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Writing together: conjunctive collaboration, scholarship and prose poetry

Abstract:

While there is a good deal of literature about collaboration and teamwork it is often in disciplines other than literary studies and creative writing. Relatively few writers have reflected explicitly on their collaborative work – and, indeed, writers are frequently characterised as sole creators, valued for their individuality and originality. However, in an environment where collaborative work is being given increased emphasis in the academy, and where there is broad recognition that claims to autonomy by creative artists are doubtful, this paper reflects on its authors' experience of a writerly collaborative partnership that grew out of a mutual interest in prose poetry and creative practice, and which resulted in a co-authored monograph on prose poetry for Princeton University Press. This collaborative relationship, which began with modest aims, has been characterised by inventiveness and trust and has developed in unexpected ways. It may be understood as an example of what Brien and Brady call called Joint Collaboration, or what John-Steiner characterises as Integrative Collaboration. However, the authors propose the alternative term, Conjunctive Collaboration, as a way of characterising the new connections and combinations that their collaborative relationship has brought.

Biographical notes:

Paul Hetherington is Professor of Writing in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra, head of the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI) and one of the founding editors of the international online journal *Axon: Creative Explorations*. He founded the International Prose Poetry Group in 2014. He has published and/or edited 27 books, including 13 full-length poetry collections and nine chapbooks. Among these are *Moonlight on Oleander: Prose Poems* (UWAP, 2018) and *Palace of Memory* (RWP, 2019). He won the 2014 Western Australian Premier's Book Awards (poetry) and undertook an Australia Council for the Arts Literature Board Residency at the BR Whiting Studio in Rome in 2015-16. He was shortlisted for the Kenneth Slessor Prize in the 2017 New South Wales Premier's Awards and commended in the Surprise Encounters: Headstuff Poetry Competition 2018 (Ireland).

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VicArts and an Australia Council grant to work on a book of prose poetry about the atomic bomb. Cassandra co-wrote *Prose Poetry: An Introduction* (Princeton UP, forthcoming) with Paul Hetherington and is co-editing *The Anthology of Australian Prose Poetry* (Melbourne UP) with him. She is a commissioning editor for *Westerly* magazine.

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Writing together: conjunctive collaboration, scholarship and prose poetry

1. Writerly collaboration

Collaboration occurs in a variety of forms, some of it interdisciplinary and some of it between two or more people working in the same discipline. While there is a good deal of literature about collaboration, and also about teamwork in the workplace, creative collaboration between writers has not been widely discussed or theorised. A significant number of creative writers and scholars engage in collaboration but relatively few writers or writer-academics have reflected explicitly on their collaborative processes. As a result, there is something of a gap in the literature about writerly collaboration in creative writing and literary studies, despite the fact that it is now generally accepted that all writers are, at least in a broad sense, engaged in collaborative activities. Lisa Ede and Andrea A Lunsford argue this point in claiming:

The relentless intertextuality of Web culture, the rapid proliferation of multiple selves online, and the development of what Sherry Turkle has called ‘distributed selves’ of postmodernity would seem to have moved us well beyond autonomous individualism. (2001: 354)

Further, and more generally, Anne Game and Andrew Metcalfe comment on the inherently social nature of creativity:

People describing their work processes and creative experience confirm again and again that creativity is not a property of an authorial self, and that, indeed, it requires a loss of self. Whether it occurs in the production of art, the cooking of dinner, or during a walk down a street, creativity is a relation, and happens in-between. (2000: 263)

This paper presents a discussion of the key aspects of the collaborative writing partnership we have been involved in for a number of years, much of which happened ‘in-between’. This is a partnership that has not only recently yielded a significant scholarly monograph on prose poetry, but which has produced a variety of other publications – and which began with a focus on creative writing and practice-led research.

