University of South Australia

Amelia Walker and Corinna Di Niro

Creative duoethnography: a collaborative methodology for arts research

Abstract:

Duoethnography is a dialogic methodology originally developed for social, health, and educational research (Sawyer & Norris 2015). In duoethnography, co-researchers actively question both their collaborator(s) and themselves, seeking to reperceive issues from different angles, thereby looking to and beyond the peripheries of what is known and how. Our essay argues the benefits of duoethnography for creative arts research. Drawing on our reading of relevant scholarly literature, and on learning gleaned through past and ongoing duoethnographic collaborations, we begin by considering collaborative research writing broadly, including related and alternative approaches. Then we outline duoethnography's history and defining features, before relating our use of duoethnography in our collaborative research. A key feature of our approach is that we weave scenes with fictionalised characters into our main duoethnographic dialogue. In this article, we share our process, intending to provide insights relevant to creative arts academics also interested in collaborative research approaches.

Biographical note:

Amelia Walker completed her PhD in Creative Writing in 2016 and now teaches at the University of South Australia. She is the current secretary of the Australasian Association of Writing Programs, and also the co-editor of the book reviews section for *TEXT* journal.

Corinna Di Niro completed her PhD in Theatre in 2016 and now teaches at the University of South Australia. She is a guest lecturer for the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, Sydney, and runs her own theatre company, Stage Secrets.

Keywords:

Creative arts research – collaboration – duoethnography – peripheral writing – theatre

Introduction

In the previous episode (Di Niro & Walker 2018) …

> *Party scene: Noise, drinks, chatter, laughter. A group of people, standing in a loose circle, are talking and having fun. MR OBVIOUSLY HAS-STABLE-EMPLOYMENT stands centre-circle, highly visible. DR NO-IDEA stands on the outer, her posture uneasy.*
>
> MR OBVIOUSLY: So, what's your PhD in?
>
> DR NO-IDEA: Er . . . ?

The above excerpt is from a book chapter we co-authored, using the methodology of duoethnography, but adapted to incorporate fictional characters ('Mr Obviously' and 'Dr No-Idea'). These characters are composites built partially from our own experiences and observations as early career academics in the fields of theatre (Di Niro) and creative writing (Walker), and partially from extant discourses – scholarly, creative, and popular – regarding issues in academic cultures. Dr No-Idea represents a creative arts PhD candidate struggling to vocalise how creative practice constitutes research, and Mr Obviously represents forces that produce challenges for candidates in this situation, particularly those who are already in other ways marginalised, for instance via gender. No-Idea and Obviously serve as devices which help us consider our research problem from new perspectives.

This essay's purpose is to elucidate how use of creative writing and theatre techniques in duoethnography help us to see past the peripheries of our habituated mindsets. We thereby aim to share the rich possibilities creative duoethnography can bring to creative arts research. Conventionally, duoethnography entails two or more researchers sharing and comparing perspectives to generate knowledge through writing in a playscript format, except that the players in the script typically represent the researchers themselves, as opposed to fictional constructions (Sawyer & Norris 2015). Although duoethnography was initially pitched towards the social sciences, health, education, sociology, and cultural studies, we attest its relevance for creative arts inquiries, and aim to provide insights relevant to fellow creative arts researchers seeking suitable collaborative methodologies. Our argument draws on our previous and ongoing research writing collaborations (Di Niro & Walker 2017; Di Niro & Walker 2018; Walker & Di Niro 2018; Di Niro & Walker 2019), in connection with scholarly literature regarding duoethnography and related collaborative research writing approaches.

To establish background, we shortly consider collaborative research writing – a range of practices including but exceeding duoethnography. We distinguish collaborative research writing from collaborative research, and from co-authoring. Then we consider three commonly deployed approaches: collaborative ethnography, team ethnography, and collective biography. Following this, we turn to duoethnography, discussing history and definitions, and then to our particular approach. Throughout this essay, we weave in brief scenes via which we introduce two new characters: Dr Crossroads, who is fed up and contemplating leaving academia, and Dr Opportunist, who is willing to

compromise ethicality where it serves career survival. Exchanges between Crossroads and Opportunist are initially presented within textboxes. In the essay's final section, however, the characters escape and trap us, the writers Walker and Di Niro, in order to critique our methods and address creative duoethnography's limitations. In line with duoethnographic openness (Huckaby & Weinburg 2015: 56; Shelton & McDermott 2015: 73), we present no tidy conclusions, instead signalling avenues for ongoing inquiry and further research to extend the peripheries of existing knowledges regarding collaborative methodologies for research in creative arts fields.

