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COLLABORATION AND CONVERGENCE
Bettina Funcke

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I’d like to begin with a simple thought: “the audience completes the work”, which is a formulation by Marcel Duchamp. It is, probably, the most general form of collaboration within the arts: the notion that the work is part of a circuit between maker and receiver.

We are all in this audience concerned with different sorts of work, different approaches to learning and teaching, and different areas of study. My own area is contemporary art, and I thought that the arts can provide some very concrete instances of collaboration, which we can think about in order to get at more abstract ideas of what collaboration might be. Let’s look at a couple of examples by artists who gave a physical shape to the thought that “the audience completes the work”.

1.

These are the so-called Passstücke–Adaptives by Franz West, a Viennese artist who passed away earlier this year. The sculptures are not only to be looked at on pedestals. The artist invites the audience to take them into their hands and adapt them to their bodies, play with them, to restyle and to convert them, physically, specifically. It’s both a straight-forward and poetic invitation to complete the work in the moment of encountering it, by relating to it in this immediate way—it’s almost like putting on a costume, which allows you to play a different role.
In this brief description we have already touched on a few key elements of collaboration: it is about relating to someone, to give in to a situation without being certain of its outcome, to pretend to become someone else. There is a playfulness, one that will certainly also be bumpy or awkward.

Then there are the candy pieces by Felix Gonzales Torres: In the lineage of minimalist sculpture and Pop Art, he would simply make piles of candy next to walls or in corners or he would spread them out on the floor in a rectangular field, with an invitation for the audience to take a piece of candy. Bending down to the floor to pick one up, unwrapping and eating it or carrying it away like a talisman suggests an intimate encounter without any knowledge of the background of the works needed. The candy pieces, however, have a more specific history; they have been called meditations on love and loss. This pile here, Portrait of Ross in LA, from 1991 is made of 175 pounds of candy, a weight that corresponds to the artist’s partner Ross, who had recently died of AIDS-related illness. The corner piece would slowly be diminished, taken bit by bit by those who came to see it, paralleling Ross’ weight loss and suffering, in the hospital bed, prior to his death. However, the candy pieces are also supposed to be continuously replenished by the museum or gallery, thus metaphorically granting perpetual life.

These works complicate collaboration with the audience, because the artist suggests a relation of complicity with no known outcome. There is not only sharing, not only a simple seduction: take a sweet and eat it, and physically, sensually interact with the work. Once you know the story behind the work, the audience is drawn into, even embodies, the mourning, and loss, and the search for hope and love that were the intimate experience of the artist when making the work. This might produce in an audience a discomfort or friction, a feeling of “this is not what I signed up for”.

2.

Friction is, I think, the essence of collaboration. It is what allows two people to synthesize a third position, to head off in some unknown direction, whether you are talking about a relation where the audience completes the work, or a person to person relation, as with an artist duo that works together on a piece. In fact, you don’t actually want complete convergence, you want a bumpy encounter, filled with friction.

Why has collaboration become such a common practice in recent times? Both phenomena—that of artists working with other artists, and that of artworks which demand large-scale audience participation—have become increasingly common forms of cultural production. Where does the collaborative tendency come from? And how does it relate to other historical developments?

In every era, the way that artistic forms are structured reflects the way in which science or contemporary culture views reality. For instance, in medieval times, the church was the overarching structuring system for ideology and power, and the depictions and images used by an artist were largely in line with church custom.
We, however, are living in times of relative truths and continuous flexibility, where almost anything is up for manipulation. Massive flexibility, with corresponding uncertainty, has replaced a belief in progress. The popularity of artistic collaboration may have to do with something the philosopher Zygmund Baumann wrote about, in his book *Liquid Modernity*:

“If in its “solid” phase the heart of modernity was about controlling and fixing the future, in the “liquid” phase the prime concern moved to ensuring the future was not mortgaged. ... To put it bluntly, under conditions of liquidity anything could happen yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty.”

In other words, we are living in times of relative truths but continuous flexibility, where almost anything is up for manipulation. Flexibility with uncertainty has replaced a belief in progress. Liquidity, then, is both the promise and the curse of modern times. We have a state of what we might call *convergence*: a merging and overlapping of various disciplines, methods, ways of thinking.

And these notions of convergence and liquidity are a part of our contemporary fixation on “the digital.” Because digital culture wants everything to converge. It wants everything to merge into one state, the state of being digital, where all material and situations have been liquified into zeros and ones, so they are all speaking the same language, are all therefore swappable and substitutable, and this is all in the name of greater efficiency, which is to say frictionless exchange. So obviously digital culture goes very well with capitalist culture, which loves a universal currency.

Collaboration is a word beloved by capitalism, but it would be a mistake to think of collaboration as being simply about frictionless exchange, for, as I have suggested: it actually works best when a kind of friction produces unusual results.

And the arts offer a model for collaboration with maximum friction, which is to say maximum possibility for productive mistranslation, misreading, misunderstanding, and ultimately synthesis. As an artist you must understand that your audience will “complete the work,” possibly by interpreting it in a completely different way than what you intended. So you might go for openness, placing the work in such a way that this is a dynamic and productive process. A lot of businesses do not understand this, and would run the other way towards more restricted messages and ideally controllable meanings, but on the other hand you only have to look at a great ad agency, or even a great political campaign team, in order to see how suggestion and openness and flexibility, i.e. anticipating the frictions that will inevitably arise, are strengths rather than weaknesses.

The artist duo Guyton/Walker thrives on this balancing act. Composed of two artists, Wade Guyton and Kelley Walker, each with individual careers, the duo Guyton/Walker acts like an artist in itself, with separate gallery representation, museum exhibitions, catalogues, and so on. The absurdity and productive struggles of experimenting together are combined with how they take advantage of the
malleability of the digital in the production of their work. The starting point for their work is always the
desktop scanner, which is a portal to the culture of convergence – it is the converger, grabbing text,
printed images, or real objects alike and ushering them into the electronic realm.

For this series of works Guyton/Walker fed sliced fruit into their scanner. Once the fruit was converted
into digital space, which is a space of pure manipulation, the artists can do all kinds of things to it. You
turn a lime orange, you enlarge it, you pervert it, you print it out on different objects and surfaces.

You see here the naked file first of all, a raw Photoshop document. The image was then arranged in
digital compositions and inkjet-printed on different surfaces and objects: a paint can, canvas, sheetrock,
the ubiquitous building material, itself part of an installation, a record cover, a mattress, and most
recently, as depicted, laminated onto a table.

So a photoshop file of a lime was first used for a painting and is then, scaled down and cropped, printed
on the side of a can. The same file serves as starting motive for a new digital composition to be printed
on a sheet of drywall. Turning the leaning drywall 90 degrees, it is then used as the top of a table and,
of course, if you make tables, you need to also make glassware. So their process performs a culture of
convergence where the possibilities of multiplication and variation are endless.

The tension between the fluidity of convergence and the friction of collaboration characterizes this
work. I want to read you an excerpt of an exchange between Kelley and Wade about their collaborative
process, which I think sheds light on this pendulum between friction and attraction that is placed at the
core of all collaborations:

KELLEY WALKER: It’s almost not a collaboration; it’s like impersonation. We are able to impersonate
this character and we can take turns. We can come and go. I think one thing about Guyton/Walker
that’s never quite been understood is that sometimes we’re equally engaged in the work and at other
times we’re at different distances from it.

WADE GUYTON: We have very different attention spans at different times.

KW: But we are still developing a vocabulary; a consistency arises that continues to be productive for
us.

WG: We didn’t know where things were going. … What’s interesting is that these strange aspects
emerge that may have been edited out by an individual.

KW: Technology edits, too. Software like Photoshop is geared to isolate you. It’s meant for individuals.
But the process of working together allows us to introduce differences into this system. Much of the
time we don’t agree. The other person is not into it and we stop; or we may go ahead with an idea and
that person might become more interested, or maybe not. When working alone, I have noticed that the computer always seems to agree.

WG: We need to design a way that we can both be Photoshopping at the same time on the same file! But right now you’ll work on a file and I’ll work on a file, and we’ll send them back and forth—and then someone else has to put them together. So there are many opportunities for mistakes to happen—

KW: What’s funny is, you or I will do something, not save the file, and then tell the other person to reproduce it for whatever reason. I’ll have a printout and try to figure out what the hell you did and how to go about retracing your steps. That happens quite often, actually. And when I can’t figure it out, you have to come back and say, Oh, you’re an idiot—

GW: That’s the thing. I’m not so loose with my own work. Somehow the collaboration really allows all of that contingency to become a part of it. And even if it causes a problem, some other solution comes along to take care of it, which of course creates other problems. … I learn from it all the time. It’s weird to feel ownership but then also feel as if you’re separate from it—that it’s alien.

KW: Hate it.

WG: Hate it and love it.

So, let me summarize the characteristics of collaboration that have been articulated here. There is a flirtation with impersonation, with an invented character, a third person that is the result of one artist + another artist, or simply one person + another person; it offers an escape from their individual careers and work habits, there is a loss of control and the freedom that results, the chaotic yet organic process of producing work, the hesitation and excitement to embrace the shared identity—a continuous tension between commitment and escape, which runs through all relationships. The contemporary sensibility of Guyton/Walker lies in their performance of the tension between the friction of collaboration and the liquidity, the malleability, the efficiency without resistance I described as the digital culture of convergence.

3.

Collaboration, however, has different implications for some other, longer-term, artist duos, who, rather than coming together only for occasional projects while pursuing individual careers, have made life-time commitments to a fully shared artist identity which in one case, that of the duo Gilbert & George, verges on symbiosis.

The British sculptors Gilbert Praesche and George Passmore met in 1967, as students at St. Martin’s School of Art, in London, and became a couple, both romantically and in their work. By 1969 they
were reacting against approaches to sculpture then dominant at St. Martin’s, which they regarded as elitist and poor at communicating outside an art context. As students they photographed each other holding small sculptures they’d made, and in looking at the pictures, suddenly realized that they themselves were the sculptures. This initial experience of allowing themselves to be perceived as sculpture meant, in their words, “taking the whole of life and giving it the dignity of art.”

This is a powerful statement: to take the whole of life and give it the dignity of art. Is this what runs through all collaborations? A relationship which turns things into that which they otherwise would not be?

