

It's Alive!: Reanimating the Author in the Age of Artificially Intelligent Advertising

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Advertising is based on one thing: happiness. And do you know what happiness is? Happiness is the smell of a new car. It's freedom from fear. It's a billboard on the side of a road that screams with reassurance that whatever you're doing is OK. You are OK.-- Don Draper, *Mad Men* ("Smoke Gets in Your Eyes")

"Constantly moving happiness machines" ("Selling Short"). That's how President Herbert Hoover described US consumers in the late 1920s, just before the historic stock market collapse that ushered in the Great Depression. The Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) and a subsequent explosion in mass communication (1840-1950) harnessed the awesome power of technology to transform the lives of citizens in industrialized nations. The result was less work, more leisure time, and an unprecedented capacity to spend — at least for the fortunate few. The young advertising industry went to work finding creative and reassuring ways to connect technology and happiness in the minds of consumer citizens. What they succeeded in creating, industry critics may contend, was a marketing monster.

This essay begins with a close textual analysis of an innovative ad for the 2018 Lexus ES: "a car that responds intuitively to the driver's intentions and changing road and traffic conditions" ("This Lexus Ad"). "Driven by Intuition" ran mostly on social media platforms. The ad's most significant feature was not the vehicle it promoted, but rather the process by which it was produced. Although it was directed by award-winning filmmaker Kevin Macdonald, the spot was written by a bot. After a shot-by-shot analysis of the ad, we summarize the responses that the ad elicited from industry critics, attending closely to intertextual comparisons with other narratives. Utilizing Roland Barthes' "The Death of the Author," Wayne C. Booth's "implied author," and Edwin Black's "second persona" to provide a

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vocabulary for analysis, we address the consequences of Lexus's decision to aggressively foreground the ad's process of production, the part of the creative process that usually remains hidden from consumers and critics alike.

Ultimately, we advance two conclusions. First, several critics and the ad's own creative team made comparisons between "Driven by Intuition" and two popular creation narratives: *Pinocchio* and *Frankenstein*. We challenge the validity of these comparisons. Each of these texts was referenced repeatedly in press about the ad. Second, we posit that these comparisons may be the result of several strategic decisions by Lexus and the larger creative team in both making and promoting the ad. The consequence, we contend, is that Lexus encouraged questions of authorial intent, and in so doing may have encouraged an interpretation of the ad that is not textually justified. Specifically, the ad was widely and, we submit, inaccurately characterized as a creation narrative: a machine brought to life. Lexus maintains that "Driven by Intuition" forever changed how ads will be made. True or not, it does appear to have changed the way textual meaning is negotiated and authorial intent is interpreted in the era of AI.

It's Alive?

Alex Newland of Visual Voice, who developed the AI that wrote "Driven by Intuition," described the computer-generated script as a "dark rollercoaster journey of an inanimate object coming to life" (Lexus UK). Our analysis of the text does not entirely support his description. Possible reasons for the disparity between Newland's description and our analysis are addressed in subsequent sections.

The one-minute ad begins with a black screen (Lexus Europe). The following words appear in white, all-caps type:

LEXUS PRESENTS

A FILM WRITTEN BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (Lexus UK
00:00-00:01)

Seconds later, a third line is slowly added in pixelated type:

DIRECTED BY AWARD-WINNING HUMAN (Lexus UK 00:01-00:03)

From the outset, then, man and machine are connected and confused. The ad is a product of both, but it is the human director whose credit is rendered in a self-consciously digitized font. The collapsing of these categories — man and machine — will be a central theme running throughout the next 60 seconds. In fact, *Man*

and Machine is the title of the 10-minute “making of” documentary that was released by Lexus at the same time as the ad.

As the sound of a heartbeat rises on the soundtrack, we see the car in a stark and modern facility (Lexus UK 00:06-00:17). Alongside it stands a middle-aged man. The words “Final Inspection” appear in the bottom left corner of the screen. Marketing materials identify him as a Lexus Takumi Master Craftsman, although that is not at all apparent to the casual viewer (The&Partnership). Beneath a canopy of geometric lights, the man runs his white-gloved hands gently along the angles and contours of the car. Eventually the digital dash display lights up, the side mirrors swing out, the headlights and rear lights come on. If this is the supposed moment of creation — the inanimate object coming to life — it is indistinguishable from the turning of the ignition key in almost any other automobile ad. As the car drives out of the factory, the man’s eyes well up with tears. It is clear that he has a strong attachment to his creation, but it is not clear that his creation is alive.