Collaborative research writing: an overview

> *The scene is a vast plateau, somewhere in a range of craggy mountains, hung with mist. DR CROSSROADS stands, gazing round as though wondering where to begin walking. Meanwhile DR OPPORTUNIST prowls, plastic gun in hand, in search of non-existent prey.*
>
> DR CROSSROADS: You know you'll never catch anything with that …
>
> DR OPPORTUNIST: Hush! At least I'm trying.
>
> CROSSROADS: Weren't you a vegan?
>
> *OPPORTUNIST groans, throws the gun on the ground like a child having a tantrum, then plonks down cross-legged and begins eating grass.*
>
> OPPORTUNIST: *(Speaking with mouth full.)* Want some?
>
> *CROSSROADS looks at the clump of grass OPPORTUNIST has pulled up and is offering. CROSSROADS reaches tentatively towards the grass, then freezes.*
>
> CROSSROADS: I can't do it anymore.
>
> OPPORTUNIST: Do what?
>
> CROSSROADS: Make decisions. Even the smallest ones, like which blade of grass … All of them remind me of the big decision: stay, or … ?
>
> OPPORTUNIST: Stay! There's plenty to eat. *(Wheezes and chokes on grass that won't go down.)*
>
> CROSSROADS: How did Di Niro and Walker do it – decide on duoethnography as opposed to the other methods they could've engaged?

Duoethnography is one among many collaborative research writing methodologies. Collaborative research writing is in turn a type of collaborative research that generally involves co-authoring. However, collaborative research, co-authoring, and collaborative research writing are all different (Day & Eodice 2001: 21) in ways crucial to duoethnography's processes. In brief, collaborative research conventionally represents *any* scenario where researchers work together (Katz & Martin 1997: 7). Often, different researchers play different roles and/or address different stages, such as data collection, analysis, and writing (Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler 2008: 236). Collaborative research publications are typically co-authored, but not necessarily all

co-authors participate in the writing process (Day & Eodice 2001: 28; Paulus, Woodside & Ziegler 2008: 236).

Conversely, collaborative research writing specifically indicates that *all* researchers participate in writing (Onrubia & Engel 2009: 1257). Furthermore, they recognise that beyond merely writing 'up' pre-existing findings, writing *is* a research activity through which knowledges are made, tested, and remade (Onrubia & Engel 2009: 1257), in line with writing 'as' strategies in development since at least the 1990s and ongoing (Richardson 1994; Richardson 1998; Rolfe 2009; Webb 2009; Webb 2010). Collaborative research writing is therefore 'a very specific collaborative activity' in which 'written language is both the group's product and its means for communication', including 'negotiation of ideas' towards 'joint meaning making' or '[c]o-construction of knowledge' (Onrubia & Engel 2009: 1257). A recently co-authored creative writing research paper by Gail Crimmins, Ali Black, Janice K Jones, Sarah Loch, and Julianne Impiccini (2018) artfully demonstrates how, by 'sharing stories and conversation, we unearth new stories, and new ways to express experience' (n.p.). This reflects how meanings are, through collaborative research writing, 'extended, deepened or transformed because participants build on each other's contributions' (Onrubia & Engel 2009: 1257).

In addition to duoethnography, prominent collaborative research writing strategies include collaborative ethnography (Lassiter 2005), team ethnography (Clerke & Hopwood 2014), and collective biography (Davies et al. 2013). All of these to certain degrees overlap with and/or inform duoethnography. They also represent alternatives we *could* have chosen over duoethnography – but did not, for reasons we shall relate as we discuss each in turn.

