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#STREATstories: Mapping a creative collaboration

Abstract
#STREATstories is a storytelling project focused on the artistic activities and interventions of a social enterprise that successfully supports homeless and disadvantaged young people in Melbourne's inner city. The project explores an 'applied creative writing' approach to creative fieldwork, critical perspectives and imaginative inquiry for researchers keen to employ their writing/research skills and interests to matters of social injustice and inequity. This paper goes 'behind the scenes' to uncover the orientation of four collaborators on this creative research project, all of whom come from very different creative practices, and examine what informs their approach – what and how they do what they do as co-creators and what brings them into this collaborative space. Areas of approach and interest range across ideas of friendship and 'lovence', the 'intimacy of failure', notions of 'giving' voice, and the 'collaboration' between artists and materials. The four contributors to this paper explore how these various interests influence the process of collaboration and co-creation as they negotiate 'that simple but enigmatic step, joining hand, eye and mind' (Carter 2004: xiii).
Key words: social enterprise; collaboration; applied creative writing; industry partnerships

Collaboration, by definition, is about people coming together to make something happen. It is about different practitioners applying their minds and creativity to solving a problem. About artists exchanging ideas and gaining strength in shared endeavour, each contributing different elements of the whole, being vulnerable one to the other also, and opening up to insecurities. Collaboration is relational, made up of processes, where 'each part-process is a pattern of relations' (Koestler 1964: 472).

Researcher, writer and artist Paul Carter argues that collaboration in the arts is:

> not simply a pragmatic response to increasingly complex working conditions; it is what begins to happen wherever artists talk about what they are doing, in that simple but enigmatic step, joining hand, eye and mind in a process of material thinking. (Carter 2004: xiii)

The #STREATstories collaboration began with such a process: joining hand, eye and mind. Writers, place-makers, locative storytellers, filmmakers, musicians, social workers, youth workers, academics, wait staff, cooks, visual artists, advertising creatives, researchers and marketing managers gathered at the home of Bec Scott, CEO of STREAT, to be briefed on an audacious project,

one that would apply creative writing to 'mapping' and intervene in the way 'embodiment and space are indelibly linked together' (Farman 2012: 35). What STREAT proposed was 'an experiment in how to make and tell stories,' one that used 'space' and told 'spatial stories'. These stories would be 'co-created' with STREAT's constituents, homeless and disadvantaged youth, and the stories themselves would be fashioned as a 'two-way telling'. That is, they would be stories that were retold but also capable of reconfiguring the space of their telling, embedding them in the streets of Melbourne (Aung Thin 2015) [1].

The focus of the creative research project, #STREATstories, is founded on the idea of collaboration, team effort and cooperation. STREAT provides homeless and disadvantaged youth with supported pathways from living on the street to a sustainable livelihood. The thread running through all its work, according to Scott, is 'a love of bringing together unlikely collaborators to try and address seemingly intractable issues' (Scott 2016: 6). Since its beginning in 2009 till now, STREAT has supported 520 young people, giving them access to 52,000 hours of training to help them get their lives back on track. STREAT's eight social enterprises – its cafes, catering and roastery – have served more than 1.5 million STREAT customers (Scott 2016: 1).

STREAT has an active and successful program of support for young people and customers who are highly engaged in STREAT's mission. Customers hold a strong desire to personally understand and connect to the stories of STREAT and to find ways to become involved in social change. Similarly, RMIT University has researchers engaged in and dedicated to creative fieldwork, critical perspectives and imaginative inquiry, keen to pursue creative projects within and across disciplinary boundaries, keen to 'apply creative writing' to matters of social injustice and inequity such as homelessness and disadvantage. The #STREATstories project would be a collaboration between STREAT and RMIT University as well as between those artists, writers and musicians in the room who wanted to take part.

STREAT recognises that creating job opportunities is only part of the solution to youth disadvantage. It is committed to developing creative programs to enhance the experiences of young people. All of STREAT's creative programs are designed to increase the visibility of STREAT and its activities in order to generate opportunities and positive outcomes for young people facing homelessness and complex disadvantage. The aim of the #STREATstories project is to engage directly with the experience of living, playing and working in Melbourne's CBD, aiming to foster a meaningful sense of belonging and connection through the making and distribution of place-based urban stories and poetic expression as a way to create prospects for social change for city dwellers and their communities.