As the avant-garde’s continual attempts to abolish or transcend the difference between art and life have demonstrated, contemporary art suggests that one must change one’s life and change the world. To collaborate one needs to accept the possibilities of failure and loss of control, and in experimental, collaborative work formats, one might escape the normal roles and limitations of our professional lives. Can collaboration perhaps even change things beyond professional work contexts? Gilbert & George would certainly say so, for in their case their work has merged with their shared life.

Let me show you some of the performances, which Gilbert & George always in fact call sculptures.

In 1969 they performed the *Singing Sculpture*. For this piece they would stand on a table, in old-fashioned theatrical poses, with a walking stick and rubber glove as props, and hold still for the 2 or 3 minutes that it took for an LP from the ’40s to play on a gramophone located below the table. From the beginning, they cultivated impersonal expressions and gestures, self-control, elegance and a sense of being old-fashioned. Everything was tidy, clean, and static. It looks quite British, doesn’t it?

By 1975 they performed the *Red Sculptures*, wearing their three-button suits, and acting out words from phone recordings over the course of an hour, with their heads and hands painted a matt red flesh color.

Soon Gilbert & George included photographic work and large-scale drawings into their output, depicting themselves taking walks in nature or the city, musing on sex, religion and urban life. They always remain the protagonists, the deliberately constructed central characters in their work, and their own relationship, as lovers and as coworkers, is thus always foregrounded in a self-consciously romanticized way.

Let me read an excerpt from “A Day in the Life of Gilbert & George the Sculptors,” from 1971: “Being living sculptures is our life blood, our destiny, our romance, our disaster, our light and life. As day breaks over us, we rise into our vacuum and the cold morning light filters dustily through the window. We step into the responsibility-suits of our art. We put on our shoes for the coming walk. … Nothing can touch us or take us out of ourselves. … Art is for all the only hope for the making way for the
Modern world to enjoy the sophistication of decadent living expressions. … And then maybe we will see ourselves in a garden, soft and sitting, watching the sun as it gently lowers itself behind the horizon, taking with it all the golden light and warmth.”

Now I’d like to look at the Swiss artists Peter Fischli and David Weiss, who for over three decades have been working together as “Fischli Weiss.” Note that they simply join their names together cleanly, one after the other. A duo, it seems, is a brand, and needs a brand name. Perhaps they choose this formation with some kind of clean Swiss design sense, whereas Guyton\Walker, the Americans, quite consciously chose a back-slash to place between their names, so as to align it neatly with the slope of the W, giving it the suggestion of a corporate logo, and Gilbert and George join themselves with the more romantic and classical British ampersand.

Here is a picture showing one of their early “rat and bear” videos, in which the artists would wear these animal costumes as they wandered through the landscape, dialoguing about the world philosophically. Of the artists, critic Stefan Zweifel wrote: “they are not 2, not 1+1, but as indefinable and as incalculable as 0. They elude the urge to press opposites into higher unity by the force of dialectical argument. … For they adhere to pataphysics, the ‘science of imaginary solutions’ in which the singular triumphs over the universal, and only the exception is the rule.”

This would be a whole new way to consider collaborations, that 1 + 1 should be seen as a science of imaginary solutions!

Here is a series of photos they took of temporary sculptures composed of precariously balanced everyday objects, entitled Equilibres – Quiet Afternoon (1984/85). Individual works are called by such apparently poetic titles as A New Day Begins, A Restless Night, Flirtation, Love, etc. Could they be models of collaboration? They emphasize the continuous searching effort, the detours and experiments, which can only produce provisional moments of balance before a constellation comes clattering to the ground.

The phrase “suddenly this overview” (1981), uttered by the Rat character in one of their videos, describes a revelatory moment of utmost clarity, when the universe appears to mystically cohere for a moment, followed by the sobering recognition that there must be a banal explanation for everything. This discovery catapults the rat and the bear into action, as they sat out to diagram their world in a series of 250 small, hand-crafted clay figures that depict the history of time as we know it, from The First Fish Decides to Go Ashore to Modern Development. The series includes the “group of popular opposites,” a number of sculptures that give form to contrary states, in the process blurring the distinction between them. For instance, they produced this sculpture, called small and big, represented by a mouse and an elephant, which are here equally sized. Are we to think that if 1 + 1 is not 2, all additions and oppositions could be replaced with imaginary solutions offering an absurd but compelling synthetic third way?
Fischli Weiss are reminiscent of Bouvard and Pécuchet, Flaubert’s 19th-century odd couple engaged in a ridiculous attempt to represent the entire world. Flaubert conceived his work in 1863, only a few years after the word “collaboration” was recorded for the first time, and it was published posthumously, in unfinished form.

The book explores the friendship of two Parisian copy clerks who, after one comes into inheritance, retire to the country, intent on together exploring all human knowledge. They move through various fields, from the sciences to the arts, frustrated by their failed attempts to put their newly gathered knowledge into practice. After exhaustively exploring areas that include agriculture and food preservation, chemistry, medicine, anatomy, and geology, archaeology, literature, aesthetics, politics, love, gymnastics and philosophy, and coming up empty-handed in each field of research, they return to copying, just as before. Flaubert’s unfinished work trails off with the hapless pair designing a worktable for two. Is this also a suggestive picture of the collaborative process, where people get together only to blunder endlessly forward, learning mainly about our general ignorance and inability to reach any coherent solution? Fischli Weiss have managed to harness this suspicion to produce artwork that, like Flaubert in planning his book, satirizes the aim to catalogue the modern world even as it in fact does so.

What do we get from shared learning and experimentation, from a shared exposure to failure, that makes us give up our individual ambitions for efficiency and authorship?

Could it be that the difficulty of the process, the friction and detours, becomes the most valuable aspect of collaboration?

4.

I want to share with you an example of a transdisciplinary collaboration, a one-time meeting of three people who come from different areas.

Unlike, say, painting, dance is typically a collaborative form to begin with: you have the choreographer and the dancers, the stage designer, the composer of the score, and so on. In the 1960s, the Judson Church in New York City was a laboratory and a testing ground for egalitarian encounters between dancers and visual artists. This is particularly clear in the 1979 collaborative piece DANCE, by Lucinda Childs, visual artist Sol LeWitt, and composer Philip Glass.

Against a minimalist score composed by Philip Glass, Childs choreographed a piece with a solo part for herself and a part for her dance troupe. All based on simple pedestrian change of direction, the piece got rid of all narration and focuses on movement and rhythm alone. As part of the working process, Sol LeWitt shot a film that captures the dancers performing on a floor marked with his signature grid diagram. Later, for the public performance, the front of the stage was bounded by a scrim onto which
LeWitt’s film was projected so that Childs and her dancers might lurk behind it like shadows or doubles, performing the piece in sync, or in dialogue, with the projection. At times you don’t quite know where the dancers are spatially: the grid plays with spatial perception, as it is sometimes filmed from a straight frontal view and sometimes at an angle that seems to slope the floor up- or downward, sometimes in close-up, sometimes from far away. The spatial riddle becomes especially interesting because of how carefully the projections are overlaid with the live dance behind them. Meanwhile, Glass’s music underscores these themes of repetition and doubling and pattern. Equal respect, equal commitment to a time-consuming and open-ended process, and the act of working with rather than working against, together create a deep sense of relationality, of structure aligning and slipping apart, which is hard to find in most work contexts, under normal circumstances. Gilbert & George’s statement about taking the whole of life and giving it the dignity of art comes to mind, as a way to express the fortunate moment when a process and relationship transcends, even if briefly, its circumstances.

While the black and white photographs I showed you are from 1979, the color ones are from 2009, three decades after the piece was first performed. Here it is being re-performed, and it thus takes on a new dimension of time, as Childs dances with the originally 16mm-film converted into a digital projection of her substantially younger self, and with the history of modern dance and her place in it, and all that that moment in 1979 now represents: downtown intermixing between art forms, a space of experimentation outside the marketplace, et cetera. Her style used to be characterized by slightly skippy, bendy movements and now feels much less fluid, but perhaps more pure, more elegant, and the juxtaposition can be seen as a collaboration with oneself, in which friction arises from the passing of time and the intimation of mortality.

5.

The last two examples I want to present concern public group collaborations, in which artists arrive at the site of a project and enlist large numbers of local people to help carry out the artwork. These works could be considered as attempts to temporarily transcend the idea of any separation between audience and artwork; here the audience literally completes the work. In my view, some of the most interesting collaborative art projects of the past ten years address the contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, reflecting on this problem in both the structure of the work and the conditions of its reception.

I see these examples as standing in a lineage that runs back to Group Material, a 1980s artist collective that organized exhibitions, town hall meetings, lectures, and publications, which focused on social issues like democracy, education, and the AIDS crisis. This was an early example of a now familiar practice, the so-called pedagogical or discursive turn in contemporary art, which takes public assembly and discussion to be crucial artistic elements.
Rather than positioning himself directly within an activist lineage, in which art is marshaled to effect social change, Francis Alÿs has a perhaps closer relationship to avant-garde theater, performance, and architectural theory. A Belgian-born artist, Alÿs has lived in Mexico City for many years, and has a deep understanding of the challenges of modernization in the Americas.

He visited Lima in 2000, just before the collapse of the Fujimori government, and found a desperate situation, one that called for, in his words, an “epic response… at once futile and heroic, absurd and urgent.” Alÿs returned to Peru in 2002 to organize his artwork *When Faith Moves Mountains*. For this piece, he enlisted 500 Peruvian students equipped with shovels to form a long line and advance up the flanks of a sand dune on the outskirts of the city, shoveling as they went. In this way, making slow progress, they managed to displace the dune by a few centimeters.

The piece was an absurdly monumental achievement made possible only through cooperation. For Alÿs it was essential that the participants be willing to donate their time and labor for free, so that the action could stand as a model for the lavish and pointless expenditure of energy, thereby running counter to conservative economic principles of efficiency and production. However locally and politically specific the context was, *When Faith Moves Mountains* was also a formal challenge and one of choreography, in which a dune carefully selected for its perfect curve and shape was to be surmounted by 500 students arranged in just the right line and shepherded through their paces. The piece was filmed and photographed extensively, and all the formal elements had to look just as the artist wanted them. The piece of course raises questions: what is the faith in question here, a faith in the artist’s authority, or in contemporary art to provide images that crystallize social issues? Was it in fact an example of collaboration at all?