The Lexus now glides along a narrow, winding highway that separates the forest from the sea (Lexus UK 00:18-00:23). It is a familiar, cliché of an image for a contemporary car ad. However, as the car turns a corner, it does not drive off into the sunset. Rather, it disappears from sight as we see a storm raging on the horizon. To the surprise and delight of the production team, the AI-produced script was accompanied by a rationale for each of its plot points, described as a “highly detailed data key, providing references spanning the 15 years’ worth of adverts it had studied to back up the effectiveness of each twist and turn in its storyline” (“This Lexus Ad”). The importance of strong facial expressions (the Master with tears in his eyes) and the need for a dramatic change in action midway through the ad to keep the audience watching were among the notes accompanying the script. The storm introduces this dramatic change.

An oddly abrupt cut brings the viewer — and the car — inside a different facility (Lexus UK 00:24-00:30). How the car arrived there is not explained. A smashed vehicle is moved aside by men in overalls whose appearance is strikingly different from the Master in the opening scene. If he was gentle, they are rough. If in fact he was a creator, these men are destroyers. The flash of cameras makes it clear that the press have assembled to witness and document whatever is about to unfold.

The viewer next sees the outside of the facility on a television (Lexus UK 00:31-00:35). The TV is in a modern living room, where the Master is watching the news with what one assumes is his teen daughter (the importance of the main character

having familial connections for emotional purposes was also noted in the AI script). Their faces reveal their obvious fear. A news reporter appears on the TV, presumably outside the building where the car is now held captive. The chyron reads: “Breaking News: Crash Test Imminent.” We cannot hear her report, but we do not need to.

An alarm sounds. Back inside the facility we see that the car is now tethered by chain to a large winch on the back of a semi-truck (Lexus UK 00:36-00:54). The car is about to be destroyed. Dramatic music blares as the car is suddenly pulled toward the truck. We await the impact, as do the Master and his daughter. Before the collision can destroy the vehicle, however, the brakes are applied. The winch and chain spark and smoke, and the car’s brake lights flash. The vehicle squeals to a stop just before impact. The Master and his daughter smile and hug in apparent relief. Although we never see a driver in the car — the windows are too darkly tinted to see inside — we are also never shown an empty driver’s seat, which would have rather clearly indicated that the car is alive and acting of its own accord.

The final shot of the ad reveals the car back out on the winding highway (Lexus UK 00:55-00:57). The sound of the heartbeat returns. If the effect is intended as literal proof that the car is alive and not simply a metaphor, it is greatly understated. The closing text first reads:

THE NEW LEXUS ES
DRIVEN BY INTUITION (Lexus UK 00:58)

It is then replaced with:

THE NEW LEXUS ES (Lexus UK 00:59)
SELF-CHARGING HYBRID

The screen fades to black, on which the Lexus name and logo appear above the slogan, “Experience Amazing” (Lexus UK 01:00).

Making Meaning

In John Hughes’ 1985 comedy classic, *Weird Science*, two teenage boys (somehow) feed magazine images of models and actresses into a desktop computer in an effort to create a digital version of the ideal female companion. Inspired by a late-night broadcast of *Frankenstein*, the boys (somehow) hack into a government computer to find sufficient power to animate their creation. When a power surge causes their system to explode, their creature (somehow) comes unexpectedly to life.

The means of production modeled on screen in *Weird Science* is strangely similar to the behind-the-scenes manner in which “Driven by Intuition” was actually made. Lexus collaborated with The&Partnership, Visual Voice, Unruly, MindX, and IBM’s Watson, among others, to produce what they claim is the first AI-written script for an ad (“Driven By Intuition: Car by Lexus”). The complex process required the creation of a bot capable of understanding luxury, emotionality, and intuition, among other elusive concepts. The public relations blitz that accompanied the debut of the ad described the process in this way:

The AI, built with Visual Recognition support from IBM Watson, was ‘trained’ with 15 years’ worth of Cannes-Lions-winning car and luxury advertisements, and was primed with emotional intelligence data from Unruly to teach it which moments of those adverts connected most strongly with viewers. It was then coached in intuition via a bespoke experiment for The&Partnership by applied scientists MindX, based at the University of New South Wales. The study explored what makes somebody intuitive, as well as how people with high levels of intuition respond to car adverts. (“This Lexus Ad”)

