knowledge on the best and fastest way to learn languages. But the truth is, she is driven by her motive to

³² www.youtube.com



build exceptional links and bonds with others.”³³

All these books got amazing five-star reviews and loyal fans. The Washington Post figured out that the actual author of these books was actually an Argentinian man by the

name of Alexis Pablo Marrocco. The Dagny Taggart pseudonym referencing the main protagonist of Atlas Shrugged was a clever message as the philosophy of

³³ “Learn Hebrew in 7 days, Dagny Taggart p. 143”

objectivism that Rand proposed in *Atlas Shrugged* included an extensive treatment of ethical concerns where one's knowledge, perception and morals are in your own hands as an individual.³⁴ On closer inspections, these books even though receiving great reviews from Amazon users are in fact quite bad. *The Learn Spanish in 7 Days* book for example has the Spanish flag waving on the cover but actually provides a Latin American dialogue. After being found out, Alexis defended himself by saying "I'm a book author," and Taggart was simply his pen name. But in later communication, he stated that all books under the name of Dagny Taggart were written and edited by language experts but he refused to provide any of their names. He kept on insisting that he never violated Amazon's policy and victimized himself.³⁵

It's interesting that in the world of self publishing the market revolves a lot around self help and educational books. The demand for such books is spectacular and how to judge these books is mostly through the book cover and the user commentary and a rating system that Amazon and other similar websites offer. The books by Taggard are a great example of how easily you can trick the audience. What I mostly consider though is the fact that through the name Taggard, Alexis used other ghostwriters to make a

³⁴ (Objectivism, 2017)

³⁵ Dewey, 2015

whole system which he benefited mostly from. This could be the case where authenticity could be important, but at the same time there could be a lot of reasons for not showing your right name, the online stock photo that is inside all the books is of a white middle aged woman. She is shown as a motherly figure, kind and smiling. The image of the author could well possibly affect the sells.

THE BLOG WORLD

Ghostwriting also exists in the world of blogging. The writer Demian Farnworth said that from September 2011 until June 2012, she wrote more than 220 blog posts. These were all long detailed posts consisting of average 1400 words. She said that some went from 4000 to 10000 words. She described that she undergoes a long research, helps generating the ideas, writing outlines and finishing drafts. Her writings would sometimes get posted on notable websites but her name would never appear. Even though she was quite clear on the fact that she was paid for being an anonymous ghostwriter, she started having problems with not receiving the attention, recognition and the authority of having her own name with her work. She declared that at the end of this period she was getting extremely depressed. In her own blog posts, she references Rand Fishkin the CEO of MOZ who had this to say about

ghostwriting.³⁶

... I found the experience to have a positive and negative aspects. The biggest negative, for me, was the voice and tone the writing took. There was nothing technically wrong with the content, but some of the “magic” was missing. In the SEO [search engine optimisation]world, I think the same concerns hold true.

... If you are, yourself, a talented writer or a great communicator, and you possess a unique voice, attitude and style, ghost writing is tough. It may communicate the same concepts, but the message, branding, and style can get lost. That may mean less impact from a social media perspective, fewer links, less enjoyment and engagement from readers, and these things, directly and indirectly, can negatively affect your SEO.

..If, on the other hand, you’re a great communicator through non-written means and you need help to put your ideas into written language, then by all means, use a ghostwriter if you can find one with the talent to properly convey you message, and your brand.³⁷

³⁶ Farnworth, D. (2013, June). The Brutally Honest Truth About Ghostwriting. Retrieved December 17, 2017, from <https://raventools.com/blog/truth-about-ghostwriting/>

³⁷ Farnworth, D. (2013, June). The Brutally Honest Truth About Ghostwriting. Retrieved December 17, 2017, from <https://raventools.com/blog/truth-about-ghostwriting/>

THE PSEUDONYM

The use of pseudonym in writing has a long history and can be used for several reasons. It was especially popular in the 19th century when writing had been a strictly male-dominated platform; female writers used male pen names to get their work published. Now many years later, literature is not perceived as much as a male-dominant profession anymore but the use of the pseudonym is still persistent. Pseudonym and ghostwriting are not used in the same way today, but the effect of using either as a tool still has a similar effect. In order to prove so, I will explore the cult writer JT LeRoy. LeRoy used a pseudonym and had another person performing him in live appearances. I believe the writer's story can shed a light on the notion of authenticity in writing.