Having said this, one of the potential difficulties in discussing collaborative relationships is that the word ‘collaboration’ suggests different things to different people. Donna Lee Brien and Tess Brady clarify such differences by formulating ‘a series of [12] categories of collaboration’ (2003: n.p.) in which they tease out the markedly different ways in which collaboration may function in practice. The forms of collaboration they identify include ‘Conceptual Collaboration’, concerning the ‘generation of a general idea such as a theory or a philosophical principle’; ‘Contribution Collaboration’, which is ‘probably the most common form of collaboration’, ‘when several artists contribute to a project in their separate ways’; and ‘Joint Collaboration’, ‘when two or more writers/artists work together on a single product producing a seamless text’ (2003: n.p.). They suggest that ‘collaboration is neither a tidy nor a static form of creative practice. Fluidity is the key.’ (2003: n.p.)

Academic disciplines also have divergent expectations related to collaborative practice. Research collaboration in the sciences, for example, is much more of a norm than collaboration between creative writers. Citing Glanzel and Schubert’s 2005 analysis of scientific networks through co-authorship, Ryan Muldoon comments that

in the sciences ‘since 1980 single-author papers have gone from approximately a quarter of all scientific papers, down to only 10% in 2000. The number of coauthors on papers has also steadily risen, from a mean of 2.64 to a mean of 4.16 in the same period’ (2018: 80). Michael M Crow and William B Dabars give a similar figure in stating that ‘[a]cross all scientific fields, single-author research papers ... declined from 30% in 1981 to 11% in 2012’ (2019: 478). Scientists often work in cooperative teams and frequently write collaborative papers based on data gathered by these teams. Creative writers and artist-academics, on the other hand, are typically understood to work in relative isolation, and often to be protective of their ideas and inspiration. As Wendy Bishop and David Starkey express it: ‘[t]raditionally, creative writers have focused on creating original texts for which they claim solitary authorship’ (2006: 29).

This is hardly surprising given, as Vera John-Steiner observes, ‘[t]he notion of the solitary thinker still appeals to those molded by the Western belief in individualism’ (2000: 3). Jen Webb and Andrew Melrose develop this idea, giving particular attention to writers:

creative writing is invariably treated as a private, even a secret act, though one that (ideally) ends up in the public domain ... [Many people] have bought into what Alex Pheby (2010) calls ‘myth of isolation,’ which holds that writers must preserve not just their independence but also their solitude if they are to be able to produce genuinely original works. (2015: 102)

Furthermore, Bishop and Starkey discuss some of the practical impediments facing creative writers in the United States – and their observations are relevant to many other countries as well – who are interested in collaborative creative writing:

Obstacles to such collaborative work include the difficulty of finding editors willing to publish coauthored work and the fact that coauthored work is regularly excluded from the thesis and dissertation processes as well as from contests and grant applications. (2006: 30)

In other words, collaboration is not always understood as an essential, or even desirable feature of the work of many creative writers, and it is not necessarily seen as critical to the success of those writers – even though there is now considerable pressure within universities in Australia and internationally for academics to write collaboratively, including in the field of writing.

Despite the relative lack of research into the nuances of writerly collaboration, there is certainly sufficient existing literature to indicate how collaboration between writers is broadly understood. For instance, at a general level, Julie Reeves, Sue Starbuck and Alison Yeung remind us that ‘intellectual collaboration and engagement are as old as the term *akademia* itself; the name of the olive grove in ancient Greece dedicated to Athena ... and the place where Plato ... founded his school’ (2020: 3). They define ‘collaboration and engagement’ fairly broadly, as ‘two or more people working together to produce an agreed outcome, ideally and preferably one that has been mutually agreed’, adding that ‘[c]ollaborating and engaging signify symbiotic relationships; each requires a two-way process of communication and interaction with others’ (11). Vera John-Steiner concurs, arguing that in ‘the life of the mind’ ‘[g]enerative ideas emerge from joint thinking, from significant conversations, and from sustained, shared struggles to achieve new insights by partners in thought’ (2000: 3). Karen Julien and Jacqueline L Beres confirm these priorities when they

discuss their particular ‘writing partnership’ in some detail, drawing on existing literature to contend that ‘[w]riting with others can foster motivation through mutual encouragement, accountability, or healthy competition’ (2019: 4).

