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Collaborative Practice: Categorising forms of collaboration for practitioners

> Collaborative works are intrinsically different than books written
> by one author alone...the decision to collaborate determines the
> work's contours, and the way it is read. Books with two authors
> are specimens of relation, and show writing to be a quality of
> motion and exchange, not a fixed thing. (Koestenbaum 1989: 2)

Faced with the prospects of a collaborative writing venture, a contract and a tight deadline for our collaborative text *The Girls Guide to Real Estate* (Brady & Brien 2002) we realised that our understanding of collaboration had not been much more than a general motherhood concept tossed about with nods of approval but rarely unpacked. In setting out to write our collaborative text we needed more insights into the various forms of collaboration and more to hang our authorial hats on than those feel-good pegs. In addition, at a time when collaboration is increasingly becoming part of a writers' working life, and as teachers and practitioners of writing, we felt we needed more understanding of the collaborative process in general.

A survey of the literature found that much of the discourse concerning collaboration clusters the various diverse forms in a way which was unhelpful to us. One form of clustering, for instance, was so broad as to render all art and writing collaborative - which has a point, of course, but is not useful to us here. Another concertinaed together ghost-writing, biographical writing and the formation of literary movements, as collaborative processes of the same ilk. (Clemens & McCooey 2000, Chadwick & D. Courtivron 1993) While we have no problem in recognising that these are all *kinds* of collaboration, such generalised groupings did not allow us enough scope to unpack the processes and issues relating to our specific form of collaboration.

We felt that any analyses of collaborative writing which would be useful to the practitioner first needed to separate out the various forms of collaboration occurring in the arts, in general, and in writing in particular. This separation needed to be in terms of authorial intention and credit, along with expected outcomes and goals. In other words, the division of various forms of collaboration needed to be made from the creative practitioner's point of view and not from that of the text's reader or critic. It needed to come from where the writer is standing looking outwards through the text, not from where a reader looks inwards towards the text.

Consequently, we found it necessary, in the first instance, to devise a series of categories of collaboration. In doing this, we have, to date, isolated twelve separate forms of collaborative practice.

It should be noted that any given work, at various stages of its development, can move or slide from one form of collaboration to another. This movement between categories generates its own concerns, which are discussed below.

Forms of collaboration

Conceptual Collaboration concerns the development and generation of a general idea such as a theory or a philosophical principle. This collaboration results in the formation of movements such as English Romanticism or Surrealism. It might set up long-lasting - but restricted to a set group or place - writing workshops, or schools of writing. Here writers maintain their own signature but align (or are aligned) with a particular movement.

Contribution Collaboration is probably the most common form of collaboration. It occurs 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. This form of collaboration is found in films and in theatre performances where set designers, writers, actors, directors, lighting technicians and the like all work together to produce a single product. It is also employed in picture books when the illustrator and writer are different people, or where a cookbook author works with a photographer. This form of collaboration is also found in research where teams investigate a single issue, but from a variety of directions. The scientific model owes much to this form of collaboration. The key factor here is that each of the collaborators is given authorial status, no matter how slight their input into the project.

Collected Collaboration is where several individuals' works are collected; they might share a theme or an overriding message but not always a style or method. This form of collaboration might result in a book of readings, an anthology, or a magazine or journal. Each collaborator has authorial status for the section they have contributed, but not for the whole. The authorial status for the whole is held by the editors.

Hidden Collaboration is a form of collaboration much discussed in feminist (and increasingly, gay and lesbian/queer studies) literature where the often seminal role of the companion of a writer/artist/other creator is discovered, revealed and lauded. The roles, for instance, of Vivien Eliot in *The Waste Land* and the women of the American Beat generation are examples of this form of collaboration, as is the now well documented role of Marion Mahony in the architectural and city designs of her husband, Walter Burley Griffin (Baccala 1997).

Secondary Collaboration occurs when one person works on another person's writing/art, assisting in the refining and modification of it. This commonly occurs in editing and publishing, and in controversial circumstances might be the role a supervisor takes in the postgraduate student's final work. This type of collaboration is often seen in the work of scriptwriters whose work is taken from them by producers, and handed on to one or more other writers. The key to this form of collaboration is that it does not carry authorship and often remains publicly unacknowledged. It is worth noting that, at times, the division between Secondary Collaboration and Contribution Collaboration is contested because an individual, or group, argues that the quantity or quality of their contributing work to a project deserves authorial recognition. From time to time editors' organisations argue for greater authorial recognition and for the editor's name to appear on the published text. This argument indicates a perceived movement (from the editor's point of view) from Secondary to Contribution collaboration.