LeRoy released his first novel called *Sarah* in 1999; a story narrated by an HIV-positive teenager whose mother is a truck-stop prostitute in West Virginia. The novel tells a story of a young boy brought up in poverty and violence under the influence of his mother leading him down the path of the same route. Following the first novel, JT LeRoy released two other novels: *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things* in 1999 and *Harold's End* in 2005. These books, even though being described as fiction, were based on LeRoy's own traumatic childhood and life and received

great praise from the literary establishment as well as famous actors, actresses, musicians and directors.

The stories tell of an American boy raised in the world of drugs, violence, abuse and trafficking addressed a lot of questions about sexual fluidity. LeRoy's literary prose was hailed and said to be equivalent to the work of other leading figures of the literary world like Allen Ginsberg. The fact that these stories were true made it even bigger. The likes of Debbie Harry, Lou Reed, Gus van Sant and Winona Ryder are just a few of his famous admirers. Maybe it has a lot to do with JT LeRoy himself. He was a petite, feminine figure that often wore a red fedora, big sunglasses and a blond wig. "He looked like a skinny, white Michael Jackson impersonator."³⁸ When appearing live at conferences, he always appeared with Emily Fraiser or Speedy as she was called. JT LeRoy would ~~then~~ whisper his answers to the audience's questions to Speedy and she would repeat them out loud to the crowd.

It is easy to say that JT was a cult superhero who also got reputation from mainstream media. However, after an exposé from the New York Magazine and The New York Times, declaring that what the public thought of as JT LeRoy was actually a woman named Savannah Knoop, and the actual author of the books was her family friend, a 32

³⁸ Rose, 2016

year-old New Yorker by the name of Laura Albert. She went by the name Emily Frasier and was the same woman that always appeared with him.



Even though Albert had childhood issues of her own, they were totally different from the issues told in her stories. For instance, she was addicted to calling child protection hotlines where she would pretend to be a boy and spend long hours improvising stories using different personas and accents.

The story of JT LeRoy has become an amazing story where LeRoy is either looked on as a scam artist or a great post-modernist artist. The fact that she could be both is what I

think is the most interesting part of her story. The artwork and its effect was real and made impact. However, saying that it had to be a true story to make an impact, when it clearly did have a massive impact, is not only ironic but contradicts the original effect the story had on its readers. Even now when you read this chapter you might start wondering who is actually writing this essay. Does that change it from being a good essay or not? Is it important? I guess the committee of teachers will have their opinion on that and my academic future might rest on it.

Vilém Flusser

Flusser was a philosopher that lived from 1920 to 1991. After his death, his name got acknowledged. Flusser was not loved by the academics because he had his own style and form of writing, and he was characterized as provocative.³⁹ Flusser theorized that people are switching to a new way of thinking, the multimedia, technological way. If we look at the world today, and the mania and power that a ‘selfie’ carries, one might say that Flusser has been quite right. Flusser said people will get programmed as like “under a spell”^{40 41} and argues for that in the book

³⁹ Flusser, 2002

⁴⁰ Network, n.d.

⁴¹ Stinson, 2012

Does writing have a future? Flusser was quite a visionary and wrote that writing shall be taken over by images and codes and that people will express this way in the future. Saying this, Flusser has foreseen the 'death of the word' and the rise of 'selfies' as the new form of expression. People read emotions from faces and thus, there is some logic in this. In movies, there are long close-ups of people's faces that make people empathize with the actor and read his or her emotions. The same is with 'selfies' when someone posts a close-up of themselves, they are actually writing about their emotions through a close-up of their face, called the 'selfie'. It is evident that people nowadays live through social media, and there is an application for everything and professional people hire ghostwriters to maintain their social media. Nobody can validate that when someone posts something, it is truly he or she that posted, wrote and meant that but a 'selfie' is authentic since it is visible that it is that person on the image. However, people sometimes try to show other emotions through 'selfies' but writers also showed other emotions through writing. They were all ghostwriters in that sense, metaphorically speaking. A writer writes for people and people interpret the writing according to their emotions and what the writer wanted to say is not relevant to that amount. It is the readers that writes the story. But people are becoming programmed to post 'selfies' and write posts to gain likes because we are gaining influence with likes which corresponds with Flusser's opinion and prediction.