In his study of mobile technologies, from smartphone navigational apps to writing, Jason Farman observes that 'concepts of culture, identity and agency all spring from our understanding of bodies' relationships to the spaces they exist in and move through' and that these ways of being are 'rooted in ideas of mapping' (Farman 2012: 35). By applying creative writing to the map, #STREATstories can meaningfully intervene in how the space of the city is represented in much the same way that 'STREAT' intervenes in the spelling of 'street' to make the relationship between STREAT's mission and cafés visible. The collaboration would begin by producing a map, available as Christmas wrapping paper (or as an artwork) in exchange for a gold coin donation at a large, central Melbourne shopping centre. This map would make visible the links between embodiment and the space of the city. It would give

disadvantaged young people a genuine, authoritative voice and sense of place and purpose through the sharing of their stories.

> *Somebody gave me $50 at Flinders Street when I really needed it.*
> *Small things are big things.*
> *He didn't wake up and make a choice to be homeless.*
> *And he knew if just one person believed in him he'd bounce back. And he did.*

As an experiment that applies creative writing to spatial modes of representation, #STREATstories raises further questions for the collaborating writers/researchers. What does it mean to apply story to a map? To give voice? How can it be done? What does it mean for a story to be made visible? And how do the writers/researchers, already struggling to make sense of this individually, make the project work collectively?

In research in universities today academics are encouraged to collaborate, indeed to reach for excellence through such collaborations, that this is how to produce something greater than the sum of its parts: 'perhaps excellence in research is more likely to be achieved the more commonly we work as explicitly collaborative teams' (Brophy 2015: 2). It is easy to be cynical about such a view, to diminish the value of team effort and cooperation such that it becomes a catchphrase only, and/or to think of excellence as imposed value, the tail chasing the heart (i.e. if we say excellence is all about collaboration then in order to be deemed excellent you need to collaborate). But what if we embraced collaboration in order to advance ideas or change pattern (Carter 2004: 5)? How would an endeavour such as the #STREATstories project manifest through such collaborative practices? What do individual researchers bring to a collaborative project such as this to make synergy (from the Greek *sunergo* 'working together'), the sum being greater than the parts?

Collaboration can determine the 'contour' of a work; enhance the calibre of the endeavour so that any outcome offers a quality of 'motion and exchange, not a fixed thing' (Koestenbaum 1989: 2). In the creative research project outlined in this paper, it can usefully be called 'contribution collaboration', where each artist-contributor is given authorial status, comes at the investigation from their own direction, and maintains their own signature (Brien & Brady 2002).

In both collaborating on the #STREATstories map and reflecting on the project, the researchers of this paper found the questions it raised were not purely questions about the map (the artefact, or result, of collaboration). Indeed, if creative writing can be 'applied' to industry partnerships and collaborative projects, then surely the effects and ethos of the partners and projects can be applied to the practice of individual creative writers.

The researchers borrowed the worldview suggested by the 'applied creative writing' project, and allowed the terms of the project to extend to their own creative practices. In asking what it meant to apply story to a map – how 'giving voice' would be done, for example – in service of an outcome, they realised the project could also create room to give voice to individual researchers: a space to explore the role played by individual practices in shaping the project, and to explore the role played by the collaboration in shaping individual practices.

In asking the question 'What did it mean for a story to be made visible?', the meaning of this collaborative project is expressed through its form, that is, using the form of the map to tell stories. To that end, the form of this paper is

also its methodology: individual researchers reflecting on collaboration (and specifically this collaboration) in the context of their own histories, experiences and practices. This paper is a map of how those factors contributed to the collaboration, and how individual practices are now informed by the new collaborative experience. To apply creative writing is also to change how the writing is done.

Below, each of the four creative artist-contributors discusses how their particular creative practices and research interests shaped their thinking and contribution to this endeavour. These co-creatives are all practising writers working in different forms and publishing as essayists, screenwriters, fiction and nonfiction writers; they are researchers across the fields of writing, 'applied creative writing', publishing, and advertising. It is hoped that out of the practicalities of doing a project such as this comes an effortless conversation about what these contributors are doing theoretically; what they are bringing to bear.