Collaborative ethnography, as with ethnography broadly, entails creation of knowledges about cultures through intensive observation of, and/or participation in, the focal culture; data collection through practices including writing – for example, journaling; critical analysis of the data towards the generation of findings; and the presentation of those findings to others in written form, which typically entails rigorous rewriting of selected passages from the initial data in order to hone and convey key points in compelling ways (Lassiter 2005: x). As Eric Lassiter (2005) explains, collaborative ethnography emerged in response to 'anthropology's crisis in the overall project to represent others' following critiques, from the 1960s onwards, of ethnography's embeddedness in colonial violence (x). In 1999, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) powerfully conveyed the essence of such critiques, which remain relevant because postcolonial issues of privilege, power, and abuse are ongoing:

> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous people's claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-

determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments. (1)

Striving to redress such violences, collaborative ethnography advocates 'ethical negotiation of moral responsibilities between and among ethnographers and ethnographic consultants' (Lassiter 2005: 1). Instead of 'reading over the shoulders' of research subjects, collaborative ethnographers seek to read 'alongside' research participants whose self-driven, self-defined *participation* in-and-with research processes is 'collaborative' and 'reciprocal' (3). This requires 'dialogic', non-hierarchical ways of writing and interacting, rather than an 'authoritative monologue' (3). It entails 'four main commitments': 'ethical and moral responsibility to consultants', 'honesty about the fieldwork process', 'accessible and dialogic writing', and 'collaborative reading, writing, and co-interpretation of ethnographic texts with consultants' (77). Collaborative ethnography thus shares with duoethnography a dialogic, non-hierarchical focus. However, for our situation, collaborative ethnography's maintenance of 'researcher' and 'research participant' roles – suitable, perhaps, for researchers working with non-academically-trained collaborators – seems awkward, for both of us are trained and work in academia.

Team ethnography emerged strongly in the 1990s (Erickson & Stull 1998; Clerke & Hopgood 2014: 8). As with collaborative ethnography, and ethnography broadly, collaborative ethnography engages knowledge-generative writing practices of data gathering, analysis, and presentation across fieldwork and journaling, followed by careful scrutiny and rewriting of initial data towards an eventual research publication or other means of sharing findings with other researchers and interested readers (Erickson & Stull 1998: 44). Much like collaborative ethnography, team ethnography emphasises 'collective fieldwork and co-writing as research strategies', but also bears the added benefit of addressing 'research collaboration between members of research teams comprising more than one researcher, which team ethnography does' (Clerke & Hopgood 2014: 6). Recognising that 'ethnography is by its very nature a team enterprise', Erikson and Stull highlighted the importance of asking, 'What do we want our ethnographic team to look like? Whose understandings shall we include?' (1998: 59). Team ethnography typically entails four stages: the first, 'getting started', includes team selection, delineation of roles and relationships, and other elements of research planning (such as setting a focus, mapping a time-frame, deciding appropriate strategies for data collection and analysis, and research ethics considerations); the second, 'getting there', broaches potentially 'dissonant features of teams' and recommends strategies to strengthen collegiality; stages three and four entail 'fieldwork' and 'writing up' respectively (Clerke & Hopgood 2014: 9).

The open, ongoing negotiations of working relationships that team ethnography emphasises are, we believe, equally important in duoethnography. However, team ethnography's model figures 'writing up' as a final stage, implicitly subordinate to earlier stages. Team ethnographers claim to recognise writing's meaning-making potentials (Clerke & Hopgood 2014: 36), but still assume their data, if not findings, as pre-existing. While this framework could suit some contexts, we, as creative arts researchers, are convinced by the argument that our inquiries benefit from methods and

methodologies where artistic practice itself forms the *main* mode of knowledge-making (Webb 2009; Webb 2010). In duoethnography, writing is key to every stage.