Inevitably these questions arise when a term like collaboration, with all its potentially idealistic shades of meaning, is used in relation to public works that claim to comment on social organization. And in a way, the next project may be the most idealistic work that I’m sharing with you tonight. Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn situates his work directly at the heart of these productive contradictions in art’s relationship to social change, attuned to the tension between a faith in art’s autonomy and a belief in art as inextricably committed to our imagining a better world.

At the same time, his unusual understanding of collaboration, about which he makes very specific pronouncements, is the most radical of any of the figures we have looked at. So his work is a good example to close with, as it points to the greatest challenges and promises of collaborative work, and arguably performs the necessary friction that I wish to emphasize.

These are photographs of his *Gramsci Monument*, a structure conceived of as an homage to philosopher Antonio Gramsci. Last summer, the *Gramsci Monument* was erected in the Forest Houses, a housing project in the South Bronx. This site was selected only after two years of research that brought the artist to 47 sites in all 5 boroughs of New York City. Hirschhorn studied the histories of various housing
projects and met with neighborhood representatives, determined to find a community willing to really embrace his proposal, since he would depend on them to realize the work.

The *Gramsci Monument* was built by the people who reside in the Forest Houses, under Hirschhorn’s supervision. As you can see, it’s a sprawling structure, sited under large trees, on a grassy area at the center of the housing project. It’s made, as is Hirschhorn’s custom in virtually all his sculpture, from “low” cheap materials: plywood and brown packing tape, decorated, in his own hand-writing, with statements and quotations that might be seen in the tradition of popular demonstration or protest. The ramshackle appearance of these works gives a sense that they are under construction, or perhaps finished to the barest minimum level, with a rigorous disdain for formal nicety that itself becomes a particular formal style.

The *Gramsci Monument* essentially functioned like a community center, staffed by local residents, and used primarily by them. It included a computer room, a bar and grill, a wading pool, a fully-functioning radio station, an arena for discussion and performance, and a library and archive dedicated to Gramsci and his ideas. There was a daily newspaper produced on-site, art classes for children, discussions, regular philosophical lectures, a play, open-mic sessions, and so on. The *Gramsci Monument* was realized, used, and embodied by a local community, who apparently began to deeply identify with it. As an art world visitor just stopping by you were certainly welcome, but you also felt the unease of voyeurism, since you couldn’t participate in quite the same way. When I visited, I left reflecting on the phenomenon as an artwork, but at the same time facing the troubling shortcomings of social inequality, even or especially in such a lively and almost romantic setting.

Hirschhorn moved himself and his family to the projects for months while the project was underway, and was to be found at the Monument all day every day, working and talking. The structure was up for six weeks, after which everything was either thrown out or raffled off to members of the Forest Houses, leaving no collectible objects for the art market. According to interviews with residents, there was a general feeling of pride in the project and sorrow to see it go.

The usual critique of the project is that people see it as somewhat dubious or condescending social activism, and not as art. Hirschhorn claims very clearly that it is first of all, and only, art. As he says, “I am an artist, not a social worker.” He sees it as an experiment, a laboratory, ready to fail, aesthetically highly controlled, with a clear concept based on his definition of collaboration, working with disagreements rather than against them.

He writes, “I want to propose a new kind of authorship: the Unshared Authorship. This means that me, the artist, I am the author of the *Gramsci Monument*, I am entirely and completely the author…I don’t share the responsibility of my work… But I am not the only author! Because the Other, the one who takes the responsibility of the work also, is equally author. Unshared Authorship is a statement, it’s an assertion, it’s offensive, and it’s a ‘hard’ term, in opposition to the ‘soft’ term ‘collaboration.’ ‘Unshared’
stands for clearness, for a decision, for the non-exclusive, for the opening toward co-existence. Unshared means saying yes to complexity and implies multiplication, not division.”

So what might this mean for us and our interest in collaboration? Hirschhorn irritated a lot of people with his pronouncements, people who took him to mean that he was putting the community to work making a monument to his own ego, something he would claim sole credit for. Notably these were generally art world critics, not participants in the work. So perhaps his view is in fact a bit more complicated, and has to do with a recognition of the complexities of engaging in this kind of work. For him, collaboration means acting in “low control,” like someone on the ground, exhausted, overwhelmed. “Unshared authorship” is his proposal for a new kind of authorship within collaborative formats of cultural production; it would encourage all participants to take full responsibility and full identification with the work, rather than ceding control and responsibility. He hopes to allow everyone who participates in the work to see themselves as authors, authors who do not share their responsibility, who do not see themselves as working together “for” a mystical synthetic thing outside of themselves, but rather identify fully. In other words, “I say this is my project, you say this is your project, rather than we say this is our project.” For Hirschhorn this is an example of true equality. As he writes, “We don’t call these works “collaboration”; we call these works, work created in “unshared responsibility”. “Unshared responsibility” is when each takes unlimited responsibility for the work of the other. It means making no compromises, it means working in friendship.”

To close, let me recall Zygmund Baumann’s thought that “under conditions of liquidity anything could happen, yet nothing can be done with confidence and certainty”. The question we are facing today is, how to set something against this general state of convergence, where everything seems to be in continuous movement, malleable, and open to manipulation? This is why I want to emphasize the awkward uncertainty, the possibility of failure, and the ambition of radical collaboration, which I set against a more relaxed or soft use of the term, in which simply coming together in a nebulous exchange process seems sufficient. The expenditure involved in giving one’s all, which true collaboration demands, might provide ways to resist our commonplace work habits or structures and to generate leaps of faith, leaps of knowledge, leaps in synthesis and identification. In times that favor a general stream of convergence, we might need these forms or methodologies of cultural production more than ever: a science of imaginary solutions; a romantic embracing of the whole of life in order to give it the dignity of art. Our challenge is how to find the context, the people, and the momentum for this kind of collaboration.
GOOD FENCES MAKE GOOD NEIGHBORS: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ESSENTIAL CONDITIONS FOR ARTISTIC COLLABORATION IN A POST-POSTMODERN AGE

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This paper is dedicated to Jan Sawka, great artist, great collaborator, great friend.

INTRODUCTION

In the work of several influential theorists of art and culture the view is put forward that distinctions between art forms, like distinctions of social class, gender, race, literary genre, social role, etc., are arbitrary and repressive.

Working with the text of Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall,” the presenter refers to Clement Greenberg’s updating of Gottfried Lessing’s classic text, Laocoon, as well as other texts to offer a counter-case. This paper uses the concept of social role as focused around social function, asserting that at the present time the distinctions between media, the modality of the senses, and the separate traditions and standards of practice in various art forms are in fact essential to meaningful and important artistic collaboration. Finally, the paper touches on the possibilities for significant inter-art collaboration in the future, in the light of the findings of the inquiry.

MENDING WALL
Robert Frost

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbor know beyond the hill:
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
'Stay where you are until our backs are turned!'
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, 'Good fences make good neighbors'.
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder
If I could put a notion in his head:
'Why do they make good neighbors? Isn't it
Where there are cows?
But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down.' I could say 'Elves' to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me~
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

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This paper is an exploration of the question: What is essential at this point in time for meaningful and valuable collaboration between artists to occur, and for those collaborations to have their full impact in the arts and in culture generally? In order to answer that question, I refer to Robert Frost’s poem, “Mending Wall,” given above, offering an interpretation that I believe will illuminate the issue as it stands at the present time.

A MODERNIST READING OF A MODERNIST POEM

“Mending Wall” was the opening poem in Robert Frost's second book of poems, North of Boston, published in 1914, in England, just before his return to the United States from a sojourn there. As Randall Jarrell, writing in the Kenyon Review in 1952, famously pointed out in “To the Laodiceans,” Frost was anything but unaware of the trends of Modernism early in the 20th Century. In fact, at the time of the publication of North of Boston, he was on friendly terms with that arch-modernist, Ezra Pound, and a number of other modernists working in England. “Mending Wall” is, indeed, for all the trappings of American Regionalism and Agrarianism, a poem that focuses on modernist themes, focuses on the position of the modernist artist, and asks modernist questions, albeit in a coded way.

In the poem, the activity of rebuilding the wall is seen as embedded in a social and natural situation which one has little control, and about which one has only limited knowledge or understanding. The narrator asserts that the wall is damaged by hunters, who will presumably hunt with or without permission, and by the heaving of frost, but no one sees the the forces in action that damage the wall. The account of the processes and causes of the damage done is essentially a mental construct.

Whatever the cause, each Spring the wall is discovered to be damaged. It must be recreated through a familiar, oft-repeated, process, described in the poem, but that process differs in detail each time, because the damage is different each year. The end result of the repair is also presumably different each time, but not significantly different. Just as the process is similar, it leads to a familiar and similar endpoint. Wall mending (not building) is seen as an activity in which a tradition is followed and the product is a close variation on the past products that make up that tradition. It’s hard work, wearing the “fingers rough,” but also there is room for playfulness, as evidenced by the “spell” the narrator and his neighbor pretend to cast on the anthropomorphized stones.

Near the end of the poem, however, the narrator, extending the thought of their activity as a game, on impulse asks the pragmatic and modernist question regarding the conditions and purpose of their shared activity. The theme of the poem is revealed in that questioning by the narrator: Why do we have to rebuild the wall at all in those parts where it does not serve a purpose of keeping something on one side of the line or the other? In other words, does the actual situation in the world warrant this practice? If not, then isn’t our activity, at least in part, without purpose other than for its own fulfillment? Is it without “meaning” in the sense derived from pragmatic purpose?
In answer, the neighbor repeats a line he’d heard from his father, “Good fences make good neighbors,” focusing attention on the social purpose of the wall, as a marker of social relationship, not on its function of walling in or walling out. The wall marks the limits of the land, of ownership, even if there is no other purpose for it. With a wall properly placed, neither neighbor can claim to have forgotten the boundary, nor can they lay claim to the other person’s property, but, more essentially, each neighbor knows his or her place. By implication, each neighbor knows how to play their social role. The wall, serves a more abstract practical purpose in the social dimension—it is being described in terms that are shifting towards the symbolic. However, that shift is prompted by a question prompted by a clear sense of the physical and social present moment. But even with the shift to a more abstract level, the response of the neighbor is intended to provide an answer, to end the discussion.