Collaborator 1, essayist: prefatory meditation on friendship and love

Like all good ideas between friends, this project #STREATstories started with a proffer, an invitation: *Yes, let's make something together. Do you think we could?* It began simply enough with a chance encounter between two old friends on a staircase – an invitation, a desire to collaborate, a foundational characteristic of the collaborative process (Carter 2004: xii).

> *We must work together.*
> *What if we just get started?*

It was an invitation to step in close, to come into the presence of the other, to give, and to give back. It was an invitation infused with recognition, that there was something to be had together that could not *be had* alone. It was premised on friendship being between friends: *friend* as both noun and verb from the German word *Freund* and the Indo-European root meaning 'to love' – incidentally, the same root word shared with the word *free.* To friend (to free). To *be-friend* (to act as friend) (to be-free). To love, in other words: active voice.

The idea of friendship in the way Jacques Derrida speaks of it is 'to love *before* being loved' (Derrida 2005: 8). To open oneself to the possibility of love by acting in such a way that the experience of love can be made possible by knowledge that there is such a thing, that love is possible; simply by coming into close proximity with the other to allow love to happen – 'before even thinking about what *loving, love, lovence* mean' (8). To create something in the space between being active and passive: not *not active,* but not passive either. To give credence to the space of the pause, the fine line between effort and ease, as yoga practitioners would think about it, the intake of breath, holding of tongue, and pause; the yield to productive silence.

As an aside: the term 'lovence' here connotes the delicacy of love as it relates to sentient beings, mortality and the inevitability of dying (Derrida 2005: 7); that is to say, the 'gentle rigour' of friendship (294), what might be between sentient beings as friends and the possibilities of that state of being, together, while being alive – making the most of it.

To think of friendship in this way for such a project as #STREATstories is on point. This project brought city dwellers of all kinds together, it was an opportunity for participants to mix with people they would not ordinarily mix with, come in close proximity; reach out with a sense of common purpose;

engage the Other. At one of the #STREATstories's workshops in the middle of the city in a shopping centre, for example, a workshop was held near midnight during a fundraiser called Sleepless in September. The highlight for this collaborator was how, well after the end of the workshop, and long after others had bedded down for the night in sleeping bags and mats, there was a chance to continue telling stories and jokes with one of the participants who was, in fact, at that point, homeless. This participant was so pleased to be dry and secure for a night, then to eat fresh almond croissants in the morning – never had they tasted so good.

Overnight, the lovence to be had materialised in *not* sleeping, but in wandering the empty shopping centre with the newfound friend and security guard, continuing to swap stories and write poems for each other:

> i slept in a shopping mall last night melways1A6H
> securityguard on his phone keeps + watch
>
> *are you sleeping here tonight? i – might*
>
> well what do *you* do all night?
> *i walk. i think. i tell myself stories. + dream*
>
> may I share this couch with you?
> can I put story here?

You could argue as Patrick ffrench does in relation to the famous friendship between Georges Bataille and Maurice Blanchot that it is '*in and through writing* that the possibility of friendship survives the abandonment of the present' (ffrench 2007: 34, emphasis in original). That this is the material of friendship – the matter of it – how stories between friends are made – in and through writing. In fact, that this is how stories of all sorts and flavours come into being, into the present tense of now, to exist into the future: for us writing this *paper-as-story*, for example, or for the telling of stories in #STREATstories overnight between newfound friends: the reading of this and that.

For Bataille, the sovereign act of friendship is to read, inscribe, to write, to dis-inscribe with and through the friend (Ronell 2013: 7:30mins), so that the artificial borders of place and experience and language melt away and it is possible to participate in a genuine and mutual exchange – befores and afters and in-betweens with once-strangers and strangeness. There is, here, in this prepositional (relational) space (Rendle-Short 2014) – with, besides, between, by – a 'becoming friend', or a '*more* friend' than the friend that once was – a once stranger, for that matter. What happens is that there really *is* an intercultural exchange of equals: a prepositional exchange born out of a spirit of conviviality and creativity. Born out of dreaming in/through/across/around the now of friendship, dreaming a future space, a space of possibility – of prospect and hope. Where the *relations-between* is the key – submit or insert your own preposition – where a grammar of creativity and friendship is in the putting together.

> what more do you need? stories / HOTsoup / each Other
> we allbelong in/on ~~this~~ map

Then in the morning, in the waking up (and in the laughter), the newfound friends are strangers no more. There is something between that cannot be taken away.