Compared with team ethnography, collective biography appears initially exciting for creative arts research. It *does* foreground writing as a key knowledge-making activity throughout all research stages: collective biographers make, share, compare, and revise stories in a writing workshop setting; through talk, writing, sharing, and rewriting, they gradually hone the data of their memories, simultaneously recognising connections between situations and experiences, and thereby coming to understand how the memories of each individual are not purely personal: they are political, social, and reflective of broader discourses or cultural scenarios, in ways that can inform research and knowledges about past, present, and ongoing issues, situations, phenomena, and possibilities for creating change (Davies et al. 2013: 684). Describing one instance of collective biography, Bronwyn Davies et al. (2013) characterise collective biography as a 'post-qualitative' and encounter-seeking 'strategy', via which '[c]oncepts, memories, and the virtual bodies of the participants are brought into a diffractive relation':

> stories we tell of our remembered experiences are not treated as if they are fixed or real, or as if they exist only in some time past. Rather, each time the stories are accessed they are re-made in their virtual intensities in the present moment. (680–684)

Recounting their three-day live-in workshop, Davies et al. explain that they began by talking about post-structuralist theory, then wrote in response to 'trigger questions'. After writing, participants shared their stories. They 'questioned each story-teller when, as listeners, they found they needed more embodied detail'. They then rewrote and repeated earlier processes, gradually enacting a 'conceptual analysis' that aimed to 'make visible to ourselves the ways our stories became entangled with each other's stories', thus intensifying, not distorting, each remembered moment's 'specificity' (684-685).

Collective biography appeals to us, and we would someday like to try it. Collaborative biography requires, however, larger research writing groups, whereas we are presently a team of two. Hence duoethnography still seems more appropriate for our situation and those of smaller collaborative research writing cohorts.

Duoethnography: history, definition and adaptability for creative arts research

> *OPPORTUNIST has given up trying to eat grass and is now using the toy gun to dig in the dirt.*
>
> CROSSROADS: Okay, so we know now why the other approaches *didn't* match … Still, what made duoethnography appealing?
>
> OPPORTUNIST: *(Plucking a worm from the soil and gazing at it with hungry eyes.)* Sometimes, maybe, you've just got to be willing to try things.
>
> CROSSROADS: What *is* duoethnography anyway?

Duoethnography's primary advocates, Richard D Sawyer and Joe Norris (2015) trace its development to 2003, when, facing a 'crisis of representation' similar to that noted earlier, they 'began to wonder, as we relied on our own scripted and socialized ways of knowing and telling, whether we were framing our findings within normative and oppressive discourses (and of course we were)'. Therefore, Sawyer and Norris 'decided to explore our stories in dialogue', using 'multivoiced and critical tension' to 'turn the inquiry lens on ourselves, not as the topic, but as the site of an archaeological examination of the formation of our beliefs, values, and ways of knowing' (1). These explorations resulted in 'Null and Hidden Curricula of Sexual Orientation: A Dialogue on the *Curreres* of the Absent Presence and the Present Absence' (Norris & Sawyer 2004), their first published duoethnographic research.

Sawyer is a professor of education who has also published on collective action and educational pedagogies as engaged practices of resistance and hope (Sawyer 2017). Norris, too, bears an educational background, having worked as an English and drama teacher for twelve years before commencing his PhD in educational drama in 1989 (Brock University 2019a). He is currently a professor and chair of drama in education and applied theatre. Norris remains an active theatre maker (Brock University 2019b) whose research publications beyond duoethnography explore drama in research (Norris 2016a), creativity processes (Norris 2012), and forum theatre (Boal 1979) as the participatory social action techniques of Augusto Boal (Norris 2016b: 220).

The interests Norris and Sawyer share in theatre, activism, and pedagogy are reflected in duoethnography's 'play script' format, its strong emphasis on voicing marginalised issues, and its use of 'currere' (Norris 2008: 234). *Currere* in educational theory represents 'lived' curriculum that 'occurs through conversation, not only classroom discourse, but also dialogue among specific students and teachers and within oneself in solitude': it 'emphasizes the everyday experience of the individual and his or her capacity to learn from that experience' (Pinar 2011: 1-2). For duoethnographers, *currere* means treating one's life as a curriculum. Analysis and (re)interpretation of this curriculum constitute research: duoethnographers dialogically 'recall and reexamine' the 'emergent, organic, and predominantly unplanned curriculum' of differing experiences (Norris & Sawyer 2012: 12).