According to the director, Kevin Macdonald, the bot not only produced a complete script but also one that featured a machine coming to life. “The fact the AI gave a fellow machine sentience,” observed Macdonald, “placed it in a sort of combat situation, and then had it escaping into the sunset was such an emotional response from what is essentially a robot” (“This Lexus Ad”). Macdonald, who is known for making both documentary (*Touching the Void*, 2003) and fictional films (*The Last King of Scotland*, 2006), seems to have drawn from his ability to mix fantasy and reality in his approach to filming the one-minute spot. But if he, like Alex Newland of Visual Voice, interpreted the script as a creation story, the ad he filmed is ambiguous at best on that all-important plot point. Critical reactions were mixed.

The news of an ad created by AI was overwhelmingly popular in the media worldwide. A search in Lexis-Nexis yielded around 30 results from media in a variety of countries, such as the US, the UK, India, UAE, France, Australia, and more. Much of the content focused on the popular film director, his previous awards, and his ability to take an AI-generated script and turn it into something with emotion and energy. Other content focused on describing the AI-generated content from IBM’s Watson and a few other sources as well as a description of the ad itself. Some provided a link to the ad.

Reactions to the ad spanned from almost giddy with surprise to eye-rolling discontent. Predictably, critics had a lot more to say about the means by which the ad was produced than they did about the final 60-second spot, and little if any attention was paid to the car. While a majority of the reactions about the Lexus ad were positive, expectations that the use of AI could produce a good television commercial script were low. There was an overwhelming element of surprise that the Lexus ad worked, especially since even the tech provider working on the project was unsure about the outcome (Griner), and Lexus personnel viewed this as a “pilot” (Nicolle).

Of the positive reactions about the commercial, most were impressed that the famous director was able to work with the script produced by AI. Others thought the AI scriptwriting was comparable to human scriptwriting sophistication and “creative merit” (Clymo; Griner; Major). McDonald positively stated, “When I was handed the script, the melodrama of the story convinced me of its potential.... The charmingly simplistic way the AI wrote the story was both fascinating in its interpretation of human emotion, and yet still unexpected enough to give the film a clearly non-human edge” (Spangler).

Some of the negative reactions to the ad centered on the skepticism of AI’s ability to replace a human who has been trained and has experience in creative development (Griner; Sheehan). Predominantly advertising industry professionals, the critics claim that the ad was mediocre at best: “the spot’s script is definitely like a Sunday drive through the uncanny valley, with disjointed ideas forming a storyline that’s less of a narrative than a series of checked boxes” (Griner).

Other skepticism stemmed from content quality issues and the “gimmicky” feel of using AI instead of humans to create a script (Tsai). “Gimmicks using technologies such as Lexus recent ad made by AI can be great at driving publicity but where new technology really gets interesting is when it changes behaviours, improves processes and makes a genuine difference to people’s lives” (Tsai).

Overall, critics agreed that the experiment was beneficial for the industry. “While relatively primitive in its storytelling ability, the technique shows an eerie amount of potential” (Griner). Some stated that AI should be used in the future for generating more in-depth insights about the target audience (Bhat), discovering overlooked demographics, and identifying new patterns of behavior and the reason certain messages resonate better than others (Lamm). Others stated that AI should be used to “crunch information (in this case, 15 years of award-winning spots) to spark some ideas” (Lamm) for a more personalized experience (Nicolle) rather than

for creative direction (that the Lexus engineer should cry) (Bhat). “Computers aren't going to replace creative pros — but machine learning and artificial intelligence can be powerful tools in the storytelling process” (Spangler). AI should be used for “grunt work” to provide more time for humans to “recognize, develop and take advantage of insights” to produce outstanding creative work for their clients (Dsouza; Lamm).

Arguably the most interesting and, for the purposes of this essay, the most relevant, reactions were those that likened the ad to one of two pop culture creation narratives. Just as Newland and Macdonald interpreted the script as a creation story, so too did a number of critics. One such critic observed:

Like Frankenstein's Monster, the ad begins with a Lexus engineer admiring his creation. He looks on and sheds a tear as the car is taken away and threatened with destruction, taking to the open and stormy roads before being shackled and readied for an imminent crash test that is being broadcast live on TV while its owner watches in suspense. (Hammett)

Said another:

The analogies with previous stories, from *Pinnocchio* to Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence* via *Frankenstein*, are rather obvious; a quotation that would be normal in the case of human writers, but surprising in the creation of an algorithm that, among other things, has not had access to certain sources. (Porcu)

Ad Forum quoted Dave Bedwood of The&Partnership claiming that the entire creative process was “given Lexus brand guidelines, to ensure we didn't just produce a generic Frankenstein monster of an ad” (“Driven by Intuition: The&Partnership”). And director Macdonald elsewhere stated, “The story told reminds me a lot of Frankenstein or Pinocchio [...] It creates emotion, it's touching. If it had been done by a creative in an agency, I don't know if the effect would have been the same” (Valentin).