> someonesaid: *we are verbs not nouns*
> now you know

it's like this every [all possible] *night*
you ~~never~~ get used to it
don'tever

This, that *cannot be taken away* is the great role art can play in the ethical project of *becoming* (individually and collectively), articulating oneself *in a particular place* (Carter 2004: xii). It is a way of acknowledging presence, allowing difference, and suspending 'an irritable desire' for control of the project (xiii). Rather in openness and interchange you are able to make something tangible together that did not exist before.

Collaborator 2, screenwriter: the 'intimacy of failure' and how projects are formed

Shortly after we began working together on #STREATstories, our group fell into a rousing discussion about processes of collaboration as considered alongside discourses of intimacy, where these ideas intersect and collide as well as the language shared by these concepts. Certainly, creative practitioners collaborate with those they know well, but it is equally true that acquaintance and collaboration can occur simultaneously. In those cases, it is likely that the project becomes an accelerant, facilitating a rapid deepening of acquaintance as minds combine to bring something new into being. It might also be true that every creative project tells a new story and, as such, invites us to contribute our own. Together, then, we become creators of a new narrative, with a shared, yet personal, investment in something extant that previously was not. We set delivery dates, and the birthing metaphors do not end there. Claims are made, both parental and obstetric, unless abandoned for military or mining comparisons for processes (or parts of processes) particularly difficult or intense. Prevalent among such analogies is the implication these experiences are intimate, shared and exclusive (or, at least, a combination thereof), and perhaps these are reflected in the relationships developed within these collaborations. After all, accounts of actors falling in love with their co-stars in the process of making a film are legion.

For the screenwriter, however, her practice is already a collaborative gesture; as Paul Schrader notes, screenplays 'are invitations to others to collaborate on a work of art' (cited in Hamilton 1990: ix). A screenwriter, then, might have her own perspective on notions of collaboration, less an intimate experience of hearts and minds colliding and rather something more mysterious, whereby screenplays are informed by notes from unseen stakeholders, mediated through a development executive. Equally possible, though, is that the intimacy of working with, say, a co-writer, a research subject, or a text for adaptation with which (or whom) one develops a close and deep understanding, might be in stark contrast with the rowdy table read and the polyphony of input from actors, directors, producers and executives in concentrated meetings. Perhaps the most intimate experience of collaboration for the screenwriter is the gradual letting go of a piece of writing that is no longer her own. As Steven Price reminds us, 'screenplays exist as texts, but as they pass through production they are always in the process of transformation' (Price 2010: xi), which suggests the screenplay reaches a place where it is no longer a piece of writing as such but the starting point to something else. At the point of letting go, as Price continues, it 'is often difficult to speak of *the* screenplay of a film at all' (2010: xi, emphasis in original).

In the case of 'applied creative writing', as our group has come to understand our collaboration with STREAT, a screenwriter must cast aside (at least

temporarily) such previously held perceptions of collaboration. Rather than screenplay notions of 'breaking' story through robust enquiry toward commercial ends, the #STREATstories we harvested required a delicacy of touch, a freedom from expectation that the story will ever be finally released. It is, we might say, a creative collaboration in both content and method.

To write of creative collaboration is perhaps tautological; it may be that to collaborate is already a necessarily creative process: arguably all collaboration is an exercise of bringing something into being, which is therefore 'creation' in its most literal sense. But acknowledging received understandings of *creative* as an adjective, synonymous with others like *imaginative* or *inventive*, we are reminded of the prevailing cultural assumptions around creativity, romantic beliefs that 'creativity bubbles up from an irrational unconscious and that rational deliberation interferes with the creative process' (Sawyer 2006: 15). Therefore, it is useful to explore creative approaches to collaboration, and collaborative approaches to creativity, in a way that is mindful of, rather than ignoring, the mechanics of both.