Duoethnography also partly derives from autoethnography: a methodology in which 'the life of the researcher becomes a conscious part of what is studied' so as to 'connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political' (Ellis 2008: 48). Autoethnography, according to Ellis (2008), arose in the 1970s, partly responding to the aforementioned crisis of representation, and partly to accommodate an increase in people from historically 'othered' backgrounds becoming ethnographers. By studying themselves and/or signalling their subjective role, authoethnographers 'shift from viewing our observations of others as nonproblematic to a concern about power, praxis, and the writing process' (48.).

Autoethnography is, however, extensively criticised (Anderson 2006; Atkinson 2006; Delamont 2009). Sara Delamont (2009) charges autoethnography with insularity and navel gazing, while Ji Young Shim (2018) perceives 'failure to recognize the ideological generalization in identifying the researcher's position', which can

encourage uncritical reiteration of subjective bias as a 'neutral "truth through the researcher's reality"' (1).

While recognising that autoethnographers have long engaged strategies to redress insularity and bias (Reed-Danahay 2002), we note that duoethnography also combats these things by juxtaposing multiple perspectives. This encourages participants to question each other and themselves. Sawyer and Norris (2015) sought 'to avoid what for us were gray zones in autoethnography', yet continue 'building on its rich tradition of critical self-study' (2). They argue that, compared with autoethnography, duoethnography 'locates the researcher differently': 'duoethnographers are the sites of the research, not the topics. They use themselves to assist themselves and others in better understanding the phenomenon under investigation' (13).

Through a 'polyvocal and dialogic' script format, each duoethnographer's voice is 'made explicit throughout the piece', creating 'juxtaposition' intended 'to disrupt the metanarrative found in solitary writing': this creates 'a third space' for readers to 'add and rethink their stories in relation to the ones being told' (Norris & Sawyer 2012: 24).

Regarding definitions, Norris and Sawyer emphasise duoethnographies as 'fluid' texts that 'portray knowledge in transition', foregrounding 'knowing' as 'not fixed but fluid' (2012: 20). This fluidity extends to duoethnography itself, which productively continues 'to change and evolve' (2015: 2). However, Norris and Sawyer do outline nine 'tenets' that 'distinguish duoethnography from other legitimate forms of research' (2012: 12-23). The first two, *currere* and *polyvocality*, we have already discussed. The third, 'disruption of metanarratives', entails questioning culturally learned beliefs. The fourth tenet, 'exploration of differences', means researchers seek to make visible how the same topic or site of exploration is perceived differently by each as a result of their differing subjective positions and perspectives.

Duoethnography's fifth tenet, 'transformation', describes how duoethnographers seek, through writing and self-questioning, to change in ways that extend their capacities for knowing. Its sixth, 'trustworthiness', represents an alternative to 'positivistic notions of truth and validity', so that '[r]eaders witness the researchers trying to make sense of and transform their recalled experiences' (Norris & Sawyer 2012: 19-20). The seventh tenet, 'audience accessibility', signals that duoethnographic texts present 'a form of praxis writing in which theory and practice converse' in ways that appeal to, and are readable for, audiences beyond just academics. The eighth, an 'ethical pedagogical relationship' between researchers, links with the ninth, which is ongoing nurturing of trust between researchers. 'Trust' here indicates a pedagogically-informed 'ethics of caring' in that they assist each other 'in the making of meaning' and are 'receptive to the Other in reconceptualizing their own meanings' (22).

Using and experimenting with duoethnography: adapting it for creative arts research

> *OPPORTUNIST is still gazing at the worm. CROSSROADS shudders.*
>
> CROSSROADS: Are you seriously going to eat that?
>
> OPPORTUNIST: *(Letting the worm go free.)* I would if I really had to. But … I was really just hungry for inspiration. *(Leaping up.)* Let's search for mushrooms. We can mash them into worm shapes, like that bacon made from tofu … You've got to do things in ways that fit your own needs, right?

We came to duoethnography when we decided to co-author a chapter for the edited collection *Lived Experiences of Women in Academia: Metaphors, Manifestos and Memoir* (Black & Garvis (eds) 2018). Both of us had recently completed PhDs in creative arts fields (Di Niro in theatre and Walker in creative writing). We wanted to raise challenges of candidature which we saw as arising from cultural myths of binary gender in connection with dichotomous misrepresentations of the arts as inferior to the sciences – issues that, we argued, still affect creative research degree candidates, signalling a need for systemic and cultural change (Di Niro & Walker 2018). We sought a collaborative writing methodology for sharing lived experiences (as per the collection's call for chapters), and to deploy creative play as a key inquiry process.