There are ghostwriters that write *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *LinkedIn* and *Instagram* posts and get paid for it. This is a common thing, people on *Fiverr* even offer to become your girlfriend or boyfriend for a day on social media. There is a TV Series called *Black Mirror* that is quite insightful into today's society; they portray how people rate each other and live through social media. They are all false, and can't show their emotions to other people because they have to maintain a proper image of themselves on social media. Just like a ghostwriter often has to show the emotion of others and to suppress his or her style of writing in order to fulfil the desires of the buyer, so do people have to show a different face than their own. However, if a professional hire someone to maintain their social media, he or she shall provide some guidelines into what is to be posted, what is to be liked, etc. So, in essence, the authenticity remains untouched because a ghostwriter will only post things that are relevant to the one who hired them, thus, maintaining their train of thoughts. There is a new form of expression, a code and image time has arrived, but who are we to say that this form is of lesser value than the word.

Conclusion or the chapter on the first-hand experience on ghostwriting

My name is Matija. I was born in Belgrade, ex-Yugoslavia

which is now known as Serbia. I am 27-year-old, and I am currently finishing my master thesis in engineering geology. I am specialized in groundwater. I started ghostwriting by accident, well, out of a necessity. It was February, 2016. I was on my master studies, had (and still have) an amazing girlfriend (fiancée now) and I have been living in a small apartment (15 square meters) on the very top of a building. I loved that small apartment even though there was a lot of humidity and occasional outbursts of cockroaches. It was my place, and during my 7 years of stay there (I started living alone quite early), half of Belgrade went through that apartment. It was a place to hang and a place of chill and relaxation (and yes, I smoked marijuana, my own plants but not a lot, sometimes I wouldn't smoke for months and sometimes I would smoke every day). Anyhow, this small apartment was the legacy of my grandfather. He was a General and they have given him this small apartment when the war started. He was a born Croat, but he was a Yugoslav in soul, and he never managed to mourn the loss of brotherhood between our same nations, who are just of different religion. But the thing was that my grandfather already received an apartment in Croatia and he received the one in Serbia to live there until his death because he couldn't go back to Croatia. He died in 2013, and in February 2015, my doorbell ringed. It was the military and they told me that I have a month to leave the apartment. I was crushed, and I wanted to rebel, I already had a million of plans on how to crush them, but hopefully, I haven't

done anything of that (I can be a hothead). My father asked me nicely, because he worked for the University and he was afraid to lose his job if I do something that is “so me”. So, there I was. I needed money urgently, and I wasn’t working at the moment. Finding a job isn’t easy and most jobs in Serbia pay around 250 to 350 euros on average (per month) and I needed at least 450 to 500 euros to be able to rent an apartment, pay the bills and eat. A friend told me about the website Freelancer and I started posting there for a translator (I translated shows like Top Gear when I was 16 for my older brother, he needed help). I got contacted by an Indian fella and he introduced me to the world of SEO writing. The pay was incredibly low, like \$0.5 per 1000 words or something like that. But I calculated that I can write so many articles to reach \$600 and more. I started working and for the first ten days, I managed to keep up the pace of what I wanted and needed to accomplish. It was crazy stuff; I remember writing a 2,000 words article about different types of carpets whilst needing to use the keywords that were given to me. It was hilarious and I found enjoyment in writing this ludicrous stuff. I read the stuff to my girlfriend and friends and we laughed like hell. Things were going fine. My departure was approaching and I noticed that the Indian fella is delaying my payments. Damn. As soon as I started to bug him with it, he came across with a brilliant marketing plan that completely blinded me for a couple of days. I was so naïve and he sold me a story. He started talking how his bosses and he have