The narrator, however, is not satisfied by this shift of frame to the social, nor the answer provided in that frame. The neighbor had opened the door to a more abstract level of conversation, and the narrator uses this as a springboard, attempting to open a much more abstract, symbolic, open-ended, speculative, skeptical conversation. Speaking from a persistent impulse to question the traditional wisdom, he seeks to engage his neighbor in a more wide-ranging discussion. “Why do they make good neighbors?” he asks, drawing attention back to the practical purpose of walling in and walling out, of dividing, that walls perform, and sophistically referring to the act of building (not rebuilding) of walls as being possibly aggressive (giving “offense”) and demanding a kind of circumspection and reflection that has not been part of their interaction to that point. He invites the neighbor to speculate, to seek more accurate descriptions, more complete understandings, by being contrary, and avoiding being pinned down.

The narrator continues to speak after the his neighbors dictum not merely because of the lack of some purposes in some parts of this wall, but also because of an impulse associated with that “something that does not love a wall” invoked in the opening lines of the poem, and now repeated, with a different meaning, for that “something” exists without and within the narrator. He hopes that his neighbor will share in the realization that he is feeling, in his flight of fancy and speculation, thinking to term that “something” “Elves,” but hoping that the neighbor names it himself. It is clear from the poem that he means something associated with the imagination of which human beings are capable, but which his neighbor eschews.

Following his flight of more-or-less unshared verbal fancy, and his rejected invitation, the narrator describes his neighbor in terms of Paleolithic primitivism, moving in darkness “Not of the woods only and the shade of trees,” and there is a frisson of alienation from not only from this neighbor, but also from those who cannot accept the invitation to imagine, who cannot “go behind” a father’s saying, who like the fact that it occurred to them, and take that mental event as being thought. They cannot join someone who wishes to innovate for the hell of it, to experiment, to “make it new”—the task of the modernist artist. The narrator’s feeling is beyond that of alienation; it passes into a fear.

The Modernist Artist
In its expression of the fear alluded to above, Frost’s poem reveals itself as a modernist and an elitist document. It can be usefully read in terms of a useful fiction of the poet’s intentions, as a statement of the situation of the modernist artist in but not entirely of his society. This idea of the artist, a pioneering one in the United States at the time of composition of the poem, had become so pervasive that by 1924, H. L. Mencken could write in the Baltimore Evening Sun (a daily newspaper!) that “It is almost safe to assume that an artist of any dignity is against his country, i.e., against the environment in which God hath placed him, as it is to assume that his country is against the artist.” Although Mencken mentions in this article many artists of the past, it is clear that his idea of the artist is the post-Romantic, Modernist idea. The “true” artist is a social critic. He or she is one who recognizes the uses of customary ways of doing things, but for whom the need to question the actual usefulness of the practice, given the present situation, is paramount. One can read it as a parable of dealing with a changed situation, when the individual questions the situation, questions the application of the rule to the activity that it regulates.

As I have asserted in my exegesis, given above, in “Mending Wall,” Robert Frost grapples with one of the core questions of Modernism, a question which Clement Greenberg asked in his essays, “Towards a Newer Laocoon” and “Modernist Painting,” in the later saying, “The essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticise the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it but in order to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” In terms of artist practice, the question could be couched in this way: “What can an artist using this particular medium do better than an artist using any other medium?” Another way of phrasing this question would be, “What is essential in this particular medium?” This last was a question addressed rigorously by Lessing, in his Laocoon, to which Greenberg is specifically referring in his articles.

The recent MoMA show, Inventing Abstraction: 1910-1925, points to the direction which many modern artists took in answering this question, and which Greenberg appreciates in his above-mentioned studies, they moved towards abstraction in the visual arts. In art history, a prevailing interpretation sees this trend as a shift away from the Western techniques devoted to visual realism, for which the goal is that the pictured world resembles the real world as presented to us visually as much as possible, toward an autonomy in the arts from representation. This trend is seen as having a number of causative factors, chief among them the impact of photography on the media environment of Western Europe, and in particular, Paris, resulting in painters asking the modernist question for the first time, not as with Lessing, in his Laocoon, in terms of the relationships of different arts to each other—a line of inquiry by which the distinction between them is made clear in relation to their essential characteristics, but in relation to a new medium, a technological advance that challenges the place and the purpose of the art form on its own ground, in relation to a potential shift in what the late Neal Postman termed the “media environment.”

This shift towards abstraction still retained the artist as a “maker” of images, artifacts, experiences for a recipient of their work, and retained the idea of the role of the artist as an outgrowth of the role of the
artisan, together with the Romantic idea of artistic expression on the part of the artist, and, eventually, the artist as creator in the sense of origin of innovation, of creation, like that of the Old Testament God, ex nihilo. This was the Modernist concept of the artist, as evoked in Frost’s poem, derived from the earlier Romantic concept of the role, by way of the Symbolist Movement. It had its roots in the emergence of the artist role from that of the artisan at the end of the Middle Ages.

THE POSTMODERN SHIFT

Postmodernism may be seen as originally a movement in epistemology, the philosophical study of knowledge and knowledge claims. It was a response to scientific movements in philosophy, notably Logical Positivism, which asserted that knowledge claims in the humanities, indeed, in any discourse that was not firmly materialist and quantifiable was, as Carnap put it, “nonsense.” The infiltration of the scientific attitude in literary criticism led to the American New Criticism, which sought to focus on the facts of the text to the exclusion of all extraneous information, and formalism in criticism in the arts. In the late 1960’s, postmodern thought picked up where Phenomenology and Existentialism left off, and, while allowing the knowledge claims of science, essentially asserted that they did not matter, because ultimately, on the most profound and general level, language did not communicate and there were no firm meanings possible. Through a series of intellectual shifts and strange conjunctions which I will not rehearse here, the critical text became divorced from the idea of truth, and the criterion for judgment of such a text was not referential adequacy in relation to the work of art critiqued. Rather, the criterion for judging the critical text became aesthetic. At the same time, conceptual and minimalist art began to make inroads in the art world, and the practice of artists, deeply influenced by Thomas Kuhn’s recently published Structure of Scientific Revolutions, focused on ideas and the idea, and continued a radical stripping away of practices and techniques that had been essential in Western Art since the Renaissance, in an effort to, as the modernists put it, “make it new” (North). After the 1960’s, these trends continued, with artists, critics, and theorists of art and culture attempting to create valid and important work, and continuing to perform their social functions, however they might be defined.

Concepts and practices were created in the interpretive communities of philosophy, literary criticism and that nebulous realm of theory, which, when first introduced, promised a great freeing of discourses that had threatened to run out of steam. What came to be conceived of and termed as postmodernism offered a way forward. If one could write a text of criticism about all the things that were not included in a work, rather than attempting to account for what was included in the work, the possibilities were endless! There was a radical opening of the boundaries, a radical expansion of the definition of what constituted an acceptable performance of the act of interpretation. One did not have to be burdened by the concept of the unconsciousness, or of one’s class identity. Social roles were open to question. One could construct identity through focusing on the various social contexts or dimensions by which the individual located him or herself.
The multiple contradictions and paradoxes of postmodern discourse in the arts need not retain us too much here. Suffice it to say that postmodern thought has sought to undercut the complex of ideas of modernism, and the associated artistic practice, moving beyond modernism. In theory, Kant as culmination of the entire philosophical tradition has been supplanted and the relentless questioning of Heidegger has become emblematic of the proper stance and project of a thinker committed to thinking. In art, Cezanne, the proto-modernist, served as inspiration for one who continued to question his medium, but Duchamp, with his kick over the figurative artistic chessboard has shown where such questioning in the realm of artistic practice could go. Duchamp’s ready-mades have become the template for countless works of art. The work of art has become not an object or event to be experienced by recipients of the work, who can be described as individuals, possessing individual experiences, but rather, in Mukarovsky’s formulation, a “semantic gesture” within a discourse, conceived of as analogous to a conversation (Deak).

THE “HOLLOWING-OUT” OF THE ARTIST ROLE

With the shift towards the conceptual, and the focus on the literary, seen in the late-modernist trend of Structuralism, which metaphorically extended concepts of linguistics to other realms of human organization, the ideas of theory and the texts that promulgated them came to be privileged by artists. Tom Wolfe pointed out this shift in late modernism in The Painted Word, a much-maligned (and usually miscategorized) document that still contains a useful nugget of truth. As Wolfe had it, artists (in 1975) were beginning to paint in response to theories promulgated by those playing other roles in society, rather than the artworks leading to the theories which made sense of them. Practices based on discourses other than that of art production entered into the social contexts of art creation. Especially important are the inroads of late Marxist thinking common in France and England in the late 60’s and 70’s, which sought to “demystify” the idea of individual artistic creativity, by pointing to social factors that were often overlooked in accounts of the production of works of art. Critics and theorists (e.g., Janet Wolff) have suggested that there is no such thing as individual talent, or creativity—an artist exists and functions in terms of his social context. This weakening of the idea of creativity weakens the tradition of the artist role that stretches back to that of the artisan and weakens the bond between the artist role and the process of art-making. Thus the social role of the artist can blur. No longer need the artist make art—if the work is a gesture in a discourse, rather than an occasion of experience for the recipient, then the artist can become a brand, and the artist an actor of the role in social occasions, without ever needing to perform that aspect of the role having to do with the actual creation of works of art. I will not rehearse the details of this trend, but wish to emphasize the extension of conceptualism and the development of “post-studio” practice. I do not mean to suggest a mechanistic formulation in which “theory” has necessarily led to this effect, but that trends in theory and trends in art practice have occurred at the same time.

The atmosphere of postmodern, radical relativism represents the last gasp of Western European “intellectual” critical marxism, which seeks, in the work of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, et al. to deny the
existence of anything resembling “human nature,” or, indeed, any aspect of the individual untouched by socialization. Thus, like the God who is also denied, the artist cannot be creative in any originary sense. A number of assumptions lying behind my “modernist” interpretation, including that there might be something that can be termed “human nature,” or “interiority” to a person, or that there might be aspects of individual creativity separable from the Romantic myth of the isolated artist, are denied in the “standard version” of postmodern ideology, and are taken as the new, postmodern “orthodoxy” and truth formed, not by assertion, but by negation. The postmodern artist has, for the most part, lived and made art in a world where the question of the essential attributes of a medium are not important. Following Duchamp, the emphasis has come to be upon transgressivity in terms of the cultural surround, rather than any intrinsic sensual or semantic qualities in the work of art itself.