However, there is more to collaboration than these fairly general (if insightful) comments may suggest. Various writers have given more personal, and sometimes highly subjective or impressionistic accounts of collaboration, letting the reader into a closer understanding of the nature of the communication that takes place within many writerly collaborative relationships. For example, Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny, authors of the experimental collaborative novels, *The Restorationist: text 1, a collaborative fiction by Jael B Juba* and *Hearing by Jael*, published a 1994 article that conveys how collaborative conversations may merge into a single voice; or, more precisely, may be part of a process where two-voices-become-one:

Joyce: What we do is what we’re doing at this very moment – having a conversation ... I see here in your OED that our English word *conversation* starts appearing in the fourteenth century.

Lydia: Let’s have a look. The route of borrowing, by way of early French, goes back not really to *convertere* but to the deponent form, *conversari* ... and, so, by figurative transfer: ‘to pass one’s life, dwell, abide, live somewhere, keep company with.’

Joyce: There you are, the two voices in our novel do not converse with each other in the usual sense of exchanging their thoughts and feelings. They converse in the archaic sense: their voices dwell under the same cover. (1994: 248)

American poet Yusef Komunyakaa who has famously collaborated with dramaturge and theatre producer Chad Gracia also mentions the importance of a collaborative ‘whole’ that extends beyond the individual visions of the collaborators:

The ideal collaboration is a dialogue and negotiation. Of course, one has to ... select someone whose sense of aesthetics is interwoven into the character of each endeavor ... someone who can grow with you, so that the two of you are like two or more dancers entangled in a tango of the heart and brain. However, the moves are not agreed upon in advance; the collaborators must be able to negotiate that sway of the imagination ... Ideas speak to each other; they sing and fight together until they make each other whole. (2017: 107)

2. Our prior experience of collaboration

Prior to entering our collaborative partnership, we had significantly different experiences of collaboration. Hetherington had already collaborated with a number of other academics in co-authoring academic articles. Each of these collaborative articles was conceived and approached somewhat differently, but in each case more-or-less equal contributions were made by each author – except in one case, where Hetherington and his co-author agreed that they would make significantly different contributions, with Hetherington doing most of the writing. Hetherington had also written a few collaborative poems and had collaborated on creating exhibitions with visual artists.

One of Hetherington’s significant collaborative projects involved working with Jen Webb on a book that linked photographs of Canberra (by Webb) and poems (by Hetherington). This was published as *Watching the world: impressions of Canberra*

in 2015 after some of the same material had been presented in the collaborative display, 'Circles and Intersections', as part of the *Imagine Canberra* exhibition at Belconnen Arts Centre in 2013. In the Introduction to *Watching the world*, Hetherington and Webb write of the nature of their collaboration for this project, which emphasised relatively independent creative activity as well as a shared outcome:

Our approach was to work semi-independently: Jen took photographs, which Paul then used as springboards into poems. Paul's poems led, in turn, to Jen taking new photographs or editing existing ones

As we worked we found ourselves in the play of a dynamic that was neither ours as two individuals, nor entirely ours as a creative partnership. Rather, it belonged to a sort of reality: that which emerged from what we found in our quotidian lives, from the everyday landscapes of Canberra, and from language. This 'reality' went to work on us, turning our creative ideas to unexpected ends and presenting us with sometimes disturbing thoughts about the incommensurability of world, image and word. (2015: vi-vii)

This book involved what Brien and Brady characterise as Contribution Collaboration, 'when several artists contribute to a project in their separate ways, each maintaining their own signature, but producing a unified object, or achieving a common goal' (2003: n.p.). Interestingly, however, even in such a relatively loose collaborative relationship – where the authors worked 'semi-independently' – they comment on how their collaborative partnership created 'a dynamic that was neither ours as two individuals, nor entirely ours as a creative partnership', turning 'creative ideas to unexpected ends and ... disturbing thoughts' (2015: vi-vii). This notion of collaboration producing a disturbance in the participants is particularly pertinent and one that we pursue in more detail, below.