selected me to run a blog for them and how I should pick a topic and they have the strategy. Well, I did and I started writing. I am very grateful to the Indian fella because of his double-crossing me resulted in the start of one of my books “The Pure White Essence”. I don’t know how, but something sparked inside of me and I started writing. At the same time, I realized that I must spread to other networks quickly and I did a lot of research and realized that Freelancer is really bad. I found iWriter, UpWork, Writers Hub, Fiverr and EssayShark. I was working the regular job, writing the book, searching for apartments, and posting on all of the websites. EssayShark and Fiverr started going better than the rest even though I quickly realized that EssayShark is a thieving mafia (they took around 70 % whilst fiverr takes 20% and they didn’t even tell you how much the buyer is priced). I needed to go in two weeks or so, and I realized that I won’t get any money from the Indian fella and I only started on fiverr, I didn’t even have a card to link to my account and you have to wait 14 days until money gets to your account on fiverr plus an additional 3 days for it to get from PayPal to your bank account. Nightmare, I thought to myself. But, it only started. A half-brother of my half-brother was in a car accident; well actually, a public bus driver intentionally hit him (he was never sentenced for this because it was election’s time so the newspapers even wrote that there was an accident where a kid got his leg broken...). I remember rushing to the emergency room to be with my brother and

his other family who are also quite near to me. We were there for hours and he was in hospital for two weeks until he passed away. All of the time, I was working like a madman because it was a must for me, and the other time, I was smoking marijuana with my 8-years-old half-brother because that was calming him down in this drear situation. My stepfather also died at that moment and it was as the entire world started to crush me down. But I didn't despair, I never do. I am alive and well, life is just life, and I intend to live my life to the best of my abilities until I can. I loaned some money to pay for the rent and started with really low rates on Fiverr. In a week or two, I managed to get some jobs there and on EssayShark too. I also published my first work in a geology journal, for which I was approached and threatened by the Turkish government. Gradually, as I got more reviews on Fiverr, I started increasing my prices. A lot of friends and family started asking money from me and wanted me to find work for them which I did try but nobody realized that I spent months and months of learning, and still am. You have to do it on your own. On UpWork, I was approached by a UK company to ghostwrite a book for them and when I started writing it, I stated that I simply can't ghostwrite a book because it felt like selling a part of my soul. Firstly they stated that they never allow new authors but when I sent them parts of my work, they agreed to make me the author and gave me a separate agreement. Because I needed to earn money, I didn't have the time to work on my book,

and I still don't which saddens me but that is life. I have learned so much whilst working as a ghostwriter because I wrote on all possible topics and used all possible styles of writing. I wrote molecular biology, physics, mathematics, philosophy and ethics (which gave me the idea for a new book that I am writing "The Ethics of One's Soul"), SEO, marketing, etc. Every project that I underwent, I had no idea about the topic, but what I do have is a rare gift and an analytical mind that allows me to dissect everything and see it as it truly is, the same as everything else. Everything has its pattern, and once you get to a pattern, you can use that pattern in pretty much every science. Everything is connected and in its essence everything is energy and matter is merely frozen energy. This is why frozen energy (or beings) contemplates time which is merely a manifestation of delusion and not a reality. Our life is a line but our line always has infinite lines out of which we only experience one of them and currently I am experiencing this line because out of some reason, Stefan contacted me for this project and I agreed to work with him in order to see where it will lead. It is as simple as that, and ghostwriting has provided me with knowledge but with a lack of time, which is a paradox in itself. I have 4 books half-written and my master thesis to finish in the next month. Working on this essay has helped me to refocus my thoughts on ghostwriting and on what I really want to be when I "grow-up". I don't mind writing essays but I will never be able to ghostwrite a book because that is selling

your creativity and this is learning.