The modernist project has been supplanted by lines of inquiry which focus on the exploitation of discourses and archives that were established outside of the discourse of the arts. My modernist reading of a modernist poem seems quaint given the fashions of postmodern reading, for which all interpretations are of equal validity, because “validity” is not the key criterion—rather an artful “aesthetic” performance of the act of more-or-less evoking the act of reading becomes operative. Truth is replaced by “truthishness,” the simulacrum of truth, interpretation is seen as an activity that has no necessary end-point. There can be no necessary judging between interpretations, because there is no end-point, and no ideal of a “perfect” interpretation, towards which the discourse of interpretations tends, except when the reality of interpretation is falsified by the members of the community, who, for reasons of their own, privilege certain interpretations and communications more than others. Generally these reasons are seen to have to do with power and the social relationships within the group, not any necessary aspect of the medium of language.

The atmosphere of postmodern, radical relativism represents the last gasp of Western European “intellectual” critical marxism, which seeks, in the work of Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, et al. to deny the existence of anything resembling “human nature,” or, indeed, any aspect of the individual untouched by socialization. Thus, like the God who is also denied, the artist cannot be creative in any originary sense. A number of assumptions lying behind my “modernist” interpretation, including that there might be something that can be termed “human nature,” or “interiority” to a person, or that there might be aspects of individual creativity separable from the Romantic myth of the isolated artist, are denied in the “standard version” of postmodern ideology, and are taken as the new, postmodern “orthodoxy” and truth formed, not by assertion, but by negation. The postmodern artist has, for the most part, lived and made art in a world where the question of the essential attributes of a medium are not important. Following Duchamp, the emphasis has come to be upon transgressivity in terms of the cultural surround, rather than any intrinsic sensual or semantic qualities in the work of art itself.

It is my contention that the eventual effects of postmodern theory and artistic practice, as that discourse has continued, have led to a “hollowing out” of the role of both the artist and the critic as these roles were defined in Modernism. For our purposes here, I will be focusing on how this trend has
undermined the philosophical and practical basis for artistic activity in general, and collaboration in particular. The "hollowing out" mentioned above is already present in Frost's modernist poem when the narrator moves from the modernist, pragmatic questions, to postmodern questions, prompted not by the situation, but by the urge to endless questioning and speculation—the questions, and the conversational "move" of which they are a part which his neighbor refuses to engage. In a sense, the poem contains the seeds of the destruction—or at least degeneration—of the artist's role, which is enshrined in the poem. Those seeds lie in the very questions and the very conversational stance used to dramatically promulgate that role and social position in the poem. But more than merely the artist's role is undercut. Look once more at the shift from the original modernist question: “Why have the wall where its purpose of walling in or walling out is not served?” to the postmodern questions and speculations in which the narrator indulges when the neighbor evokes the social function of the wall. These are questions and statements made out of an urge to negate, to disagree, not for the purpose of saving time, but as moves in the conversation that is seen as a form of play, rather than a conversation through which a decision will be made. In other words, just as the narrator does not see any possibility for meaningful collaboration, in the modernist framework—that is, making it new, the very questions he asks to attempt some kind of breaking beyond the meaningless (in modernist terms) collaboration make even meaningful postmodern collaboration very difficult.

**COLLABORATION**

What do we mean when we use the word, “collaboration?” “Collaboration” describes a structure of interactions that lead to a product. What kind of social structure? What are the assumptions? What follows are three assumptions on which I will base my description of the context of collaboration.

First assumption: If there is, as postmodern thought suggests, no such thing as originary creativity, the social system or group is predominant, and everyone is replaceable in the social system—then art is merely recycling what already culturally exists. Then any member of the social system, even the microsystem of a group of collaborators, can be replaced without there being any significant difference. But let us for our purposes say that there is such a thing as creativity, that is, human individuals have unique traits that cause their versions of the materials that they produce based upon the cultural archive to be capable of being distinguished. Human beings are not, as Foucault (1980, 1994) and other postmodern theorists would have it, socially conditioned “all the way down.” In other words, there are individual, biological aspects of an individual that are part of that person’s equipment, even though, since human beings are social beings, we may never experience such things outside of a social context, we can imagine them as such, and for the sake of argument, can make useful attempts to distinguish the physical, the biological, and the innate—and unique—aspects of an individual.

Second assumption: Given the significant uniqueness of the individual, there is also such a thing as talent—these are terms used to describe aspects of human behavior that have a venerable history, but they have been sharply criticized in the postmodern discourse—Let us bring them back. So let us for
the sake of discussion say that a collaboration has to do with individuals who have talents and skills that are also individual, so that it does make a difference who participates in the group--this does seem to be common sense, but then, postmodern theory and practice are often not based on common sense, because the point is to test and transcend the boundaries that common sense might impose.

Third assumption: If there is such a thing as talent--that is, an innate ability to perform certain tasks better than other human beings might be able to do them, then there is such a thing as skill, and skills can be developed. Denis Dutton, in his article “Has Conceptual Art Jumped the Shark Tank” (Dutton), points out that human beings have an appreciation of the skillful performance, as evidenced by the skillfully produced artifact. In this article, Dutton points to this aspect of human beings as being essentially “hard-wired,” and of evolutionary importance. It has a survival value. Oh, and this means that there is a point to education--“innate” talent is modified through experience to yield greater skill--that is, one performs tasks more effectively. This education can take many, many forms. As Bob Dylan, who cannot read music, once said in an interview, “I listen A LOT.”

For collaboration, one needs individuals, as described above, who are performing related tasks that lead to a product. But this is not enough for us to have a collaboration. Certain kinds of social system/interaction are excluded from the term. For example, let us say that an artist who shall remain nameless comes up with a concept for a work of art. It involves casting a sculpture. Let us say that he sends his third assistant to pick out examples of a certain kind of item, for instance, blow-up sex dolls, and deliver them to the foundry. Let us say the workers at the foundry cast 20 different bronze versions of these blow up dolls, creating molds from the originals. A different assistant shows up and picks the ten that he feels most fit with the artist’s instructions. He takes photos of them. The artist examines the photos, and picks three, which are then packed and shipped to the gallery. The artist picks the one he likes best, which goes into his latests show, but keeps the other two in storage at his dealer. A number of postmodern themes are touched upon by this process and the resulting products, among them appropriation, the transfer of images from low art to high art (a critique of aesthetics), the commodification of sexuality, the alienation of the postmodern world, etc. etc. But can this process usefully be termed a collaboration?

I believe that most people would say that, although to term it a collaboration could be framed as a critique of the idea of artistic process or of collaboration, what I have described above essentially is not a collaboration. Even though there is a differentiation of roles, it is one that is not based on the same dimension of skills. The process of creation is monitored, but it is always monitored from the point of view of reception, never from the point of view of the manipulation of materials. The artist does not get his hands dirty. He is not “making.” In a sense, the role of artist as outlined here is not based in making, and does not bear reference to the role of artisan, but rather is more closely related to that of patron or of entrepreneur. Something is missing that would make this a collaboration. Perhaps at some point, aspects of this process could be seen as a collaboration, for example, if the artist and his dealer got together for a few drinks and in the process of the conversation, they came up with the concept of
the piece together, perhaps that could be seen as a collaborative process. Or would it depend upon who paid for the drinks? Or, another example: the overseer and the slave--can they be seen as collaborating in bringing in the crop? It seems clear that a certain relative parity of power is necessary for a collaboration to be a collaboration.

And this returns us to the poem.

A PARABLE OF COLLABORATION FOR THE POST-POSTMODERN AGE?

If “collaboration” means the working together of people who are more-or-less equal in power and talent, then “Mending Wall” can be read as a parable of collaboration in an age when we need such parables. First, “Mending Wall” emphasizes the activity of building between equals—each person voluntarily enters into the interaction, both benefit equally from it, and share equally in authorship. Their skills are presented as commensurate. The task is, as habitually performed, fairly rote. In “Mending Wall” a shift is presented, in which the narrator moves to a more conceptual level than his neighbor. He suggests conversations and innovations in process that, should his neighbor accept them, would lead to a shift in relationship. The neighbor refuses to engage in that conversation, refuses the shift—refuses to ask the modernist conversation. What if he had done so? The collaboration would have changed, and might have moved from being a collaboration to being something else. There was a moment of risk that was refused—and the neighbor cannot be part of the modernist conversation.

The point is that the postmodern conversation has been the modernist conversation continued on different terms. Perhaps we are to the point where that questioning of the categories and boundaries of modernism that was at one time a search for essences, and then became an attack on boundaries, whether based on essences or not, have reached a point of diminished returns. Perhaps we have come to a point in cultural history where it is time to return to the tradition, because that which the modernists reacted against has been marginalized—to the world of fantasy paintings and landscapes. Perhaps conceptual art is the new kitsch—not sentimental and false, but provoking false conversations that show up the divisions of society and get in the way of concerted action, of collaborations on other levels. Perhaps it is time that we stand upon our side of the wall, and not give in to the something there is that does not love a wall, because good fences have a use, and the rebuilding of them is a worthwhile activity. After a point, when that which does not love a wall, that wants it down, has succeeded, has become the dominant force in society, it is a time of building up walls, because there is a necessity to establish and maintain distinctions. This does not mean that the modernist question cannot be asked, but the time of the postmodern asking of the question, based on the existence of social forms in and of themselves, has passed—And it is time to ask the modernist question as originally couched, because technological progress continues, and media shift in relation to each other as new means of communication and image-making arise.
By extension, the shared activity of rebuilding, the following through in the maintenance of the tradition of building, embodied in these two, the ritual of remaking, repeated over and over, is also important. What also makes good neighbors is this way of collaborating--each one on his respective side of the divide, each staying on his side, and each acting as an individual, yet building together, that also makes good neighbors, good citizens, in that part of the art world having to do with art production, as well as in society in general.

When I began this study, I thought that the working of the two characters on the opposite sides of the wall could be read as the importance of the difference between the two skill-sets of the collaborators--in order for a collaboration to be fruitful, there must be a synergy--the combination of the two must be greater than the sum of the two--or else what is the point? One could have the collaboration of the market--that which Ricardo first pointed out--that we can exchange those products that each most efficiently produces, and that yields more than otherwise--but I am thinking of a kind of synergy that occurs when two or more people engage in an open-ended process of creation together. Each must have cultivated their skills, and have different areas of expertise and knowledge--it’s easy when, say, a musician and lyricist collaborate together--when the fence is between media or art forms--and there is a recognition that skill, talent, training matter.