We adapted duoethnography to incorporate theatre and creative writing practices. Using textboxes, we included a 'play within a play' (Grinstein 1956) featuring fictional characters (Dr No-Idea and Mr Obviously). This created something comparable to 'plaited' research writing: interwoven creative and critical discourses (Krauth 2011). Use of fictional characters in duoethnography has precedents (Zazkis & Koichu 2015), but plaiting our dialogue with our characters differentiates our approach. Our first characters were *Dr No-Idea* and *Mr Obviously-Has-Stable-Employment* (henceforth *Mr Obviously*). *No-Idea* was a fictionalised composite of ourselves, and *Mr Obviously* embodied challenges creative arts researchers may encounter. We explored ways in which *Dr No-Idea* might respond to challenges. Prior to the chapter's publication, we gave a conference presentation of our research-in-progress (Di Niro & Walker 2017). For the conference, we sought a more visually exciting approach, presenting the *No Idea / Obviously* scenes as comics using reworked Roy Lichtenstein-style images. Since the chapter's publication, we have also created a podcast, which was part of an online research conference (Di Niro & Walker 2019). The podcast uses Lichtenstein-inspired images from the slides, but with a recorded voiceover in which we both speak, plus music and sound effects. Following on from these collaborations, we created a second conference presentation reflecting on duoethnographic processes (Walker & Di Niro 2018), which was the starting point for this essay. In the final section of this essay, we activate feedback from the conference presentation, which prompted us to reflect on creative duoethnography's limitations, and how we may continue to improve our approach.

Trapped in a textbox: a critique of creative duoethnography through creative duoethnography

> Duoethnography requires that we explore difference in its complexity and resist tidy conclusions … the work for the reader is to enter and wrestle with the openings duoethnography makes visible. (Huckaby & Weinburgh 2015: 56)

New Scene (representing simultaneous events in two separate locations):

WALKER is sitting in her lounge room, laptop open, cup of tea in hand, Facebook Messenger ready.

Meanwhile, DI NIRO is sitting at her dining table, laptop open, coffee pot on the stove, Facebook Messenger ready.

WALKER: Here we are again!

DI NIRO: It's great to be back.

DR OPPORTUNIST: *(Sarcastically)* Ooh! 'Here we are … Great to be back!' Ha! I bet they won't be saying that when they realise where 'here' is!

(Long silence.)

DR OPPORTUNIST: *(Coughs)*

(More silence.)

DR OPPORTUNIST: Ahem. I said … bet they won't be saying that when they realise where 'here' is! *(Pause, then whispering) Pssst!* Are you there?

DR CROSSROADS: I'm no longer a part of this.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Oh, that's nice. Leave me to do all the work on my own, eh?

DR CROSSROADS: Isn't that the life you want though? It's not for me. I've got other work to do … children to raise …

DR OPPORTUNIST: Well, if that's how it is … See if I care. Poor Dr Di Niro might have other feelings though. I mean, she's stuck in a textbox, with ME in control …

DR CROSSROADS: Now that's a scary thought! Being in a box controlled by Dr Walker I mean!

DR OPPORTUNIST: Scarier than you think. Walker's in the box too. I'm her shadow self. You see, last time, Di Niro and Walker were on the outside and their characters locked in. Now the tables are turned. They don't know. They think it's a harmless messenger exchange and that their actions are purely textual. Yet as Butler (1993) reminds, text is material and it *matters*. Both ought to review their privacy settings.

DR CROSSROADS: Geez! You really are nuts! Ok, I get it. So if we – —the fictional characters – are in control then I'd better stick around. Don't want people thinking I've given up.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Oh … and what other name would you give it?

DR CROSSROADS: Just because I'm no longer interested in all the bullshit academia has to offer, doesn't mean I've given up on my career. I have other avenues I wish to pursue. I'm writing a book for example. Does that satisfy you?