Kathryn Millard observes, 'We live in an era of maps and all stories are maps of a kind' (Millard 2014: 39) noting a number of working screenwriters, Christopher Nolan and Gus Van Sant among them, 'have used maps as part of their scripting process' (39). Although screenwriting is not yet a form explored within #STREATstories, the practice itself, literally or otherwise, enacts the process of mapping stories. Indeed, the dominant models for screenplays often use journey analogies, and methods by which to apply these models take the form of signposts, and directions. Ways of understanding the pervasive three-act structure of screenplays are visualised by Linda Aronson as 'all related to movement and a journey', employing metaphors such as 'travelling a road, moving full circle, climbing a mountain range' (Aronson 2010: 53). Thus, as part of contributing to #STREATstories, the collaborating screenwriter understood that a map can work for story in two ways, as a means of inspiring and generating story, or as a template within which to retrofit one. Indeed, it would transpire that some of our stories found their way *into* the map and others directly responded to it.

Writer, actor and comedian John Cleese has said, during his lecture on creativity, 'I always find that if two (or more) of us throw ideas backwards and forwards I get to more interesting and original places than I could have ever have gotten to on my own' (Cleese 1991: 27:20mins). Indeed, making creative work in collaboration with others involves generating content and navigating through what is useful, what is needed, what is missing. As part of these negotiations, we inevitably draw from previous lived experience, delivering evidence of the sorts of events that might transpire as the result of other actions, what responses may occur, how characters might react. In marshalling these experiences, to both guide and endorse the creative ideas of others and ourselves, we contribute something more than mere proof. With each revelation, we offer new insights into ourselves, even new ways to be vulnerable. It is for this reason that to participate in story meetings for television series is colloquially referred to as showing up at 'the table of pain'. In these sorts of intimate collaboration, with every story we share, more is revealed of what unites and divides us. The group is arguably strengthened, and bonded, by both. Cumulatively, then, the result might be access to more perspectives, a greater wealth of stories and clues to the different ways to tell them. Intimacy, for the purposes of the strategy described, is about raw humanity. In this idea of collaboration, intimacy might be defined as the act of sharing beyond what is usually advisable. It is notable, then, that screenplays (at least in the conventional sense) lead their protagonists through obstacles to reveal the worst of themselves – they must stumble before they redeem

themselves or discover what it is they have needed all along. Such 'intimacy through failure' (Giglio 2012: 195) is a necessary place from which to entice potential viewers; perhaps to assuage those viewers' own feelings of failure by exposing such human frailty. Moreover, the screenwriter might find this truth through developing an intimate knowledge of her own failings and disappointments.

Screenwriting scholar Peter Bloore asks of script development, 'when precisely does collaboration become compromise?' (Bloore 2012: 4). The process of script-to-screen, moreover, is a collaboration within which the writer is often absent. There is now an interesting correlation with the collaboration inspiring this paper because although we are all writers ourselves, our task was the facilitation, collection and commission of creative writing from others, who were also absent from the curating process. Therefore, sensitivity becomes a part of what we have defined as an intimacy of collaboration. Which stories we include, how they are placed on the STREAT map, and the next contexts we create when those stories sit fragmented and in relation to others' words. Thus, our collaboration is both intimate and far-reaching.

Collaborator 3, novelist and copywriter: found, lost, gifted – the voice and transaction in the #STREATstories collaborative process

Pajnik and Lesjak-Tušek argue that advertising is one of the 'important cultural artifacts affecting life today' (Pajnik & Lesjak-Tušek 2002: 277). Its influence is 'immense' and its discourses 'verbal and non-verbal' are not confined to the 'voices' of brands within a marketplace, where advertisers would argue that decisions to buy are rational, but also, on an implicit 'ideology of consumerism' (2002: 277-278).

Money, time and attention are lavished upon a mere 30 seconds of film or a few dozen words of text, yet copywriting is considered an inferior form of writing. Copywriters draw from 'an existing repertoire of resonances and meanings' (Mazarella 2003: 21) – that is, stereotypes and established, sometimes conservative, community standards, whereas good creative writers seek to push the boundaries of meaning. Copywriting coerces, cajoles, manipulates by employing the same craft skills as creative writing, but with markedly different purpose. For example, copy aims to lend a voice and personality to large commercial entities such as brands or institutions. It is arguably this relationship with 'voice' that makes copywriting such a suspect form. A creative writer cultivates voice as a 'signature'. The ideal writer's voice is distinct, authentic and original in terms of both style and concerns (where concerns may include interests, subject matter, themes and political perspectives). A copywriter on the other hand, obscures their own writerly voice to create a voice for others, one that is distinct but not necessarily authentic and that contributes to this non-verbal discourse of consumerism.