“Driven by Intuition” was undeniably groundbreaking. It is curious that so many viewers interpreted it as a creation story when the textual evidence to support that view is underwhelming. That members of the creative team described it in that way is sure to have influenced the perceptions of at least those critics who were aware of how Newland, Macdonald, and possibly others had described their creation. But that does not explain why the creative team itself saw the script as a creation story, nor why there appears to have been no pushback whatsoever in the press about this widely shared but textually unsupported interpretation. We think it

likely that the aggressive public relations blitz that celebrated the novel use of AI in the writing of the ad may have constrained the possible range of textual interpretations by emphasizing the role of the inanimate author and thus questions of authorial intent. To understand the consequences that reanimating the author can have on the process of textual analysis, one must turn to theory.

Rebirth or Reboot?

Central to our analysis of the text, and its implications for textual analysis, is the consequential dynamic established by the ad's opening credits. An opening credit sequence — standard for a feature film — is anything but standard for an advertisement. The apparent point of including one at the top of “Driven by Intuition” was to announce that what follows was authored by an algorithm, the brainchild of a bot, created by a computer. In so doing, the content of the text makes its own method of production inescapable in the act of its consumption. This textual feature, combined with the promotional campaign to promote the ad's production process, established an unusual and consequential interpretive dynamic. A brief review of narrative concepts by Roland Barthes, Wayne C. Booth, and Edwin Black provides a vocabulary for articulating our analysis.

In the late 1960s, the French semiotician Roland Barthes signed the author's death warrant. In an influential essay whose title referenced Mallory's *le Morte d'Arthur* and whose thesis resonated with the twentieth century New Criticism movement, Barthes argued against the practice of limiting the meaning of a text to the identity and presumed intent of its author. “The removal of the Author,” the writer promised his readers, “utterly transforms the modern text,” and with it the whole purpose and practice of criticism (Barthes 145).

To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing. Such a conception suits criticism very well, the latter then allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author [...] beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is “explained” — victory to the critic. (Barthes 147)

Instead of solving a puzzle that has a correct answer, the point of criticism, Barthes contended, was to explore the text so that all of its possible meanings become “disentangled, but nothing deciphered” (147).

No longer obliged to account for the author's implied meaning, Barthes declared that critics were not only free but in fact obligated to investigate all of the

different meanings that all different readers might infer. This was an early call to explore what academics would later refer to as the polysemy of the text: its simultaneous multiple meanings (Ceccarelli; Condit). “Once the Author is removed, the claim to decipher a text becomes quite futile,” Barthes concluded; “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author” (147-148).

With the mortal remains of the human author now neatly disposed of, did the text become an orphan, alone in the world, entirely on its own? Not according to Wayne Booth. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth introduced perhaps his best known concept: the implied author. Simply put, the implied author is the version of the storyteller that the reader gleans from the text. Not to be confused with a narrator, an implied author is neither a character in, nor commentator upon, the story. Rather, it is a sense one gets of the source from which the narrative has come. “Whether we call this implied author an ‘official scribe,’ or adopt another term,” Booth noted, “it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author’s most important effects” (71).

Importantly, whether the real author and the implied author share anything at all in common should not matter to critics or readers. In fact, the two can be complete opposites. A film with a progressive message about racial justice does not necessarily cease to be progressive if one discovers that the filmmaker has previously expressed racist views. It is not the man or woman behind the lens whose beliefs and attitudes should matter to the critic or viewer, according to Booth, but rather the invisible storyteller whose beliefs and attitudes are suggested by the text itself. Booth thus called for a radical reconsideration of the relationships between and among author, reader, and text, effectively removing the living author from the rhetorical situation.

The rhetorician Edwin Black complemented Booth’s implied author with his own creation — an implied reader or auditor or viewer, which Black called the “second persona.” The second persona is an idealized version of the audience that real audience members are invited to become. Black explicitly identified his creation as a close relative of Booth’s.

