

**Love and Pain and the Whole Damn Thing:
Collaboration as Biography**

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The path towards the other is first a path towards the infinite, an infinite in which both I and the other risk losing ourselves.

Luce Irigaray¹

In François Dosse's excellent biography of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, he writes, "The success of their common intellectual work depended on mobilizing and using everything that made them different, rather than pretending they worked in osmosis."² Robert Maggiori believed Deleuze and Guattari retained "the distance that Jankelevitch called 'amative distance,' meaning that you are not restricted to a specific position ... an *amative* distance has to do with rapprochement or distancing."³

When the two were introduced, Deleuze was a respected professor of philosophy who had written studies of Kant, Proust and Nietzsche, while the younger Guattari, a psychoanalyst who had trained with Lacan, was working at La Borde, a clinic where radical reformist views about the treatment of the mentally ill were practised. Deleuze was a gentle, retiring fellow who loathed social gatherings, though his charismatic teaching style and brilliant insights made him a popular lecturer at the Sorbonne. Guattari was

a dynamic individual, an anarchist who was influenced by the “anti-psychiatry” of R. D. Laing. He was a gregarious, voluble and generous character. Deleuze and Guattari might seem like an odd couple, but both believed that the upheavals of May 1968 had brought them together intellectually and ideologically, creating an intense and open dialogue in which each fed off the other.

Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia (1972), their first joint effort and landmark book, propelled Deleuze and Guattari to develop the idea of the “collective arrangement of utterance.”⁴ Thanks to Deleuze’s animating collaboration with Guattari, he was able to write a new, experimental kind of book and to challenge the solo production of writing. For Guattari, the situation was less satisfying. The book was written primarily through letters, which meant that Guattari had to isolate himself for hours each day, an act inimical to his personality, and which he found agony. For the most part, the writing plan for *Anti-Oedipus* was that Guattari sent his texts to Deleuze, who then reworked them for the final version. “Deleuze said that Félix was the diamond miner and he was the polisher. So he needed only to send him the texts as he wrote them and he would work on them; that’s how it went.”⁵

However, due to Deleuze’s seniority and his reputation as a philosopher, he was credited with the lion’s share of the work in *Anti-Oedipus*. The book was often reviewed as if it were Deleuze’s production alone. Guattari was assigned a traditional “feminine” role as assistant, helper, shadow, muse and minor player, which depressed and infuriated him. Indeed, Guattari’s colleagues at La Borde clinic admitted that they had neither read nor discussed the book, and did not explore its theories for their ongoing clinical practice.

The situation Deleuze and Guattari encountered illustrates many of the issues that arise in creative partnerships. How can such issues be understood and theorised? Is there a paradigm for collaboration? Or does its multiplicity of action, intent and result deny or negate such cohesiveness? Is it one gesture or two? These were the questions that led to me to convene the conference “Collaborations in Modern and Postmodern Visual Art” which took place at the Monash Conference Centre in 2010. The speakers numbered leading artists engaged with collaborative practice – Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, Kate Daw and Stewart Russell – as well as cultural theorists – Adrian Martin, Anne Marsh, Peter Murphy and Eduardo de la Fuente – plus postgraduate students and early-career researchers in the field. The keynote speaker, Ken Friedman, is an artist long associated with Fluxus. Combining conceptual art with collaborative multi-media strategies, and liberally laced with Dada’s provocative humour, the Fluxus movement

emerged in New York in the 1960s.

The word “collaboration” has only recently been rehabilitated. During the Second World War it had a sinister meaning – the act of treacherously assisting a country's enemy occupier, an act that was punished by death or imprisonment after the Allied victory. During the 1970s, an era defined by collaborative activity in contemporary culture, the collaborators in group ventures were called a “collective.” A term influenced by Marxism and socialist utopianism, it sounded more hip than “committee.” For example, in 1974, I was a member of the Ewing and George Paton Gallery Collective, which comprised artists, critics and curators who advised the gallery's director about the exhibition programme. On the title page of *LIP, a journal of women in the visual arts* (1976) we referred to ourselves as The Collective rather than as an editorial board. In a decade that was strongly influenced by the protest movement against the Vietnam War, in which many in the Ewing and the *LIP* collectives had participated, group activity was regarded as an ideal.