The idea of 'voice' is particularly relevant to the #STREATstories project. This collaboration was charged with 'giving voice' to the social justice enterprise. That 'voice' had to resonate with STREAT customers as well as make the voices of homeless youth perceptible. The map-as-wrapping-paper, at the centre of the project, was created to raise money, awareness and profile – all classic copywriting objectives – while simultaneously experimenting with the creative possibilities of story in new physical forms – the province of creative writing. This section will compare processes of collaboration and consider the nexus between copywriting and creative writing in the context of 'voice'. What does it mean to 'give voice' with its connotation of an offer, an exchange and

even a transaction? And how did the processes of collaboration afford this? What was created here and how did it blur the lines – reveal a formal intimacy – between a story that experimented with 'applied creative writing' and a piece of advertising copywriting?

Collaboration in advertising

Advertising creativity is predicated on 'interaction' and in the advertising industry collaboration is a familiar working model. Agencies work closely with external parties, such as clients and suppliers. In-house specialists collaborate across disciplines, from planning to production. All play a part in a 'co-creative process' that leads to single broadcast-ready advertisements as well as brand campaigns that run for many years (McStay 2013: 41). Agencies and marketers break down social relations into products and services, expressed in abstract terms such as desires, needs and socio-economics. An abstract, highly coded message is mapped onto a 'structurally relative signifying relations of brands […] product categories […and] social relationships' (Mazzarella 2003: 22). The process of mapping 'social relationships' to 'relations between […] goods' is called 'strategy' and the advertisement itself is 'the visual and aural component of the strategy made manifest' (McStay 2010: 38).

Strategy is turned into an ad by a creative team; an intimate partnership between a copywriter and an art director who work together in a formal, sustained and largely self-managed collaboration. Teams are the basic working unit of a creative department. Unlike a novelist or painter, they do not sign their work – advertisements are traditionally only attributed in trade journals and awards, but never in front of the consumer. Teams also manage a chain of collaboration between the agency and external creative practitioners, such as composers, musicians, voice-over artists, actors, film directors or photographers. Each practitioner has a clear and finite responsibility, be it a soundtrack, a piece of film, or a photograph.

Copywriting is therefore the product of a series of established forms of collaboration between writer and art director, internal departments, clients and external suppliers that bear a strong resemblance to what Brien and Brady describe as the 'contribution' form of collaboration. But what copywriting never aims for is 'authorial status' or the 'signature' (Brien & Brady 2002). And yet 'authorial status' and 'signature' as aspects of 'voice' were important to STREAT project.

The #STREATstories collaboration centred around a series of conversations, where ideas regarding the map of stories might be negotiated, tested and amplified. These conversations were for the most part, facilitated by a group member. At times, specialised opinions were sought from group members with a stated area of expertise, whether it was locative media or experience working with the young homeless people. At the end of each meeting, the discussion leaders identified actions, allocated tasks and set timelines. An email trail was established and, along with all material generated, meticulously archived. As with a copywriting brief, the time of all participants was paid for. However, those who took part after the initial dinner did so out of interest in a larger conversation around 'giving voice' to homeless youth. In fact, this idea of a conversation was key to the process of collaboration because it gave the participants a sense of purpose and pleasure.

'Giving voice'

In a blog for *The Atlantic*, Noah Berlatsky describes the importance of voice for creative writers:

> Find your own voice. That's what teachers told me in creative-writing classes when I was in college 20 years ago – it's what the *Guardian* trumpeted as the goal of creative writing courses just this month. It's what old grizzled writers always tell the young, bright-eyed, bushy-tailed up-and-coming wannabes. (Berlatsky 2014)

Developing, acquiring, *finding* a voice is part of a writer's apprenticeship. 'Voice' is prized and precious, akin to the 'signature' that Brien and Brady mention (2002). A 'voice' is a tool of the trade. Certainly, in the #STREATstories collaboration, the writers who took part were assumed to have a 'voice', made evident by their bio, a paragraph detailing their credits and credentials.