We have learned to keep continuously before us the possibility, and in some cases the probability, that the author implied by the discourse is an artificial creation: a persona, but not necessarily a person.. What equally well solicits our attention is that there is a second persona also implied by a discourse, and that persona is its implied auditor. (Black 111)

A speaker whose argument is likely to be persuasive only if, for example, the audience buys into the notion that “all men [sic] are created equal,” effectively invites the real audience to take up that point of view, to adopt that worldview, to become that ideal audience best positioned to be receptive to the rhetorical text.

In *Coming to Terms*, Seymour Chatman summarized all that is implied by the recognition of these narrative constructs:

The act of reading a text, though ultimately an exchange between real human beings, entails two intermediate constructs: one in the text, which invents it upon each reading (the implied author), and one outside the text, which construes it upon each reading (the implied reader). (76)

Although somewhat radical when first proposed by Booth in the 1960s, the notion that meaning is derived from a critic or audience member’s engagement with a text — a text that implies a version of its author and an ideal version of its audience — is anything but radical today. What is radical is resurrecting the long dead author, especially when the reanimated writer was never alive in the first place.

Pinocchio versus Frankenstein

Among the critics and journalists across the globe who wrote about “Driven by Intuition,” the two most popular narrative comparisons were with the equally well known but strikingly different creation stories *Pinocchio* and *Frankenstein*. Although *Frankenstein*’s progeny, Eando Binder’s story, “I, Robot, is arguably a more apt comparative text, this connection seems not to have appeared in responses to the ad.

Pinocchio’s tale is that of a wooden doll that comes to life. Published in the late nineteenth century by Carlo Collodi, *The Adventures of Pinocchio* introduced readers to a puppet whose creator/father, Geppetto, wished to create a real boy (Collodi). Featuring a flawed character whose nose would grow when he lied, as he often did, the book served as a cautionary tale about how one should behave in the world. In 1940, Disney animated the Pinocchio story (*Pinocchio*). In their classic film, the puppet-turned-boy is a sanitized character, whose flaws are less severe and whose heart is more pure than in the original telling. Because of the popularity of the Disney version, the majority of adaptations in popular culture have presented a far more innocent Pinocchio, a tragic hero who suffers undeserved misfortunes, overcomes great challenges, and is ultimately rewarded for his perseverance (Morrissey).

By contrast, the character at the center of the *Frankenstein* narrative has suffered the exact opposite fate. In Mary Shelley's gothic novel, the Monster appears to learn from his mistakes. He changes. And although he speaks of suicide at the end of the book, he does not die and is very much alive when the novel ends. Dr. Frankenstein, however, dies while he is still hunting his creation, still determined to destroy it. Unlike Geppetto, Dr. Frankenstein is revealed to be a morally flawed character whose creation evolves beyond him. Despite this, countless pop culture adaptations have turned Dr. Frankenstein into a somewhat naïve victim overwhelmed by his creation whom he gave the precious gift of life (Friedman and Kavey). And it is the Monster who became ever more monstrous as the tale was retold. Although James Whale's 1931 Universal film starring Boris Karloff was more faithful than many future adaptations, at least in this regard, the role of Monster and Master have been permanently rearranged in the popular consciousness (*Frankenstein*).

That these two popular creation stories would be referenced by several critics of the Lexus ad is fascinating because as noted previously there is nothing definitive in the ad that identifies it as a creation story. "Driven by Intuition" is a survival story, no doubt, and the rationale produced by the bot did call for "anthropomorphization" — i.e., the attribution of human traits or tendencies — but that does not necessarily amount to a car that actually comes to life (Lexus Europe).¹ The absence of an obvious moment of creation is especially striking. No fairy grants the Master's wish as in *Pinocchio*. Lightning is not harnessed by a scientist to animate the creature with the power of electricity as in *Frankenstein*. Michelangelo's "The Creation of David" is not restaged as it might have been, and it so often is in popular culture, to make clear that a moment of creation occurs. The vehicle powering up before leaving the factory is hardly such a moment. And yet numerous critics interpreted the ad as if it undeniably featured a car that comes to life. Why?