How did it work? Well, slowly. At the Ewing, Kiffy Rubbo was the director, so decisions and the responsibility for decisions were finally hers. On the *LIP* collective we strived to be egalitarian. Even deciding on a name for the journal took months because every voice deserved to be heard. We met constantly and sometimes it seemed I spent the years 1975-1981 entirely in meetings. Having many hands made the production of *LIP* possible and we all chipped in to do the finicky task of lay-out. We assembled in the North Fitzroy living room of a collective member who sported pink dungarees stitched with embroidery and whose attention to the task wandered as she smoked a succession of joints. Hopelessly inept at most practical tasks, I sliced slivers of flesh off my fingers with a Stanley knife during the lay-out process and dripped blood over the copy.

But the journal looked smart and professional: we wanted a striking product that carried a funky “feminine sensibility” and the first issue's luscious, shiny, almost-bad-taste, hot-pink cover attained it. Lip, according to the dictionary definition printed on the cover, meant “impudence; abuse. Lip, give it. ‘To talk vociferously’.” But pink lips belong to the vagina as well as to the mouth and a “vagina dentate” doily, designed by artist Frances Budden and patiently handmade by the collective, was inserted into the journal as a feminist “centrefold.” The Women's Art Movement, which started in Melbourne in 1975 (International Women's Year), organised itself around large meetings that took place at the Ewing Gallery and smaller studio-based gatherings. All were determinedly good-natured. “Supportive” was a key feminist word but I felt uneasy with the uncritical enthusiasm that was sometimes showered on meretricious work, as if being a woman and

making something were enough. I also recall the look of surprise and embarrassment on an artist's face when an eager young curator suggested, "We could come to your studio and help you do your paintings."

Such nostalgic reminiscences indicate the time-space that collaborative/collective/communal projects often occupy: early adulthood, a coming-into-the-world, ambitious idealism, shared goals, passionate beliefs, friendships and love affairs. To spend so much time together you need to be besotted and friendship, after all, can be almost as erotic as sex. Around 1980, I detached myself from my network of collaborative affiliations. My relief at flying solo took an extreme turn: I quit my job as a university lecturer and my career as an art historian, critic and curator and began writing fiction, a most private and isolated activity. From being in rooms with others, I went to being in a room alone. The collaborative scene had ended, or so it seemed to me, like so many brave, small and poorly financed cultural ventures, in ego-battles, quarrels, boredom and exhaustion. Even the Surrealists got fed up with each other. But my first novel, *Speaking* (1984), was about a group of women friends who, at the end of the '70s, assess the fruits and the damages delivered by the decade. Alone in my room, my head resounded with voices from the past.

Creative work, like a creative collaborative partnership, is a cycle which involves hope, failure and success. But collaborative projects are always a story, a biography – of two, or more. Collaborative projects require explanation. Who did what? When? Whose idea was that? What was the method of production? Whose hand was involved? A solo artist doesn't require the same story, the same narrative. A solo artist authors his/her autobiography which belongs to the one. It can even be kept secret. Collaborative projects require an other. Since feminism's interrogation of artistic production as gendered and political, such projects also require disclosure. Is collaboration "in a way a philosophy in the feminine, where the values of intersubjectivity, of dialogue in difference" are explored?⁶ Like biography, which requires an other to structure the subject's life-work, the co-creator acts as observer, at times compassionate, at others critical or interrogative, of the work.