Among the several definitions for voice are the following:

> –*n*. 2a the use of the voice: utterance esp. in spoken or written words (esp. *give voice*) b an opinion so expressed c the right to express an opinion (*I have no voice in the matter*) d an agency by which an opinion is expressed
> –*v.tr.* give utterance to; express (*the letter voices our opinion*). (Concise Oxford English Dictionary 1991)

'Voice' then, can be given and also be taken away. It can be found too and therefore, also lost. It confers the status of author(ity), affording the owner the right to express an opinion and functions as a conduit of that opinion. To take part in conversation (the #STREATstories model) collaborators needed a voice. As the #STREATstories project showed, having a story is quite different to having a voice. The stories by homeless youth used in the map were originally developed through workshops. Proposed future phases of the #STREATstsories project included more of these workshops. As the collaborators learned, too often the only possession a homeless youth has is the story of their life. What they lacked was 'voice' that conduit between speaking and being heard.

What is the power of 'voice' and of 'giving voice'? As Janie Conway-Herron puts it, writing about her workshops with Burmese women on the Thai-Burma border, the act of 'giving voice' contributes to 'redressing the dreadful imbalance of power' (Conway-Herron 2011: 12). For Conway-Herron this power is political.

So what is the nature of this exchange of power in 'giving' voice? Later in his blog, Berlatsky observes that those who are paid for their writing suppress this voice at the behest of their employers.

> ...when you're doing work-for-hire, no one cares about your voice. Or rather, they do care, in that they actively don't want anything to do with it. The point of work-for-hire is to make your voice disappear into the house style. (Berlatsky 2014)

'Give' means to deliver to another in exchange for something. Giving voice, as a copywriter does, is a form of trade, a brokering of an authentic voice, or the assumption of a voice, in exchange for payment – economic power.

Mazarella situates the 'importance of consumption as a social practice' within a range of social practices including the 'commercial, political [and] subversive' (Mazarella 2003: 4). The offering of map-as-wrapping-paper was an invitation to engage in a social practice that was commercial – a transaction called a donation – but also political and subversive – the intervention in the representation of the city. As such, this form of 'giving voice' is similar to

copywriting, creating the visual and aural component that communicates a strategy to the consumer, or the voice of a brand. However, the value of the map-as-wrapping-paper was also in its status as an artwork. Giving voice in this case was the opposite of copywriting as the writers used their signature to lend authenticity to the project.

The #STREATstories collaboration at times blurred the lines between copywriting and creative writing. But this blurriness is perhaps already familiar to writers, certainly writers who are also academics and frequently have to produce writing to explain and promote their work. This nexus between copywriting and creative writing exists in many writing practices. Blogs, emails, newsletters, all of these are in essence a form of copy. What was distinct about the STREAT project is how 'voice' was found, lost, shared, exchanged and negotiated in the collaborative process.

Collaborator 4, nonfiction writer: comics studies and 'collaboration' between artists and materials

As an experiment that applied creative writing to spatial modes of representation, our #STREATstories map shares DNA with other forms of spatialised storytelling, perhaps especially comics – variously conceived as 'graphic narrative', 'sequential art', or 'narrative art', each a term that can, with minimal imagination, be applied to a map. Indeed, a page or strip of comics can be understood as 'literally a map of time' (Raeburn 2004: 11) because in comics, temporal relationships are often rendered spatially; according to Scott McCloud, in comics 'time and space are one and the same' (McCloud 1993: 100).

Like many comics, the #STREATstories map is enriched through its joint authorship by writers, editors, and artists. Comics is a multimodal medium (Herman 2009: xii), so it is perhaps by necessity that many if not most comics are collaborative: few creators are both virtuoso artists and virtuoso writers.

Also like many comics, the #STREATstories map feels both collaborative and personal. The #STREATstories map is an example of a work designed to feel intimate but also to connect the viewer to many different hands – including the writers, artists, editors, and researchers who formally collaborated on the map, but perhaps especially the many people whose stories it shares. Text on the #STREATstories map was collected from workshop participants, in some cases orally and in others handwritten and transcribed; they have been edited (or 'curated', with spelling corrected but style maintained); they have been vetted by a group, then illustrated by an artist, then checked again by multiple people for issues of accuracy, completeness, and aesthetic effect.

By interpreting stories told by workshop participants on a hand-drawn map, and carefully reproducing words written by workshop participants in handwritten text, our map sometimes invokes and at other times literally reproduces traces of the gestures performed by its many authors, which puts the viewer in close communication with the creator in time. As such, the viewer derives meaning not just from the content of the map, but from traces of the map's production – its collaborative origins.