I have earlier pointed out that the continued statements by the narrator can be read as a postmodern shift in the conversation. This shift, had his neighbor participated in it, could have been from collaborative work, and creation within a frame of activity that was shared and defined, towards collaboration in developing a new frame--and this was the liberating promise of postmodernism. It is my belief that the promise of postmodernism has worn itself out, and that it is time for a move to post-postmodernism.

**TOWARDS A POST-POSTMODERNISM**

Postmodernism, shadowboxes with modernism. In reality, it continues the battles of modernism, the pretentions to the mantle of the avant-garde, of the modernist artist, while denying much that is assumed within the modernist frame. It is, essentially, an attenuated modernism, a modernism that has drawn its substance out gossamer thin, just as the narrator draws out the conversation to a point where it ceases to be about any practical purpose. This does not mean that postmodern arguments serve no purpose, but they primarily serve an aesthetic one, while the works of art which are created in relation to them are drained of aesthetic value or aspect.

There are a number of steps or conceptual moves that this commentator would suggest as potentially useful in moving forward. The first is the revalidation of the idea of truth in the arts and the humanities. Decisions and value judgments need to be made, and we need a language that allows for them to be made. This is not to assert judgments for all time, or to assert that value and truth judgments are somehow “purified” of politics and power--the postmodern analysis showed that this is
not possible—but the critique that formed the postmodern impetus has gone on long enough, and it is
time to consolidate the gains that have been made in the fields of discourse having to do with
knowledge in the arts and humanities, even as those gains are presently being made in other discourses,
including the discourse of politics. What I am not suggesting is a reestablishment of the old hegemonic
discourse that postmodernism critiqued, but a more nuanced shift back toward the establishment of
working hypotheses in order to put forward artistic and intellectual products that can be seen as
offering an alternative to artistic and intellectual products that are created within the postmodern
frame—a frame that denies that it is a frame, but as power shifted to the new paradigm, and as the
holders of the old paradigm because inactive, ignored, or died, as Thomas Kuhn describes in The
Structure of Scientific Revolutions, the new boss, as the Who put it in “Don’t Get Fooled Again,” looked a lot like the old boss. The avowed humanistic direction of postmodern thought went the way of
many a revolution, following what critics have called in William Blake “The Urizen Cycle,” by which
the revolutionary figure becomes, when given power and authority, an authority figure, and the gestures
of a critique of truth and orthodoxy harden into the orthodoxy.

This revalidation requires language that is conceived of as having a denotative connection to objects
and processes that exist in the real world. In a world in which there is a tendency to believe that all
values are not only set by markets, but are created by markets, we need to remember that our symbol
systems bear a relationship to a world in which we are present as embodied. We have arrived at a
moment when beliefs, truth statements, and artistic practices and styles that would have been
retrograde in 1975 are perhaps the tools by which society can move forward. One can refer to the
theorists like Umberto Eco and the philosophers like Wittgenstein and the English “Natural Language”
philosophers who insist that one can look at the pragmatics of language, without seeking foundations
and exact meanings that hold universal truths, in order to establish contingent truths that can be used
by discourse and interpretive communities to get things done. As my brother put it, in a private
communication, “...we still live in a real world of politics and war, and postmodernist's claims to being
somehow liberalism on steroids or beyond progressivism, have fallen short of what they at first offered,
and their philosophical assumptions can be taken to support right-wing politics just as easily (as any
leftist/liberationist agenda).”

Room needs to be made in our media and discourse world for discourses that allow for the existence of
non-material realities. Although advances in neuroscience promise to explain thought and
consciousness as epiphenomena of biochemical reactions, the innate paradoxicality of human beings
trying to explain and describe themselves will very probably make a mockery of this promise. The
metaphorical and figurative language of religion deal with aspects of human experience that would
otherwise be victim to paradox and a draining away of expressive or other use. Whereof one cannot
speak, one must, as Wittgenstein put it, be silent. But perhaps one can draw a picture.

The necessary connection between artistic practice and the ownership of the resultant artifact or event
needs to be reestablished. The basis of this reaffirmed connection should be upon the artist’s direct
experience of the emergence of the work of art through the manipulation of the materials. This reestablishment of connection should NOT primarily be effected through the writings of critics and art theorists basing their inquiries and conclusions in the experience and discourses of reception, but rather be effected by a validation of the writings of artists which report on their direct experience of the emergence of works of art in their own art practice. No one but an artist, who is intimately concerned with the processes of emergence, can authentically produce an account of a work or works of art from this perspective.

In addition, there needs in the discourse of art education be a recognition of the transformation of consciousness that an artistic studio practice that involves the manipulation of materials and the use of tools brings about in the art practitioner, rather than the connection between the concepts with which the artist worked in creating the piece—perhaps—or perhaps grafts onto the work of art more or less after the fact of its emergence, through a reading from the completed work to a body of literature that bestow on the work conceptual bona fides that are deemed necessary at the present time. The artist’s account of his or her process, and of what was revealed to them during the process—technically, intellectually, or emotionally, is more important than various discourses external to that of art production.

It is necessary at this time to reject what has become a fallacious connection between representational art and making of objects with soi-disant “conservative” politics or “social issues.” There is room for a REAL realism and a REAL Symbolist movement that would stand opposed to the present-day conceptualism, transgressivism, and minimalism which are finally about the financial health and well-being of major institutions and of a small segment of the population, in spite of didactic works of art of limited aesthetic value and sensual content that purport to engage issues such as global warming, population, the exploitation of the third world, etc. etc. In fact, such works operate within a framework defined by a postmodern discourse that has been utterly coopted, and collaboration within that framework does not challenge it, but rather serves to reinscribe it, because it does not challenge the aesthetic assumptions and epistemological assumptions on which the postmodern debate is framed. To see how pointless such collaboration is, given the postmodern conception of the self and the idea that talent and skill do not matter, and that even the object or the event does not matter, but rather the framing text is what matters, like a derivative financial instrument is what you make the “real” money on.

The orthodoxy of postmodernism excludes many discourses, while at the same time waving the banner of openness—but it is a certain kind of openness, to a laundry list of causes and beliefs. For example, religious belief is most emphatically OUT. However, is this necessary in order to live the life of a thoroughly postmodern person (who, of course, only exists socially). Let us, in the spirit of Robert Frost’s narrator, perhaps, suggest that a distinction might usefully be made between faith and fundamentalism. Faith means the use of a system of ideas with a commitment to it—while allowing for other systems of ideas to be used by other people. Fundamentalism denies the truth and utility of systems of ideas to which one is not committed. To oppose one fundamentalism with another does not
solve the problem, but is, rather, as James P. Carse puts it in Finite and Infinite Games, to merely play another finite game, in which there are winners and losers. Carse points out that culture is an infinite game, in which change occurs so that the game continues, that is, remains infinite, that there are no winners and losers, and finally, that there is ONE infinite game. We can choose to play that one game, which is devoted to its continuance, but the questions and gestures of postmodernism no longer are those that will provide the necessary changes to keep the game going. This seems to be what we are engaged in in our postmodern world, but the possibilities that are symbolized in the discourses of religions are rejected out of hand within the postmodern standard picture of the universe. Perhaps we need some of those possibilities in order to make artistic production and artistic collaboration meaningful today.

To return to our narrower focus, the social role of the artist needs to be focused around studio practice, and the discipline of making, which transforms the consciousness of the practioner, even as skill is attained--so that the maker understands and sees things that would not be understood or seen otherwise. The focus needs to be on the core symbolic product of the artist, the work of art, rather than on all the ancillary aspects of the work of art, even though those are important. Let me describe this by an extension of the phenomenological terms used to describe how vision appear to us--there is a central part of our visual field that is in focus, while we also have peripheral vision. The central focus of the artist needs to be the process of making, and the peripheral vision is what surrounds that process and the experience of being in the studio.

This, of course, does not mean that the artist should neglect other aspects of the role, but what do artists do? What is their core symbolic product? What is their skill, what do they know that no one else knows? What experience do they have that no one else has--they have the direct experience of the emergence of their work. They own that experience in a way that they do not own the work when it is completed. They can share that experience, through writing about it, and by extension, by showing or selling the work, but they cannot sell that experience, even if they teach. It qualifies them to teach, because they have something to share. It also qualifies them to collaborate.

At the present time the distinctions between media, the modality of the senses, and the separate traditions and standards of practice in various art forms are in fact essential to meaningful and important artistic collaboration. Although I can entertain the conception of collaboration in a context where everyone is considered to be capable of doing anything, where the standard is not the quality of the product, but the infamy of the result, or the audacity of the attempt, or the notoriety of the exploit, where the experience of the recipient of the work of art does not matter, nor the experience of the artist--there is something to be said for the divisions between media, and the division between artist and audience--good fences, that is, not only well-made, and traditional, but fences that meet the criterion suggested by the modernist question of the narrator of the poem--that are useful, that do serve a purpose--good in that sense--they may make of us all better neighbors and better collaborators--that is, better members of whatever social entities of which we find ourselves a part.
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THE ARTIST AS AVATAR AND THE COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS

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We have been guided by myth and ritual and a connection to Nature from our beginning, yet our ever-present tendency to rationalize, disconnect, exploit, commodify, destroy, and our arrogant disassociation to Nature, has caused a disintegration of morality and spirituality worldwide creating a demythologized world. Because we ignore the concept of what is sacred, mysterious, magical or numinous, Modern humans are disorientated and disconnected from our Mother, Earth, others, each other and themselves.

Cultural and ecological healing are required. Demonstrating courage, a sense of selflessness and the abandonment of speciesism, artists, writers, biologists and philosophers are incorporating these issues into their work due to the realization that it is our reconnecting to Nature that is critical to all species’ survival. Empowered by a posthumanist philosophy to allow Nature to heal and therefore, to heal us, it is a collective consciousness that is manifested by these Avatars of our times who are abandoning anthropocentrism, ignoring the concept of Other and embracing a reconnectedness to Nature.

Once we are reminded to see, hear, be, it seems so simple, so clear. In the words of Joseph Campbell, “. . . if you think of ourselves coming out of the earth, rather than having been thrown in here from somewhere else, you see that we are the earth, we are the consciousness of the earth. These are the eyes of the earth. And this is the voice of the earth.”