The conference was intended to explore fresh and robust approaches to collaborative practice and methodology. Surprisingly, such approaches are lacking in visual art. While the field of literary studies has initiated a paradigm shift in conceptions of authorship, there has been no theorisation regarding collaboration encompassing visual art *and* literary practice.⁷ Griselda Pollock comments that art history is "a discipline bypassed by the theoretical impulses" which have transformed literary studies.⁸ In *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership*, Whitney Chadwick and

Isabelle de Courtivron highlight the problem. Unwilling to be “restricted” to either “the anecdotal or the theoretical” in their discussion of intimacy and creative partnership, they merely “propose ... stories about relationships.”⁹ In his case studies of contemporary creative couples, Charles Green theorises that a “third identity” is produced. In Green's imaginative and holistic construct, individuality is absorbed and harmonious co-workers can produce discrete artworks.¹⁰

Joachim Pissarro developed an innovative methodology in his study of Cezanne and Camille Pissarro (who was his great-grandfather), Johns and Rauschenberg. Pissarro identifies *reciprocity* as being at the heart of language, and, identifying art as a branch of language, also at the heart of art. The innovative aspect of Pissarro's theory is that it locates intersubjectivity, “the reciprocal formation of an individual artist through interaction with another individual artist,”¹¹ in language. Cultural practice is “like a conversation,”¹² not a solitary, individualistic act. Through dialogue, the individual artist transforms him/herself. In his account, the artist is not a fixed essence, or the mark of unchangeable singularity: “the individual is a process.”¹³ It is a dynamic interchange between the self and others. Pissarro suggests it is through the internalising process of tension-filled and sometimes conflicted expectations that Habermas' notion of the “self-realisation of the individual” takes place.¹⁴

To date, one of the most difficult aspects of discussing the processes of creative collaboration has been the lack of an appropriate vocabulary. Pissarro's theories of intersubjectivity, which can be applied to both the visual arts and literary fields, attempt to provide it. Nor does Pissarro's micro-theoretical approach simplify collaborative cultural practice. While his theories have been shaped by Habermas, Pissarro's work goes further in accounting for dyadic authorial agency, for the complex, personal and intimate shades of exchange between artists. In Pissarro's concept of artistic development, “one can realise one's Self most effectively in a reciprocal relation with an other.”¹⁵

In *The Way of Love*, Irigaray proposes ways of approaching the other, “to prepare a place of proximity.”¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari declared that they loved each other. What does that mean? Not necessarily “romance” (bro-mance?), or even happiness. Love is more prosaic, requiring patience and commitment, imagination and ingenuity, sacrifice and generosity, fear and need. Love itself is a work of art, imperfect, elusive, frustrating and fundamental. Requiring constant attention, it is never finished. Failure and rupture are included in a dynamic that seems to offer the desired states of rapture, rest and union. There is no *one*. There is always the other. Moving, shifting, beckoning, closing, opening, to make collaborative partnerships,

like creativity itself, an incessant movement *towards*.

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NOTES

- ¹ Luce Irigaray, *Sharing the World* (London: New York, Continuum 2008), 1.
- ² François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Intersecting Lives*, trans. Deborah Glassman (Columbia University Press, New York, 2010), 6-7.
- ³ Ibid, 7.
- ⁴ Ibid, 13.
- ⁵ Ibid, 7.
- ⁶ Luce Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, trans. Heidi Bostic and Stephen Pluháček (London: New York, Continuum 2002), vii.
- ⁷ See Wayne Kostenbaum, *Double Talk: The Erotics of Male Literary Collaboration* (New York: Routledge 1989); Jack Stillinger, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Bette Lynn London, *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Marjorie Stone and Judith Thompson (eds.), *Literary Couplings, Writing Couples, Collaborators and the Construction of Authorship* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000).
- ⁸ Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Gardes and Partisans* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1996), 315
- ⁹ Whitney Chadwick and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds.), *Significant Others: Creativity and Intimate Partnership* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 12-13.
- ¹⁰ Charles Green, *The Third Hand: Collaboration in Art from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2001).
- ¹¹ Joachim Pissarro, *Cezanne/Pissarro, Johns/Rauschenberg, Comparative Studies on Intersubjectivity in Modern Art* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 70.
- ¹² Ibid, 71
- ¹³ Ibid, 70
- ¹⁴ Jurgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays*, trans. William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, MA/London: The MIT Press, 1992), 152.
- ¹⁵ Pissarro, 228.
- ¹⁶ Irigaray, *The Way of Love*, ix.