DR OPPORTUNIST: Satisfy *me*? I think you need to be honest with yourself. If you're so deadset on those 'other avenues', why is Di Niro saying things like …

> DI NIRO *(coffee in hand)*: Our collaborations have all been so different, haven't they? I really enjoyed the shift from writing our chapter to doing the first conference presentation and how our presentation took a theatrical turn.

DR OPPORTUNIST: What's that about 'playing the game'? (Harré, Grant, Locke & Sturm 2017).

DR CROSSROADS: You're one to talk about playing the game.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Oh! *Touché*. I'll confess, I've taken some liking to it … But I'm in the system to change the system. When Walker was doing her PhD, and everything was such a struggle, the thought that kept her going was that if she finished, she'd make things different for others. But to change the game, you've got to stay in the game.

DR CROSSROADS: Sounds a bit egotistical to me. Don't you think others have had those thoughts before? To 'change the game', but then realised it was easier to just stay in the game and enjoy the prizes?

DR OPPORTUNIST: You're going off track. The research writing genre requires focus!

DR CROSSROADS: Spoken like a true academic! But anyway, our textbox scene is still in the expository stage … We need to get to the inciting incident …

DR OPPORTUNIST: Ah yes, that was amusing. Initially, they were so narcissistic and congratulatory – classic rookie error in duoethnography:

> WALKER *(lying on couch)*: Transforming the written play script into a comic was interesting, wasn't it?
>
> DI NIRO: It was. It felt right to carry our 'play within a play' writing style into a play, or performance of sorts, into our presentation. Within a comic strip, each image acts as a mini scene to tell the story, so it seemed, and is, a good fit. Plus, it's a refreshing take on how to present at a conference – who doesn't like a good comic strip?
>
> WALKER: So true. I think there was also a kind of intertextuality to it. We used some public domain classified Roy Lichtenstein images. They got me thinking more about how our personal struggles connect with those of others, and with issues in our culture like gendered inequality.
>
> DI NIRO: Absolutely. The whole process really helped me understand that what transpired was not personal, it happens to many of us.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Ugh! Always agreeing, congratulating one another, failing to see any irony regarding Lichtenstein in relation to their binary gender argument. His images after all 'remain open to lively, provocative debate' about whether they 'critique the fetishisation of women', or are themselves 'guilty of replicating the gender stereotypes of their source material' (Spencer 2017: n.p.).

DR CROSSROADS: You're certainly a negative sort. Have you tried resisting the urge to pick on every detail? Maybe the irony is that these two creatives played on the fact that their *Dr No-Idea* character was perceived by *Mr Obviously* as 'the gender stereotype of their source material', being themselves. I actually think it is a positive that they responded to critiques received at the AAWP conference (2018):

DI NIRO *(sitting in her cold office)*: How is the conference going? The bloody heater in the sessional room is broken again!

WALKER *(standing in her kitchen making lunch)*: Again? Well, I survived the presentation! There were good and useful things in the Q&A that we should consider:

(1) Someone wanted more about critiques of duoethnography and limitations.

(2) Does working with the same collaborator multiple times make the process, over time, subject to the critiques about autoethnography's insularity that we claim duoethnography addresses?

(3) We need more tangible examples of how the method pushes us to see things we wouldn't if working alone, and to be transformed.

DR CROSSROADS: Then they sourced more literature on duoethnography's critiques … and began to panic.

> WALKER *(in her office)*: I read that article you found. It … err ... worries me …
>
> DI NIRO *(in her lounge room)*: I had concerns too. Are we too similar?
>
> WALKER: Maybe. I'm worried we've become guilty of what Breault calls 'parallel talk': 'more a sharing of experiences rather than an interactive, shared probing of those issues'. It often goes hand in hand with 'theory confirmation': when duoethnography 'begins with an understanding and then uses one's own experiences as exemplars of that theory' (2016: 782). Do you think these have relevance to our previous and/or current collaborations?
>
> DI NIRO: As a short answer – yes. I think in our first chapter there are elements of this. We both started out feeling that our PhD experiences were pretty crappy, and we ended with pretty much the same opinion. But 'an effective duoethnography does not simply facilitate the retelling of the past. The process should question the meanings about and invite reconceptualization of that past' (Breault 2016: 779). And that's something we could've done more. Also, what do you make of this one? 'Because of the potentially intimate relationship between co-researchers, the ethical stance between participants is deliberately negotiated and requires continual vigilance. The stories of the other must not be "reified, trivialized, vilified, or romanticized"' (Norris & Sawyer 2012: 24). Given we're not just colleagues, but also close friends ... ?