Subject Collaboration concerns the relationship between the writer/artist and the research subject of their project. Authorised biographies (as portraits) fall into this category as do ghost-writing, some forms of creative non-fiction, oral and 'ethnographic' history, portraits, and certain documentary films. In this category the author and the subject are named and given recognition but the author usually retains ownership. Ghost writing is an exception if the ghost writer has been commissioned for a set fee and has signed away copyright and authorial ownership. Translation can fall into this category but can also occupy other categories such as Contribution Collaboration, depending on the relationship between the original author's work and the translation. It should be noted that some instances of translation have nothing at all to do with collaboration and work outside of these categories.

Conjunctive Collaboration involves several writers/artists contributing to a given work, but where their contribution occurs in a sequence. This form might generate experimental works such as a poem where each writer contributes a line, or a novel where individual chapters are written by individual writers but where the authors are working to the same themes, and using the same locations, characters or plotlines. Here, perhaps because of the very experimental nature of this form, authorship is privately determined and does not appear to be an issue of concern. In some cases, a composite name is created; in others, names are clustered together; in yet others, the individual sections are tagged. This is perhaps one of the least successful forms of collaborative writing and, interestingly, is a favourite of the often ill-fated 'Let's write a Mills and Boon together' phenomenon.

Sequential Collaboration occurs when one writer/artist might produce the initial outline (such as a plot, characters, location or theme) and another writer/artist develops this, fleshing it out. Frederic Dannay plotted and shaped a series of crime novels while Manfred Lee wrote them, together creating the writer Ellery Queen. This form of collaboration is also ascribed to the novels of M. Barnard Eldershaw where Majorie Barnard is thought to have written most of the text with Flora Eldershaw contributing significantly to the concepts and the shape of the works. (Dever 1994) Such collaboration is, indeed, not uncommon in genre fiction or when an expert non writer/artist is needed as a significant collaborator, an example being P.D. James and the policeman T.A. Critchley's joint investigation of the 1811 Ratcliffe Highway murders in *The Maul and the Pear Tree* (James and Critchley 1987). It is also a common form of collaboration in adaptation, as in the case of Arthur C. Clarke, the science fiction writer, and Stanley Kubrick, the film writer, producing the script for *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Posthumous Collaboration occurs, as the name suggests, when works by the dead are completed by other (living) writers/artists. Again, genre fiction, because of its plot orientation and stylised characters, lends itself most successfully to this form, although the resulting work largely remains a curiosity. Robert B. Parker completing Raymond Chandler's *Poodle Springs* novel (the original dating from 1959; the finalisation completed in 1989) is an example (Parker and Chandler 1989).

Sequel or ***Prequel Collaboration*** is closely linked to Posthumous Collaboration. It occurs when a writer adds sequels or prequels to other famous works. Alongside those for *Rebecca* and *Gone With the Wind* there are a number on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, most notably Julia Barrett's bestselling *Presumption: An Entertainment: A Sequel to Pride and Prejudice* (Barrett 1995). Interestingly, Barrett is actually two authors collaborating. Fan literature is another example of this form of collaboration and is prevalent on the Web where self-publishing is a more affordable option for new writers who might gain confidence in such collaborative works. The established characters, location, plots and themes in this form offer a deceptive security. Possibly because of its seeming ease and comfort,

this form of collaborative work is encouraged by some high school English curricula where, even in the final year of school, students are encouraged to produce creative writing exercises in the style of, or extend a character or plot for, a given writer or work.

Mentor Collaboration is often found in songwriting where a new or lesser experienced writer is *networked* (their term, see Cobo 2001) with an older or more experienced songwriter. The level of experience determines authorship. Lower levels of mentor collaboration can occur in the supervisory role of higher degrees and, in particular, in the various sponsored forms of literary mentorship which are becoming popular.

Joint Collaboration occurs when two or more writers/artists work together on a single product producing a seamless text unrecognisable as belonging in part to any individual collaborator. In this way, Dympha Cusack collaborated with Florence James on a children's book, *Four Winds and a Family* (1946), and in their revered *Come in Spinner* (1951). Joint Collaboration differs from Sequential Collaboration in so far as the writers/artists concerned indicate that the collaborative process does not follow categorical steps or demarcations of roles, and remains instead, a more fluid process. Here authorship is attributed, jointly, to each individual writer or, more often, a collective pseudonym is created.