We submit that several factors likely contributed. Foremost, the creative team itself seems to have been an early source of this interpretation. Given their hyper-focus on the bot's writing of the ad, it is perhaps not altogether surprising that they would search the script for motive or intent. And indeed it appears they did. Macdonald's observation, which was republished across several reviews, that "the

¹ The work of Clifford Nass explores the tendency of humans to anthropomorphize computers and robots. See, for example, Nass and Moon.

AI gave a fellow machine sentience” described the ad such that the car became something of a surrogate for the bot. By suggesting an emotional connection between bot and car, the director framed his creation as an example of what Bill Nichols has called a documentary of wish fulfillment: “a fiction about the kind of peoples and cultures someone [...] wished to find in the world,” or in this case, to find in the text (4).

In addition, we submit that critical responses that interpreted the ad as a creation story are also the likely result of the aggressive manner in which authorial credit for the ad was given to the AI. This includes the decision to give the bot on-screen credit, as well as the release of the “making of” documentary that accompanied the release of the ad. The creation element is thus far more extratextual and intertextual than textual — an example of what David Bordwell calls “making meaning,” whereby critics project onto visual texts interpretations not fully justified by what is actually on the screen (Bordwell). It is thus possible that the bot (and not the car) came to life, at least in the minds of many critics, when it did that which previously only humans had done — authored both an inspirational narrative and a rationale for its creative choices.

Lexus gave its text an author, and in so doing all but suffocated the implied author and greatly disoriented the implied audience. The promotional campaign that celebrated the ad’s innovative process made it all but impossible for viewers to engage with the text on its own terms. Rather than disentangle the ad, as Booth urged, they tried to decipher it — to discern the meaning that the AI author intended. Further complicating the process is the fact that this particular author has no past, no biography, no body of work to guide the process of deciphering. Unable to look to the author’s life and work as a guide to discovering intent, critics looked instead to popular culture and found in the creation narratives of *Frankenstein* and *Pinocchio* a version of what they imagined the bot was trying to tell them.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that it was unwise for Lexus to have a bot write a script, nor for them to promote their unique experiment. However, if bot-written scripts are to become more common in advertising, it may be wise for advertisers to resist heavily promoting their use of AI — and especially not to insert that fact into the content of their ads — unless the goal is for viewers and consumers to once again search for the bot’s intended meaning within the text. Reanimating the author, at least in this case, seems to have created confusion about the images and storyline that fundamentally were supposed to promote the purchase of an

intuitive car, but which instead were arguably misunderstood to celebrate a machine that achieved its dream of coming to life, if only by proxy.

Conclusion

This essay advanced a close analysis of a unique text: an AI-scripted ad for a luxury car. “Driven by Intuition” was directed by the filmmaker, Kevin Macdonald. It ran on social media platforms and on television in Europe. A summary of critical responses demonstrated that reactions ran the full spectrum from gleeful celebration to accusations of gimmickry. Most notable for this essay were those critics and members of the creative team behind the ad who interpreted their creation as a creation story. Many made overt comparisons to such narratives as *Pinocchio* and *Frankenstein*. These were notable, we assert, because our shot-by-shot reading of the 60-second ad does not support an interpretation that the content of the ad amounts to a creation story.

Using the work of Roland Barthes, Wayne C. Booth, and Edwin Black, we posited that Lexus’s extra-textual campaign to promote that the ad was written by a bot, combined with the decision to credit the bot at the top of the ad, perhaps inadvertently invited viewers and critics to ponder questions of authorial intent in a manner not at all consistent with how product ads are normally consumed. Possibly viewing the car in the ad as a surrogate or stand in for the bot behind the ad, at least some viewers saw that which (we contend) is simply not there: the story of a car that comes to life. We conclude that the use of AI was both creative and novel. However, we caution that highlighting the means by which the ad was produced greatly skewed critical and possibly popular responses to the ad, changing rather dramatically how various audiences understood the text.

“Whether we call this implied author an ‘official scribe,’ or adopt another term,” Wayne Booth has argued, “it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author’s most important effects. However impersonal he [sic] may try to be, his reader will inevitably construct a picture of the official who writes in this manner — and of course the scribe will never be neutral toward all values” (71). There is no evidence that we know of to suggest that the bot’s script called for its own on-screen credit, and certainly it did not prescribe a media blitz promoting its creative contribution to the ad. The bot may have replaced the author in the creative process, but it did not attempt to resurrect it in the text. Reanimated by

Lexus and its creative team, the bot's presumed authorial intent resulted in the "making [of] meaning" rather than the reading of the text.

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