DR CROSSROADS: And then they source even more literature … signal a new turning point in their story arc …

> DI NIRO *(in her study)*: I've just read 'Spark Like a Dialectic' by Huckaby and Weinburgh (2015). In it they share 'a desire to use duoethnography to open avenues of inquiry and to find how, when, where, and why the issues intersect' (58). I think this applies to us. We've looked closely at where our experiences intersect and have discussed those intersections at length.
>
> WALKER *(in her research room)*: Agreed! Reading that article was very healing for me, and helped me to see another way of thinking about the whole question of how to be safely in productive conflict without risking damage to our friendship. I realise I was misunderstanding dialectic and conflict in overly binary ways – ironic, given that we have written about the need to break open binaries in academic culture. But I guess I'm entangled in those parts of the culture after all.

DR OPPORTUNIST: I wouldn't be living up to my name if I didn't interrupt here to point out that Walker just reflected on her own misconceptions, and realised things she previously hadn't, and thereby changed – transformed – through the process of duoethnography …

WALKER: I love the way Huckaby and Weinburgh (2015) bring an intersectional/black feminist approach to dialectic, so that their attitude to difference isn't conflict so much as connections … finding those points where different people and/or issues share some similar experience, interest, investment, or need … points where we can reach 'interstanding' (62).

DI NIRO: Another paper I really like is 'Duoethnography on Friendship' (Shelton & McDermott 2015). How friendship shapes the duoethnographic process, because 'who we select as our friends indicates something about what we think about ourselves' (87).

WALKER: Good point. That people are drawn to be friends already indicates intersections between their lives as well as divergences – similarities that make them able to relate, and differences that make them interested to know more about one another. Shelton and McDermott even go so far as to suggest that friendship is always already 'a form of collaboration' that 'recognizes and represents the ephemeral nature of identity, the fluidity of knowledge between ourselves and others, and the constant shape-shifting we do between the tangible world about us and the inner workings of dreams and visions' (2015: 84). When friends collaborate through duoethnography, all those processes and transformations are consciously enhanced and shared.

DR CROSSROADS: See, look at them now. They are able to realise that there's meaning in finding and discussing the intersections of their experiences through duoethnography. The fact that they are friends isn't problematic and makes sense from an intersectional feminist point of view.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Yes, it's a very tidy conclusion that brings them from crisis to resolution within their word count. How convenient! Except it's obvious – given the textboxes and so forth – that this isn't their exact instant-messenger conversation in its entirety. It's been creatively selected and edited for a purpose, raising this question: who really are the characters? Plus, there are other questions we lack room here to probe. When Walker asked about parallel talk and theory confirmation, she also said …

WALKER *(in bed)*:   I'm worried about master narratives or metanarratives, too … Do we go too far in our claims about the connections between our stories and those of other ERA-era candidates? Then there's Breault's (2016) obviously negative attitude towards fiction and fictional characters …

DR OPPORTUNIST: These questions remain unanswered, as does that of whether working with the same collaborator over time leads to insularity.

DR CROSSROADS: And that's a good thing. Who knows what will come of this in six or 12 months' time? Duoethnography is nomadic. We don't need to conform to 'tidy conclusions', rather we offer these 'openings that duoethnography makes visible'

(Huckaby & Weinburgh 2015: 56) for others as well as ourselves to keep grappling with.

DR OPPORTUNIST: Nomadic! You just got me thinking …

(DR CROSSROADS picks up a big hook and drags DR OPPORTUNIST off stage kicking and screaming.)

DR CROSSROADS: *(Pokes head out from behind curtain)* Come back next time when we chat about metanarratives, fictional characters, and the pros and cons of working with the same collaborator.

DR OPPORTUNIST: *(Breaking free and running on stage, yelling)* And the Deleuzian …

[CURTAIN DOWN]

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