Overall, by 2014, Hetherington's experiences of collaboration had been largely positive. He enjoyed the challenges presented by collaboration, particularly the opportunity to share and develop creative ideas with others. Atherton, on the other hand, had previously been reluctant to collaborate. In 2009 she gave a presentation at Deakin University entitled 'Two heads are never better than one', outlining many of the potential problems associated with academic collaboration. She commented on some of her experiences with group projects, where not all participants had contributed equally but everyone had received equal credit. More generally, she stated that the idea of collaboration – especially for women – sometimes appeared to be a recipe for doing more than half the work and receiving only half, or less, of the credit (2009: n.p.). This issue of the unequal sharing of work during collaborations has bedevilled many collaborative relationships, and Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunford comment on this issue in remarking that 'in collaborative situations, women often play the "secretarial role", one that by definition devalues their contributions' (1990: 138). They also write that some 'feminist scholars have been at pains to argue that the death of the author does not and cannot entail an abandonment of [female] agency' (2001: 116).

Atherton was also aware that collaborations were not always harmonious, and that sometimes a compromised product was the result, particularly when collaborators simply divided the research and writing into various parts, leading to a disjointed outcome. She was concerned that sometimes there could be too much negotiation or

too many trade-offs within a collaborative partnership or group. In such cases, a book or an article may end up as fairly bland and was unlikely to represent the best or most characteristic work of any of the collaborators. However, notwithstanding these perspectives, between 2013 and 2015 Atherton successfully collaborated with a female colleague in co-authoring an academic article, and collaborated on editing a couple of journal issues, including an issue of the *Axon: Creative Explorations* journal on the topic of collaboration, focusing on ‘explor[ing] different appeals to ethics, from individuals trying to maintain ownership over parts of a collaborative document, to the use and redeployment of someone else’s work within the frame of a new piece of writing’ (Pont and Atherton 2016: n.p).

3. Beginning our collaboration

Our own experience of writing collaboratively began with a shared interest in creative writing and practice-led research – with a particular focus on prose poetry – and a shared enjoyment of writing scholarly articles related to these matters. Our collaboration was initiated through sharing a fairly simple idea which grew to become much larger than either of us originally envisioned – and it grew *because* we began to collaborate. In other words, our decision to collaborate generated ideas and projects that otherwise would never have been created.

In 2014, some months after we met briefly at a symposium in Melbourne, we began to correspond by email about a few occasional academic and writerly matters. On 5 December of that year Hetherington, who had begun to write prose poems largely as a result of Atherton’s example, emailed her with a suggestion:

Since I’ve embarked on writing prose poems I have become more and more interested in the form, and would like to explore it in a practice-led research project in the next year or so ...

... we could start by finding a potential topic (‘Rooms and Spaces’??) and by exchanging maybe five or six prose poems each that relate to that topic. (2014: n.p.)

Atherton responded enthusiastically. At the time both of us imagined that this project would involve each of us writing separate, relatively small groups of prose poems – perhaps five to 10 works each – and one or two joint academic articles related to what we agreed were the compressed and room-like qualities of many prose poems. We were both busy with other research projects and diverse academic responsibilities and, initially, we both saw this collaborative project as simply one among many – although its connection to creative writing made it intrinsically more interesting than a great deal else we were involved in.

Further, even when we decided to write our first article on prose poetry – this was published in 2015 in the *New Writing* journal under the title “‘Unconscionable Mystification’?: Rooms, Spaces and the Prose Poem’ – Atherton felt apprehensive. We wanted to write the article because there wasn’t a lot of current scholarship internationally about prose poetry and we thought we had new things to say about the importance of prose poetry as part of a proliferation of short and often hybrid literary forms in the twenty-first century. Atherton had been writing prose poetry for many years and, as we have mentioned, Hetherington had only recently begun to write in the form, so producing a scholarly article was also a way of extending our understanding of our poetic practices. Additionally, it promised to address one of the

goals we had formulated for our initial practice-led research project, which we had formalised under the title 'Rooms and spaces: the still movement of prose poetry'. In our project outline, we listed two collaborative refereed journal articles as part of our project outcomes.