This is one of the most powerful qualities the #STREATstories map shares with comics – the ability to feel collaborative and personal, in some cases intimate, all at once, the latter quality more often associated with single-authored works. However, while comics scholarship supplies rich language for discussing the intimacy of comics (see El Refaie 2012 on authenticity and 'mark-making'),

few comics are analysed as though they are collaborative documents. The language used to analyse form and content often seems divorced from the language one might use to discuss the origins of a work – yet in many cases, including the #STREATstories map, the collaborative origins contribute to a work's meaning.

Perhaps, though, in a medium whose theoretical language has already been adapted from other bodies of work (especially theories of text, art and film), analytical approaches can be adapted further. The artist/scholar Frank Santoro notes that most American comics are printed on 6.5 x 10.25 inch paper, with a 6 x 9 inch 'live' area that remains consistent across most works (Santoro 2011). In a series of diagrams, he shows how the particular proportions of a printed sheet affect the undrawn proportions in the page's 'live area'. These diagrams show the influence of the 'material limit' on the types of stories a particular comic will tell, and on the range of conceptual structures (like panels, gutters, word balloons) that a particular comic might contain.

In other words, it is possible to view formal choices as collaborative; the reality of the medium, with its affordances and limitations, is the first collaborator in a work that creates meaning through engaging material forms. The #STREATstories map feels at once intimate (forming a close connection between a viewer and a creator) and collaborative (showing the reader it has been made by many hands). But perhaps we don't need a new language to discuss this effect: it is there when we are discussing the 'first' collaborations between individual creators and the materials at hand.

Conclusion

The #STREATstories project is both a work of 'applied creative writing' with a set of material outcomes in mind and an aperture through which co-creators have been invited to explore collaboration itself. The individual approaches to the questions posed by the #STREATstories project enriched its material outcomes, and this paper has explored the ways in which the project has enriched individual creative and scholarly practices.
Each section offers a further set of questions and proposals about collaboration, creative practice, and 'applied creative writing' – the kind provoked by a project that asks a group of creators to collaborate with industry partners, public participants, materials, audiences, project briefs, and each other. Given the many-layered collaborations encouraged by #STREATstories, the sections remain separate but together explore the terms of intimate collaboration – the 'raw humanity' that is embedded in all creative practice but which the collaborative enterprise makes so apparent.

To date, through the framing stage of this project, #STREATstories has produced three creative products curated and edited by RMIT University writers and researchers: a map of stories devised and designed as Christmas wrapping paper and distributed to thousands of shoppers through a large shopping mall in Melbourne's CBD; a prototype range of six coffee cups each with different stories on them connected to songs and longer stories online to be sold in STREAT's cafes; and a double-sided folded map-to-the-city featuring an imagined below-the-street cityscape of railway lines, pipes and tree roots to be distributed as 'a postcard'. This paper suggests the project will influence individual practices well beyond its material outcomes. Future research directions for the project include additional workshops connecting homeless youth, collaborators, city dwellers and STREAT customers. Thus, this collaboration anticipates and shapes future collaborations.

As an approach designed to benefit from a diverse range of contributors, collaboration is a process that comes with its own iterative logic; it may always be experimental and provisional, with the terms of approach decided by the individual contributors. This paper has been a case study in one particular collaboration, one which the researchers have approached in an organic fashion, 'feeling our way through' an experiment in creative collaboration. Both the #STREATstories map and this paper are collaborative projects, which has informed the thinking and the making; the process and the product. A project arrived at through collaboration has perhaps two points of stability: the beginning (at which point practitioners decide to collaborate, and make something) and the end (the outcome). In a 'contribution-collaboration', wherein each author-contributor is intended to maintain their own signature (Brien & Brady 2002), the space between the beginning and the end is as multifarious as the range of author-contributors.

The influence of collaboration is clear in the idea and notion of the map (a product of 'applied creative writing'); as such, the collaborators have aimed to make the influence of the map evident in the form of this case study, mapping the influence of this project on four collaborators through a process of individual and collective reflection. The result is a map of these practices within the coordinates of collaboration.

Notes

[1] Notes were kept by Michelle Aung Thin at initial meetings with #STREATstories participants. return to text

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