Overriding issues

1. Movement between forms

Despite the neatness of the above definitions, collaboration is neither a tidy nor a static form of creative practice. Fluidity is the key. As indicated above, authors can move in and out of collaborative forms at various stages in the same project, particularly as aspects of the situation change.

When the movement from one form to another is articulated, recognised and agreed upon, the collaboration can continue without interruption or unease. When the movement is not formalised and is unconscious, it can generate an unsettling, which in its mild form is manifested as an increased interest in the work at hand, and in its extreme from can completely break down the collaboration.

Perhaps because one form of collaboration carries with it a different attitude towards authorial credit than another, we attempted to investigate some known long-term collaborations. We found an interesting example in *TEXT*. Tess Brady and Nigel Krauth have successfully edited *TEXT* for 7 years and in 2000-2001 certain conditions surrounding their editorship changed. Instead of being on the same campus they were in two different hemispheres. In hindsight, and applying the categories above to their situation, it can be seen that the writing of the editorial and other aspects of their collaboration unwittingly changed from Joint Collaboration to the Contribution Collaboration mode.

So strongly was this change in collaborative practice intuitively felt that the editors both commented upon it. In Vol 4 No 2 they wrote:

> How different has it been editing this issue of TEXT? How
> different from when Tess and I had offices just down the corridor
> from each other?
> It seems hardly different at all. There's a collegiality in email, in
> shunting files back and forth; a close-seeming. It defies the
> tyranny of distance. But it deceives too. If the electronics had

fouled up, we would have fouled, 17,000 (or whatever)
kilometres apart. (Krauth 2000)

And,

> I too have been thinking about this editing across time and space
> delays. It is the closest I've come to being deaf - we've talked,
> human talk, with our fingers - the only sound the clicking of the
> keys, the spilling of a glass of wine, the movement of paper. And
> in my mind I feel as if we have tricked the keeper of those dark
> distances between Melbourne and Barcelona. I kept feeling our
> files, your papers, this edition, might slip into some deep recess of
> hyperspace. (Brady 2000)

The example is useful as it indicates the strength and unease generated when there is an unconscious move between collaborative forms. *TEXT* editorials had not previously or since carried such self-conscious comments on the editing process.

We have all, as teachers, experienced student collaborative groups: some are successful, others are a disaster, and the dynamics of some in the course of their collaboration move from one extreme to the other. Instead of attributing the decline or rise in collaboration practice to personalities it might be useful to reflect on the various collaborative forms wittingly or unwittingly employed by such groups and identify any movement between the forms.

In such cases it might be useful first to teach students the forms of collaboration and alert them to the difficulties of *inadvertently* moving from one form to the other before they are asked to engage in a collaborative work.

Of course we are talking here of unwitting movement between forms. There is no indication that a collaboration which knowingly moves from one type to another generates the unease discussed above. Indeed, agreed movement between forms can generate new and fascinating projects.

2. Issues of friendship and equality

Another overriding quality of collaboration revolves around the issues of equality and friendship which are part of the human aspect of collaboration. These qualities transgress any specific form of collaboration and create their own sets of assets and liabilities in all the forms.

For example, collaboration in any of the above forms is not *necessarily* between equals. In many instances, collaboration involves a senior figure who might lead the collaboration or dominate it in some way. This domination might be culturally constructed, such as the role of a film director, or it might be socially constructed as in the imbalance generated from racial, class or gender differences. In other cases, the collaboration can be more egalitarian. For example, a theatre or film director in a Contribution Collaboration might be the kind of director who works closely with a particular company, collectively devising a production and actively shunning the dominant role. Similarly, in Joint Collaboration the line between encouragement and support, and demanding, insisting or even bullying, might be so fine as to generate an actual or a perceived sense of inequality within the collaborative partnership.