Atherton's apprehension was connected to her uncertainty about whether she would enjoy writing with someone else on a subject that was of longstanding importance to her. Additionally, she was aware of what Lorraine Mary York calls 'property anxieties' (2002: 108). This was not simply an anxiety about preserving what was 'hers' and what was someone else's. Rather, it was anxiety about whether Hetherington would embrace what Joyce Elbrecht and Lydia Fakundiny identify as 'the unmistakable image of both of us working together' (1994: 256). She didn't want to receive referee reports for a joint article and have to start referring to 'my parts of the paper' and 'your parts of the paper'. She wanted to discuss all parts of an article as 'ours', in keeping with York's assertion (about collaborations between women) that 'collaborative work is, indeed, not easily divisible or parsable into its constituent parts' (2002: 8).

In practice, when writing the article together, we not only found that we shared many understandings about prose poetry, but we also had the happy surprise of discovering that our writing styles were easily accommodated, each to the other. This was an unusual experience for both of us and meant that we were able to produce a collaborative scholarly paper in which our work, as York says, was 'not easily divisible'. We both also agreed that neither of us would have written the article without the other's encouragement and have continued to believe this about all of our collaborative writing – that we challenge each other in productive ways. Furthermore, our ways of working are complementary. We are able to work on the same general idea and produce different insights, enriching each other's perceptions.

Once Atherton's initial anxiety about how Hetherington would respond to what she wrote was allayed, she enjoyed the collaborative process, commenting: 'I've always been a bit of a hermit and this has been so different and so engaging – we definitely have to write [other articles]!' (2015: n.p.). Vera John-Steiner has written of what she calls 'integrative collaboration' in which collaborators 'frequently suspend their differences in style'. She also comments that:

These [integrative collaborative] partnerships require a prolonged period of committed activity. They thrive on dialogue, risk-taking, and a shared vision. In some cases, the participants construct a common set of beliefs, or ideology, which sustains them in periods of opposition or insecurity. Integrative partnerships are motivated by the desire to transform existing knowledge, thought styles, or artistic approaches into new visions. (2000: 203)

We are not sure whether our collaborative writing fully meets John-Steiner's characterization. However, in some respects it does, because by the time we have completed any joint article neither of us could confidently say which part of an article 'belonged' to which person. We live in different cities and draft parts of articles separately, but we both feel free – and always take the opportunity – to rework, refine and edit each other's writing. As a result, almost every sentence, and certainly every paragraph, is the result of two sets of eyes rather than one. This is not to say that we change each other's work willy-nilly. There are times when one of us will receive work from the other and want to preserve both the quality of an idea and its

expression. However, even in such cases, because we see our collaborative scholarly writing as depending on ongoing dialogue and risk-taking, we sometimes make changes in an attempt to move an idea towards new ground and away from the expression of our more habitual insights and ideas.

In this way we depend on ‘a common set of beliefs, or ideology’, as Steiner puts it – although it is hard to say exactly what all of these beliefs are. Our collaboration is not only founded on the pleasure of writing together, but shares a vision of the importance of literature as well as a love of reading that literature. We have, in other words, many of the same ideas and priorities – and even some of the same prejudices – which support us during difficult collaborative periods when we are tired or frustrated or where one of us may have inadvertently upset the other – or, as Steiner puts it, ‘which sustains ... [us] in periods of opposition or insecurity.’

However, our similarities and shared ideas are not our only – and perhaps not even our most important – collaborative strength. That strength derives from our differences. We thrive as collaborators because, despite many similar interests and shared convictions, we see and respond to the world very differently; and despite the compatibility of our writing styles, they are not the same. We also have contrasting approaches to how we like to plan and conduct research. These differences mean that we are always prompting one another to think in alternative ways, or to find greater subtlety of expression, or to reconsider how we might frame a particular argument.

Joyce Elbrecht speaks of collaboration as a form of ‘conversation’, and also in terms of dwelling and abiding (Elbrecht and Fakundiny 1994: 248). We share Elbrecht’s ideas, because collaboration for us, and writing together, is an extended, almost habitable form of talking and writing together in order to unearth what the other may think about an engaging topic. If we produce what our universities sometimes refer to as a ‘scholarly output’, that is a bonus – and we do write partly to achieve such ‘outputs’ – but the main driving force behind the co-labour we conduct is the enjoyment we get from undertaking the work. It is an excuse to keep conversing deeply; to find out new things; and to share the pleasure of the other’s writerly company.