Today we are confused and distracted by the media, science and each other. Being silent or remaining in denial are options that we cannot afford. As we are only part of the interconnectivity of the earth, battling it means battling ourselves. We continue to build, continue to invade other species’ environments, and pollute, seemingly without consequence. The species we take from are silent, voiceless.

Many artists have used their voices to create political art that challenges us and offers us a restoration of our moral consciousness. They present reminders as to who we once were, who we are and who we aspire to be. It is the Artist who has been a great warrior, a defender in the war that has always seduced and consumed us. It is the ancient one we struggle with, the one that is inherent within us, the war on ethics and power. Artists have worked alone and they have worked as collaborators, but some have worked with awareness in order to transform consciousness through art.

Three living artists today have incorporated the theme of power and powerlessness in their work and all three have made specific reference to the Holocaust, to animals and to the subject of containment. Dominance, subordination, power and submission are the qualities most often depicted when
Judy Chicago has promoted a consciousness of moral importance in her major works; all of which have been collaborations. In 1993, after eight years of research, Chicago and her husband, photographer and collaborator, Donald Woodman, challenged the art of the documentary and premiered their collaboration, “The Holocaust Project: From Darkness Into Light” which incorporated painting, tapestry, stained glass and photography.

In her book, *Holocaust Project, From Darkness Into Light*, Chicago wrote, “I wondered again whether art could really help in confronting the Holocaust so that its lessons could be applied. Perhaps the Nazis were afraid of modern art for a good reason. Visual art has the power to provide us with a way of facing aspects of reality that are too painful to approach except through the oblique path that art allows.”

Chicago realized that the Jewish experience of the Holocaust demonstrated a vulnerability of not only all human beings but also all other species of our planet. Slavery, the war in Vietnam, laboratory experiments on animals, nuclear testing and its waste, and the fate of endangered species are addressed in Chicago’s and Woodman’s project. Chicago commented her research on the Holocaust had led her to the conclusion that it was essential to dehumanize human beings in order to “process” them:

> I had learned that during the Industrial Revolution pigs were the first “things” on the assembly line. I began to wonder about the ethical distinction between processing pigs and doing the same thing to people defined as pigs. Many would argue that moral considerations do not have to be extended to animals, but this is just what the Nazis said about the Jews. Others argue, or believe subconsciously, that animals exist for human use. They assume that people are more important than other species and are horrified when human beings are treated like animals.

As philosopher Theodore Adorno, a German Jew forced into exile by the Nazis wrote, “Auschwitz begins wherever someone looks at a slaughterhouse and thinks: they’re only animals” (qtd. in Patterson, *Eternal Treblinka*, 53).

Chicago further states:

> Some people have been offended by the fact that we are suggesting parallels between the destruction of European Jewry and the genocide of other cultures and the mass slaughter of other species. But I believe that it is this larger context of genocide and destruction that created the conditions for the Holocaust and that, in the future, people will look back upon the massacre of other species during the nineteenth and twentieth
centuries as being genocidal in nature. But that will be a shared view only when we evolve to the point where we understand that all species have the right to coexist on the Earth and that other creatures do not exist merely as means to human ends.  

Art Spiegelman frequently collaborates with his wife, Francoise Mouly, who is the art editor for the New Yorker. Their collaborations have included Raw Magazine in 1980; a large format magazine of graphics, comics and text, and in 1998, Little Lit, an anthology of comics for children.

Proving that the comic can shape cultural ideology, Art Spiegelman won a Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for his graphic novel, Maus: A Survivor’s Tale, published in 1986. Based on interviews with his father, it is his account, in comic book style, using cats and mice as characters, of his parents’ experiences as Polish Jews in the Holocaust. He said that it was not until he left home that he realized “that not everybody had parents who woke up screaming in the night.”

The impetus for Maus was a three-page strip that Spiegelman was asked to take part in an “Underground Comic” along with Robert Crumb and other underground cartoonists in San Francisco. “The only editorial premise was one used anthropomorphized creatures rather than people.” He considered doing work regarding black oppression in America, but realized that he had more personal knowledge of his own background in regards to oppression and could do more meaningful work.

Maus is two volumes; Maus I, A Survivor’s Tale and Maus II: And Here my Troubles Began. Spiegelman drew Jews as mice, Nazis as cats, the Poles as pigs and the Americans as dogs. Spiegelman said:

By using these mask-like faces, where characters look more or less the same, a sketchier drawing style, I am able to focus one’s attention on the narrative while still telling it in comic strip form. So that distancing device actually brings one closer to the heart of the material than a true comix [sic] approach.”

Echoing the comments of Judy Chicago, Spiegelman adds, “The rhetoric of the genocide that the Nazis used had to do with the extermination of vermin; it wasn’t murdering people, it was squashing parasites, lice, rats.”

Sue Coe’s web site is appropriately called “Graphic Witness.” Similarly in describing Chicago’s work, or Spiegelman’s, using words like provocative and powerful to describe Coe’s work, seem cliché. Coe has researched and illustrated subjects such as slaughterhouses, factory farming, the subject of containment, the cruelty towards animals in entertainment, AIDS, prisons, apartheid and war – ugly things. Things we prefer to turn away from, and worse, ignore. She records what is concealed and what we are indifferent to. In my own involvement with animals, I have done rescues and witnessed cruelty cases. I have seen humans do their worst. These experiences are imprinted in my brain and remembered by me. Coe puts the images she sees out into the world for all to see and to be imprinted
by. She witnesses and records through her art. Those recordings go beyond her personal experience to collectively become our experience.

Terrence des Pres, who wrote, The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps, said, “In the literature of survival, we find an image of things so grim, so heartbreaking, so starkly unbearable, that inevitably the survivor’s scream begins to be our own. When this happens the role of the spectator is no longer enough.”

Coe is an artist who responds to those screams that are mostly silenced behind closed doors. Coe grew up in England literally next to a slaughterhouse. Next to the slaughterhouse was a memorial to World War I and next to that, one for World War II. She realized later that no one seemed to make the connection that all three structures represented mass slaughter. “When I asked my parents about World War II and the Holocaust, they said, ‘But we didn’t know’…It’s not that we didn’t know, we did know, but we are indifferent.”

The technical aspects of factory farming represent the current consciousness: a focus on function, reproducibility and measurability. The intolerable treatment of animals raised for food and the slaughtering of those animals were the subjects for Coe’s work, Dead Meat, published in 1995 after six years of work. Coe viewed first hand slaughterhouses in the United States and documented that journey with her sketchbook and interviews of the workers and the managers of those facilities, those “killing floors,” a place Sue Coe says that you will see no human females and a place that she could not have access to today. The six years she devoted to visiting and sketching slaughterhouses gave us graphic documents of animal decapitations, debeakings, electrocutions, dismemberment and the human ability to “detach.”

How does an artist convey the terror in innocent animals’ eyes before death, the sound of chain saws on still breathing bodies, the odor of blood and the jobs of the workers who wade in that blood and flesh every day? How does one stand there as fellow humans compound the horror by adding to the misery of these animals who have no federal laws to protect them? How does an artist convey the sordid reality?

“How does an artist convey the terror in innocent animals’ eyes before death, the sound of chain saws on still breathing bodies, the odor of blood and the jobs of the workers who wade in that blood and flesh every day? How does one stand there as fellow humans compound the horror by adding to the misery of these animals who have no federal laws to protect them? How does an artist convey the sordid reality?”

“‘The Holocaust keeps coming into my mind’, Coe said, ‘which annoys the hell out of me. I see this reference in so many animal rights magazines. Is this the comforting measuring rod by which all horrors are evaluated? My annoyance is exacerbated by the fact the suffering I am witnessing now cannot exist on its own; it has to fall into the hierarchy of a ‘lesser animal suffering.’”

Animals are consumable because they are controllable. Industrialization factory farms what we eat, and therefore, we are factory farmed. Coe further states:
How would the food on our plate be different if we could see the terrible routine cruelties that are standard industry practice; animals abandoned without food or water, legs frozen solid in their own waste, dying in transport trucks on the way to be slaughtered—their short lives spent being roughly handled, electrocuted with cattle prods, drugged up with hormones and antibiotics, branded, beaten with tire irons, chained, noses pierced, fins cut off, gasping and torn apart in nets, bombed underwater, driven mad by a life of imprisonment, their babies stolen, being made repeatedly into breeding machines, entirely and utterly under the power and control of human beings. And all of this with no language to communicate to this alien species, their oppressors, other than cries which go unheard.  

In text accompanying her graphic artwork in her book Cruel, Coe says, “Animals have no choice, cannot change their fate—they are bred to be murdered by the billions every day—and are completely under human power and control.” And, lastly, she says, “If we put ourselves in the place of other beings without power, that’s the beginning of change.”

This great disconnect with Nature, and with ourselves, becomes clear when one examines the subject of containment overall and our obsession with exploitation of animals who we disempower by disadvantaging them.

When the artist as avatar, creates work with the understanding of the potential power the work can have towards spiritual healing and therefore for moral transformation through art, we will then have an opportunity for revitalization as a whole through the recovery of the soul, a spiritual reawakening to the sacred and consequentially, a reconnectedness to Nature and therefore, to ourselves.

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16. Sue Coe: *Art of the Animal*

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THE CLOSEST OF COLLABORATIONS: BOTANICAL ILLUSTRATION

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Botanical illustration has been essential to botany since its inception as a modern science in the 16th century. In fact, at that time illustrations were more accurate and informative than the accompanying texts. It has been argued that botany could not develop as a science until after the invention of the printing press (Ivins, 1953). Without accurate images that can be precisely reproduced, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between closely related species because it’s hard to put subtle differences into words, differences that can easily be distinguished with images. Leonhart Fuchs, author of one of the early printed herbals, gave another reason: “Who in his right mind would condemn pictures which can communicate information much more clearly than the words of even the most eloquent men? Those things that are presented to the eyes and depicted on panels or paper become fixed more firmly in the mind than those that are described in bare words (quoted in Charmantier, 2011, p. 366).”