None of the forms, likewise, necessitates friendship. There are instances of collaborators working together for long periods in what is often referred to as a hostile situation. The Dannay/Lee collaboration lasted for most of their lives

despite what their children testify to as constant conflict between the cousins. Dannay's son Rand Lee recalls:

> Dad and Fred's differences were not only professional. Often I would pick up the phone, hoping the line was free, and put down the receiver moments later with Dad and Fred's arguing voices in my ears. On one occasion, Dad threw down a plot outline and exclaimed, "He gives me the most ridiculous characters to work with and expects me to make them realistic!" Cousin Fred probably felt some frustration about Dad's treatment of his plots. (Sercu 2002)

In an Australian example, twenty-year-olds Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey were friends and Joint Collaborators when they wrote *Puberty Blues*. But shortly after, they fell out and did not speak for almost 20 years. Their thoughts are recorded in Helen Grasswill's documentary T*he Big Chill* (ABC 2002). Gabrielle Carey comments:

> Kathy and I fell out probably just months after *Puberty Blues* came out. It was a pretty nasty sort of break-up, and essentially we haven't spoken to each other since.
> I suppose I was questioning the whole idea of what a celebrity or a personality is. I felt there had to be some substance behind whatever we went on to do or say.
> Kathy was a lot more opportunistic than I was. She saw every occasion as an opportunity to further her fame or her status as a personality. I felt that she was selling herself. I felt that...that she would sell herself to anybody for fame and fortune, and I didn't like it and I didn't want to do that. (Grasswill, 2002)

And Kathy Lette says:

> What I remember about Gabs is that she was fiercely intellectual and always striving to make herself a better person. Those intense female friendships you have in your teens. You can't be welded at the waist forevermore. You've got to grow apart - it's unnatural not to. You can't be psychological Siamese twins forever. So it was - you know, it was predictable and very natural that we went our separate ways. You know, it'd be kind of sick if we hadn't, really. And it was heartbreaking 'cause we were best, best buddies, and I missed her terribly, and I lost all my confidence for quite a while after we stopped working together and being best pals. But, you know, looking back, it had to happen. (Grasswill 2002)

Other collaborations, both the short-lived and long-term, have been more harmonious. Billy Wilder, who collaborated during all his writing life, saw collaboration as a calm and business-like process.

> Whenever I worked with somebody *more* than once, that tells you. I worked with Brackett twenty years, with Diamond twenty years, twenty-five…it was all very peaceful. There was no jumping around on tables and couches, "Hahahahaha, that's great! They're just gonna die!!" No. It was very quiet. [Pause.] Sometimes I would leave the office in an angry mood, but in the morning, it's all forgotten. (Crowe 1999: 42)

Dymphna Cusack, in a letter to Miles Franklin, comments on her collaboration with Florence James that 'our minds struck sparks off each other so superbly'

(North 2001) and Katherine Bradley of her collaboration with Edith Cooper (as Michael Field) writes that

> the work is perfectly mosaic: we cross and interlace like a company of summer dancing flies; if one begins a character, his companion seizes and possesses it; if one conceives a scene or situation, the other corrects, completes or murderously cuts away. (Blain 1996: 254)

Joint collaboration case study: *The Girl's Guide to Real Estate*

As non-financial experts who have successfully invested in real estate, we found that we were often asked by friends and acquaintances for advice on how to get started in this form of investing. As observers of the book trade we knew there were no simple, experience-based and user-friendly guides available targeted directly at women. So, we set out to write a book providing reliable foundational advice for women who, like us, have no intention of giving their life over to investment strategies. In the back of our minds was a kind of modernised *Room of One's Own* - a mixture of empowerment and financial pragmatism, to which we added humour.

As teachers of creative writing we knew we had ahead of us the dual tasks of writing a book and successfully setting up a collaboration which was sustainable.

We thought the best thing to do was to make the experience of writing the book as unstressful (and even fun) as we could. Because we live in two different States, Queensland and Victoria, we decided (for time and economic reasons) to dovetail our writing time together on the back of professional trips like conferences. We would hole up at each other's homes or rent an apartment, stock up the fridge, unplug the phone/modem and lock ourselves away for some serious writing time together. One of these apartments was in Canberra after the 2001 AAWP conference. Although the apartment was comfortable, it was a bit strange, too many mirrors, lush furry wallpaper and too much gold trim. It was in the suburbs with no view except for a cream brick wall, but all became clear when next door the film crew and actors arrived. We had rented a set for a porno movie!

Maintaining a sense of humour was important. On the last leg of writing the book, we knew we were in danger of getting exhausted; we also knew we had to keep the tone of the text light and friendly, so we rented an airy apartment at a beach resort with plenty of tables and pacing room. We were odd tourists setting up an office instead of a bar! Tess arrived with some fairy wings in her luggage while Donna brought an old-fashioned wooden popgun. When the going got tough we'd dress up, looking so totally silly we soon found our sense of humour again.