Elbrecht also states that ‘[t]he two voices in our novel [*The Restorationist*] do not converse with each other in the usual sense of exchanging their thoughts and feelings. They converse in the archaic sense: their voices dwell under the same cover’ (Elbrecht and Fakundiny 1994: 248). We would endorse this characterisation of collaboration, but also suggest that in our shared conversation and writing we are always tending to be in a state of reinvention, finding ways of thinking and being that are sometimes subtly, sometimes radically disrupting what we know. In this way, collaboration represents both a constant disturbance and a repeated reinvigoration of our writerly selves. In addition to our commitment to collaborative scholarship on prose poetry, we continue to write separately, continue to engage in collaborations with other people, and continue to resist one another’s ideas from time to time, but we never underestimate the value of our collective, enjoyable field of disturbance.

In this respect, it is worth reflecting on Wayne Koestenbaum’s contention that ‘the decision to collaborate determines the work’s contours ... Books with two authors ... show writing to be a quality of motion and exchange, not a fixed thing’ (1982: 2). It is certainly true that the collaborative disturbance we have mentioned also constitutes a restlessness. Very often, just as one of us feels that they have settled on an idea or

approach to a topic, the other unsettles it by suggesting something unexpected. In such co-labour, it is critical to be prepared to shift ideas and not to hold too determinedly to preconceived notions. This is, of course, sometimes difficult or even upsetting, but it has become a highly productive way of working. In collaborating, we have agreed that nothing is fixed until neither of us has anything more to say about it (and, even then, we each reserve the right to change our minds later).

4. Writing a monograph on prose poetry

It was initially satisfying to write academic articles together, most of them ranging between 4,000 and 7,000 words. However, our most challenging collaborative project began with the idea that, having co-written about half a dozen articles on prose poetry, we might write a book on the subject. We had begun to wonder why so much prose poetry was being written in the United States; why poets in the United Kingdom – who had so long largely ignored or dismissed prose poetry – were suddenly taking up the form with enthusiasm; why was there so much prose poetry being produced in Australia; and what was this thing people called prose poetry anyway? We pitched a proposal to some publishers in America in December 2016 and Princeton University Press responded promptly and enthusiastically, asking to see samples of our work and sending our publishing proposal to a reader. By July 2017 we had signed an advance contract to write a 100,000-word monograph (in practice, the book will be longer), with a delivery date of December 2019. On receiving and signing the contract we were delighted and also a little daunted. To write so many words in a relatively short period of time looked possible but challenging, given the amount of research involved.

Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biederman write that ‘In true creative collaboration, almost everyone emerges with a sense of ownership’ (1997: 28), and that was one of the keys to this project. The monograph on prose poetry was almost all-consuming, with each of us writing an initial draft of five of the ten chapters, and swapping and writing into each other’s initial drafts as we went. This was true co-writing and co-labouring, with each chapter changing hands numerous times, and receiving so many edits, revisions, insertions and deletions, and so many comments and queries, and also restructuring, that on many occasions track changes became too jammed with text to be useful.

The trust we had developed through writing together was fully tested. As we worked, researched, wrote, rewrote, edited, added and talked, so we prompted, inspired, encouraged, questioned or (occasionally) upset each other. Sometimes we simply shared a sense of exhaustion. By the end of the writing process every sentence in our manuscript has been scrutinised and, as it were, signed by each of us (somewhat like a contract – but a creative contract, where most of our collaborative understandings were implicit). Then, as we reflected on what we had done, we realised that our collaborative relationship, challenged and tested as it had undoubtedly been, had emerged whole and strengthened.

5. Conclusion

Our collaboration continues, and it continues to require both of us to unsettle some of our practices and stretch the habits we have each developed over our lifetimes. It has

enabled each of us to find an important ‘in-between’ writing practice and creative space, where we are neither entirely our separate authorial selves, nor entirely a single writerly identity (indeed, each of us remains fiercely independent). Our experience endorses Game’s and Metcalfe’s comment that ‘creativity is a relation’ (2000: 263)

We almost always write in separate places – Atherton lives in Melbourne and Hetherington lives in Canberra – but, as we collaborate, we always write with mutual aims and goals, imaginatively conjuring an in-between writing space for the duration of each of our co-authored projects. In this way, what one of us has to say is also what the other has to say. (We believe this as we write, but it is hard to explain this sense of trust and connection in purely rational or logical terms. And we can never simply assume that this is true, so we continue to check and exchange what we write, in an ongoing process of combined critique and affirmation.)