I came to the realization that a lot of other ghostwriters are of bad quality, especially on Fiverr. A lot of my clients told me how they got hassled and double-crossed by people whose ratings are great but I still can't understand how because there is a rating system on Fiverr. If you do a bad job, you will get rated with a one star. Thankfully, I never got a one star, I received two or three 4.5 stars and even that was quite hurtful. The problem with ghostwriting is that you are always at the mercy of your client. I mean, you can do an amazing job and still, your client can give you 4 stars because he thinks that 4 stars are good when only 5 stars are good. One bad rating can destroy years of work and brand building and thus, the freelancing community is quite harsh to its employees. I wrote a pretty personal description of my gig on Fiverr in order to only attract the people who are similar to me just because of this and because I believe in honesty. A lot of people laughed at me and told me to "sell myself a bit better" but there is no need. I don't wish to sell myself, I wish to work with people who can understand and value me, not only as a ghostwriter but as a person. The problem is my naivety and desire to help. For example, from trusting other people, I stayed without around 3 to 4 thousand dollars of work I did for them. Furthermore, I started several projects in order to help people and only lost a lot of my energy. I also underwent a pro-bono project to raise money for a small

village in Jamaica that had water issues. Being a water expert, I already designed a manner in which they could get quality water into their village and I was ready to raise some money on my own and go to Jamaica and build the system with my own hands. That never happened because the other person didn't have the courtesy to wait for me because as she said "I was too slow" and I was doing it pro-bono whilst having to work on the side to earn money for a living too. It is a strange world out there, and I have been in quite a lot of strange situations with numerous people who wanted to sell their idea online. Each time when I underwent these projects (I was mostly paid for one thing and I ended up running it all for a promise of money...), I noticed the amount of vanity present in people and a giant issue called the Ego. None of them was truly honest, and I understand the need to earn money, but why do you sell something to people without caring whether something you are selling has any value at all. I always try to do the best job and provide something that is of value, it helps me feel better because I want my work to have meaning and not just be done for the sake of money. Don't get me wrong, I like money, but I just think that if both sides get something out of it, then it makes sense. Ninety percent of people that contacted me wanted to sell something that holds no true value for the people who would spend money on it, and I always tried telling them how they can provide value and that in these cases, they will profit more long-term. But everybody wants that quick fix, it is just a way of living

now. Look at our nutrition, we pack ourselves with sugar on daily basis and sugar gets you that kick of energy and then drops down so you constantly take kicks of energy and become delusional and emotionally unstable, I don't eat sugar anymore and I loved it before.

Ghostwriting isn't something that can be explained in a couple of sentences. In the above text, I tried to explain my path but I was still not successful. I would need pages and pages of text in order to explain the complexity of ghostwriting and the wide range of emotions that it induces. I believe this differs from one individual to another. There are some people who are strictly professional with it and write only ads or only books but I can't operate that way. I can write about anything and I love that fact. I can't be bottled to one thing and ignore my thought of writing. I prefer writing essays even though they require research and learning but that is what I love about them, the constant ability to learn new things and grow as a person. I don't see my future as a ghostwriter, I have no idea where my future shall lead me, and I never have. I am not a type of person that can determine his life and follow the path, my thoughts are everywhere and at one moment, I have 20 futures planned and each of them is possible and enjoyable. But I want them all and through my mind and writings, I feel and live through them. I wouldn't call myself a professional ghostwriter because I can't get past my emotions so I will never be able to understand their world. I don't look at this

as a job, it is a job but it is so much more. It gives me the opportunity to earn money and be creative, it is as if someone is paying me to learn and develop.

Furthermore, every time I write for someone I do instill a bit of myself but it is never just me. As soon as someone contacts you, through the conversation you can see what type of person they are. It is not intentional but I do have a different style according to every person. I think that somehow their idea gets transferred and it is a mixture of my and the clients' thoughts. So, as for the authenticity, it is quite hard to draw a line. It all depends on the case. Most of the times, I transfer the emotion of the client into my writing because I communicate with them and even by the structure of one's messages, you can learn about them. Whether they add a smile, whether they are polite, casual, casual and polite, kind, fast, caring, affectionate, etc. I can't speak for some ghostwriters and their work, but I believe that in 90 % of my work, there is authenticity and you can feel the author in there (even though it is never intentional). Out of all the people on fiverr, they came to me which means that we are already similar in mind, we are a part of the similar philosophical matrix and thus, my mind becomes their mind and vice versa. It is a funny thing, a crazy funny thing.

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