We both quickly realised that a key to being able to work together in these situations was to keep to a working timetable which allowed personal and private space as well as ample working time. In this sense we adapted the Wilder method. Over the days our routine became quite predicable with interesting consequences for the other holiday-makers who learnt to ask in pool-breaks, "How many words so far today?"

When we couldn't get together we bounced the chapters back and forward over the email, and made sure we signed up for various discount long distance phone deals, when, armed with hard copies and hundreds of attached post-it notes, we spent hours on the phone amalgamating our final edits and proofreading into one manuscript.

The benefit of collaborating, in our case was, at its most basic, what the process enabled - the production of a publishable text within the required time frame.

There were obvious benefits of brainstorming and working/writing together, a process which seemed to save time and energy by multiplying our individual creative outputs, as well as that of having a motivator and editor continually on hand. The ideas of conversation, interaction, mutual enterprise, resource sharing and partnership were integral to our own articulated conception of our collaborative process.

This went further as we decided to use women's stories as a central part of the text. They were key and carried much of the message of the text. We did this, on one hand, to diminish our own authorial voice and, on the other, to encourage the reader's entry into the text. Some of the stories were ones we had heard, but mostly they came from our own experience. We gave the stories pseudonyms so that the final text looks as if a very large number of women contributed to it. So successful were we at distributing the ownership of the text that at interviews we were often asked if these other women could be interviewed as well! Deleuze and Guattari commenting on their own collaborative writing are interesting here and, in a sense, we found we had named for ourselves the crowd they speak of:

> The two of us wrote Anti-Oedipus together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. Here we have made use of everything that came within range, what was closest as well as farthest away. We have assigned clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition. Why have we kept our own names? Out of habit, purely out of habit. To make ourselves unrecognisable in turn. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3)

Interestingly, the question of what happens to the concept of originality and to the individual's writing style was not a problem at all for us, and this was probably one of the core reasons for the success of the collaboration. On re-looking at the manuscript, we both find it impossible to say who wrote which bit and which idea was Donna's or Tess'. This same phenomenon is reported by Wilder who said in an interview, "It's always difficult for me to say, "This is mine and this is his".' (Crowe 1999: 42). By engaging in Joint Collaboration we had created a new voice, at once many but also one, rather than a duet or chorus of voices.

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.

Wilder suggests that his collaboration was born of necessity, and perhaps ours was as well. From the moment the book proposal was accepted and contracts signed, we had a very clear task and a very clear deadline to meet. This tended to generate a shared overall goal. The goal extended to more than the book itself as, at all times, we thought of the project as a continuing one, the book as first in a series. This active long-term goal led to a greater than usual involvement in the layout and design of the book, along with other considerations in the text itself. This also necessitated formalising aspects of our collaboration with various legal documents regarding branding and ownership. (But such legalities are outside of the scope of this discussion.)

Of course, there were obstacles, and drawbacks, to the process. It is part of the human condition, in any task, to feel that you have 'washed the dishes' more than anyone else. At times it was boring and stressful and, no matter how friendly we

were, we were forced into an intense personal, professional and creative proximity, and suffered over-exposure to each other and, sometimes, a feeling of lack of control over the time and effort each of us wanted to expend at any moment. At times, benign support and encouragement was perceived as slipping into pressure and coercive intimidation. But the human negatives, when seen as human foibles, were manageable, and we were somewhat surprised to find how collaboration also facilitated considerable individual (artistic and personal) development by engaging in the process of working so closely with another.

In our situation, we believe the key to our successful Joint Collaboration was a willingness to accept a fluidity of methodology and a willingness to leave our egos behind. We gave up preciousness of the text and always trusted that the collective effort was going to be stronger than the individual one. We attended to our physical needs and took the trouble to set ourselves up in a pleasant but productive working environment which minimized distractions and also put boundaries on the time we spent in the same room. We lived our own lives and did not feel, as Kathy Lette put it, 'welded at the waist forevermore'. In addition, we shared a clearly stated goal and, perhaps most importantly, a strong and healthy sense of humour.

Conclusion

Collaboration is a complex form of writing which has been under-examined. It is often seen as something which on particular occasions works and on others does not. The factors affecting the success of collaboration were seen as being more in the hands of the gods and a matter of personalities rather than in any working method.

We would like to suggest that luck and personalities have little to do with the success of collaboration. By separating into forms the various modes of collaboration and by recognising the awkwardness and unease generated when the collaboration shifts modes, we hope we have a preliminary study towards isolating tools useful in practising and analysing effective collaborative writing methods.

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