Donna Lee Brien and Tess Brady call our form of collaboration ‘Joint Collaboration’, commenting that this ‘collaborative process does not follow categorical steps or demarcations of roles, and remains instead, a more fluid process’ (2002: n.p.). Such fluidity is a key to collaborative success and a pleasure. Important, too, is a genuine tolerance and care for each other. There are times when one of us may not feel enthused by, for example, the other’s editorial intervention, but because we believe in the vision we have of our collaborative partnership, such moments are quickly resolved and pass, never assuming any great importance. We are soon able to merge again into the flow of a whole project and its mutual, absorbing space.

Our collaboration demonstrates that the idea of the ‘lone creator’ is perhaps an old-fashioned model for thinking about creative processes, and for understanding writing practice. As we collaborate, so we remain ourselves apart; and at the same time we fuse our writerly energies, producing what neither of us could manage alone. Donna Lee Brien and Tess Brady remark that:

Ownership of text, or ego-generated protection of an idea or a piece of text, can cripple any Joint Collaboration. Once a writer becomes precious and insistent on an aspect of *their* text they are running the risk of moving from Joint Collaboration to Contribution Collaboration with all the confusion and breakdown in communication such a shift can generate.

We have never experienced this problem of breakdown and fragmentation of effort, mainly because each of us takes pleasure in the other’s writing and ideas – and, also, probably because neither of us likes to waste effort on unproductive labour. We both know that there are times when our collaborative partner writes things that are beyond what we can do. Without our egos in the way, we are able to take pleasure in the other’s successes and achievements. In this way, collaboration may become a best-of-both-worlds enterprise. It involves the willingness to resolve misunderstandings, and sometimes the willingness to give reassurance – not to mention occasional kindness – and both of us have easily managed this.

Having said that, we both agree that trust takes some time to establish and it was very useful to write relatively short articles when we were getting used to each other’s working methods and preferences. At this early collaborative stage we found ourselves negotiating our differences and resolving a few misunderstandings along the way. None of that proved very difficult but there were issues we are both glad we addressed early. One of these is the sometimes-vexed question of the attribution of authorship. We decided early on that while first authorship means little in the

humanities, nevertheless we would share that attribution. We agreed that each of us would simply be first author on every alternative paper we wrote, regardless of whether one or other of us had written most of that paper.

More generally, it is pertinent to note that when Yusef Komunyakaa contends that '[t]he ideal collaboration is a dialogue and negotiation', he emphasises that one's collaborator should be 'someone who can grow with you, so that the two of you are like two or more dancers entangled in a tango of the heart and brain' (2017: 107). This is an apt simile for our experience of working together. Chasing our joint ideas and creative impulses has often seemed like an intricate dance, in which ideas and feelings merge, circle, lift and subside, emerging in new forms in scholarly papers and prose poems. Further, Komunyakaa insists, 'the moves are not agreed upon in advance' (2017: 107), and this is crucial to successful collaboration. We suspect that if we ever knew exactly what next year's collaboration would bring, we would stop working together. The excitement is in the not-knowing and the unfolding of what co-labour makes – its irreducible element of surprise. The other person in any writerly collaborative relationship is always only partly knowable; and always able to bring what is unexpected or even contradictory into the partnership. Collaboration's boundaries are thus always shifting, and always demanding reassessment.

If pressed, we would suggest that we understand our co-labour partly in terms of Brien and Brady's category of Joint Collaboration, and partly in terms of John-Steiner's notion of Integrative Collaboration. However, we would offer a third term: Conjunctive Collaboration, in which the collaborators are neither operating jointly nor behaving in a fully integrated manner. Rather, they are making new connections and combinations together, while remembering their separation; creating new moves through focusing on their sense of a whole project rather than the sum of their individual parts.

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