Fuchs revealed how much he valued the images in his De Historia Strupium (1542) by including portraits of the three primary artists involved: Albrecht Meyer did the watercolors, Heinrich Füllmaurer translated these paintings into line drawings on wood blocks, which were then engraved into the wood by Veyt Rudolff Speckle. Such recognition was not always the case, particularly when the artist was a spouse or offspring of the botanist. However, there are cases where the spouse was well recognized. This was true with Blanche Ames, the wife of the Harvard botany professor and orchid specialist, Oakes Ames. Every one of the hundreds of pen-and-ink illustrations she did for his articles and books is signed. Even the watercolor sketches she created, which are pasted to herbarium sheets, have her initials (Flannery, 2012). I think they had a very good marriage, but she was confident enough with herself as an artist to not let her husband—and the botanical world—forget her contribution to his work.

I mentioned the term herbarium sheet above, and I should explain it. An herbarium is a collection of plant specimens, most of which are pressed plants mounted on heavy white paper and labeled with the plant name, the collector, and the date and location of the collection. These specimens are not only important to the study of plants because they serve as the ultimate reference for a species’ characteristics, but they also can be important historical records as well since some date back to the 16th century. The herbaria of Charles Darwin, Lewis and Clark, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Emily Dickinson, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau have all been preserved and attest to the cultural as well as scientific significance of plant collecting. In addition, herbarium specimens are often used as reference material for botanical artists who have a talent for adding dimensionality in their drawings based on this flattened material.
WORKING TOGETHER

In terms of the collaboration between artists and botanists, one of the most notable was that involving the British botanist Robert Brown and the Austrian artist Ferdinand Bauer. As was common at the time, a British Naval mission to circumnavigate and map Australia included naturalists to study and collect flora and fauna and artists to record their finds on the spot, while the specimens were still alive or freshly killed. Bauer made pencil sketches with notes on color, using a complex color chart with 1000 colors that he had devised to insure the accuracy of color in the finished illustrations (Mabberley, 1999). Brown and Bauer worked closely together for much of the trip, though at one point they collected separately for several months. Brown could be difficult to work with because of his obsessive demand for accuracy, but Bauer persisted in their collaboration for a number of years. When they returned to England they continued their work together, though Brown was slow in publishing his findings. This resulted in Bauer publishing many of his images as a separate volume for which he did the engravings himself.

There any number of such collaborations in the history of botany. Joseph Banks travelled on Captain Cook’s first voyage around the world with an entourage of naturalists and artists including Sydney Parkinson who created hundreds of watercolor sketches of the plants and animals they encountered, though Parkinson died before the voyage ended (Chambers, 2007). The artist Titian Peale served on the Long Expedition to the Rocky Mountains and later was both naturalist and artist on the Wilkes Expedition (Reveal, 1992). The fact that both naturalists and artists traveled with such expeditions that were primarily aimed at mapping and exploring uncharted areas indicates how important natural history was considered. This was in part a matter of advancing science, but there were also economic incentives as well. Early explorers brought back valuable plants that became economically important, so there was the hope that further exploration would reap more valuable plants.

Beginning in the 19th century, women became important in the production of botanical illustrations. As I mentioned earlier, some were related to the botanists with whom they worked, though this was not always the case. The American agricultural botanist Sturtevant was supported by both his wife and daughter who did hundreds of illustrations for him, some of them in watercolor (Plumb, 1899). Una Weatherby, wife of the botanist C.A. Weatherby, not only took photographs and created drawings of the plants he studied, but also drew maps of all the Connecticut towns they visited to show species distributions (Brown, 2003). In a collaboration that did not involve sacred vows, Sarah Anne Lindley lived with John Lindley and his family for 15 years while serving as his illustrator (Stearn, 1999).

BOTANIST/ARTIST

In some cases, botanists participated in the closest collaboration of all, making their own illustrations. While it takes a great deal of time to create illustrations, a number of botanists have found it worth the effort. Obviously they had the talent to do this successfully, but almost any artist will say that most of
talent is just the result of hard work. The Irish botanist William Henry Harvey traveled the world botanizing and drawing (Butler, 2000). Because he wanted to have total control over the illustrations in his publications, he not only did his own finished drawings but also his own lithographs, completing over 900 of them before his death in 1866. Harvey, like Robert Brown, kept his own traveling herbarium so he could easily refer to specimens while creating his drawings. In the 20th century, the plant morphologist Agnes Arber, who was taught art by her landscape-painter father, Henry Robertson, also did her own illustrations. This was in part for convenience and accuracy, but also because she didn’t have a paid position and lacked funds to hire an illustrator (Flannery, 2005).

Joseph Hooker was another noted botanist-artist. During his first long ocean voyage headed for the Antarctic, he drew sea creatures just to have the drawing practice (Endersby, 2008). On this and a subsequent trip to India and the Himalayas, he created pen-and-ink and watercolor sketches that were the basis of the illustrations in such works as *The Rhododendrons of Sikkim-Himalaya* (Hooker, 1849). His father William Hooker was also a noted botanist and talented artist. However, they both also took on artists as their workload increased. The principle one was Walter Hood Fitch who produced art at the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew from 1841, when William was in charge, until 1877 during the tenure of Joseph who had taken over as director from his father (Desmond, 1999). Fitch created an almost unbelievable number of illustrations, including over 10,000 that were published. In 1845 alone he produced more than 200 botanical plates.

In the United States, a similar, though not as intense, collaboration existed between the Isaac Sprague and the botanist John Torrey (Rudolph, 1990). In the archives at New York Botanical Garden there is a pencil drawing done by Sprague of a new species of pitcher plant for which Torrey was publishing a description. On the drawing, there are notes, such as a question mark next to the comment: “position of the anther,” the plant’s pollen-producing organ. Sprague had never seen the living plant. He was working from a pressed plant specimen and attempting to create a three-dimensional, life-like drawing. He needed direction. The same kind of back and forth between artist and botanist continues to this day, though Robin Moran, an expert on ferns at the New York Botanical Garden, says that his illustrator, Haruto M. Fukuda, is a valuable research asset because the artist understands this group of plants well enough to know how to make the drawings intelligible to the viewer and to include the necessary elements that Moran (2004) also emphasizes in his written commentary. This type of art is a matter of balance between filtering out the unnecessary and focusing on the essential. Moran and Fukuda have discovered that balance through years of collaboration.

Illustrations become particularly important when there are no specimens available. This has happened many times in the history of botany, though it is unlikely to happen today with photography and when preserving and transporting specimens is much easier. In the past, specimens were often lost at sea, at times even seized by pirates. Also there were no barcodes to help keep track of them. Herbarium sheets can also be lost to fire or water damage, or in the case of specimens Nikolaus Jacquin used to describe Caribbean species, insects feasted on them (Fraser & Fraser, 2011). For many species that
Linnaeus described, botanists can reliably link the descriptions to images that he saw rather than to plants that he might or might not have studied. In the case of fungi, which are no longer taxonomically considered plants but are still studied by botanists, the type specimen upon which the species description is based is often an illustration, because fungi are so difficult to preserve. They can shrivel so badly when dried that it’s impossible to distinguish defining features.

**ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS**

Botanical illustrations are and always have been expensive to produce. That this burden continues to be undertaken by publishers is an indication of the importance of illustrations to this type of scientific communication. Many publication projects, dating back to the early years of the printing press, failed to come to fruition because of financial woes and other disasters. Olof Rudbeck the Younger, Linnaeus’s mentor at Uppsala University, had worked for years with his father on a multi-volume compendium of plant species with hundreds of illustrations, most of which, along with the Rudbecks’ notes, were destroyed in a fire. His father died soon afterwards, and the son never regained his momentum for the project and no text was ever published (Blunt, 1971). Descriptions of the plants that Banks and his naturalists had collected on Cook’s voyage, along with illustrations based on the sketches Parkinson had made, weren’t completely published until 1990 (Banks, Solander & Cook, 1980-1990). During Banks’s lifetime, he was sidelined by other projects and never got around to pushing this massive task through to completion.

Today, most plant illustrations are done in pen and ink, and as the president of the American Society of Botanical Artists, Robin Jess, notes, the money available often dictates the amount of detail in the drawings. Shading is a luxury, and is usually minimized to allow the artist to produce more drawings in a particular period of time. While photographs might seem to be an alternative form of illustration, they are not cheap to publish either. Also, there are some problems with photos in being useful in picturing plant structures. Photographs are not as good at providing clear depth cues, and artists can eliminate or underplay extraneous characteristics while clearly portraying the essential ones. Research has revealed that cameras and human vision work very differently, in that the latter makes sense of the world by emphasizing boundaries and the outlines of objects, while cameras treat each piece of information the same. In other words, an illustrator does just what the visual system does in outlining structures and emphasizing boundaries (Kingdon, 2011). It’s no wonder that humans find such images satisfying and understandable.

**ART AT THE FORE**

The artist Victoria Crowe, who teaches botanical drawing at the Royal Academy of Art in Edinburgh, agrees with this assessment. She has been involved in a collaboration with David Ingram, a Cambridge botanist. She was engaged to paint his portrait and planned to incorporate images relating to his work, including herbarium specimens. In a discussion and lecture given by the two, Ingram notes: “It was
perhaps the most unpromising of the images incorporated into the portrait that was responsible for our new train of thought—a herbarium sheet. Crowe found embodied in it the same tension between timelessness and fragility which is the hallmark of her work as an artist” (Crowe & Ingram, 2007, p. 2). Crowe began her herbarium investigations at the Cambridge Herbarium where she was particularly drawn to iris specimens, and where she first noted the timelessness and fragility link. She also visited other herbaria and botanical libraries, including Padua, one of the earliest botanical gardens. She even examined fossilized plants at Cambridge’s Sedgwick Museum of Earth Sciences. Crowe became so fascinated with herbarium specimens that she continued to use them in her work long after she completed the Ingram portrait.

In another art/science collaboration, the botanical illustrator Rachel Pedder-Smith (2012) created a large watercolor of plants in the herbarium collections at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Each of the 703 specimens is presented individually and together they make quite an impression. This was Pedder-Smith’s doctoral project at the Royal College of Art in London. It was a work of love as well as an artistic masterpiece, and it is now owned by Kew. Watercolor in general is now rarely used as the basis for botanical illustration in scientific publications, it is just too costly, though in some monographs there may be a small number of plates to give readers a sense of what the live plants look like. After all, there is an aesthetic aspect to plants that can’t be denied, whether they are seen as artistic or scientific subjects, or both.

DIGITAL COLLABORATION

What I have been discussing here is perhaps one of the closest kinds of collaborations between art and science, a space in which art is essential to the advancement of the science and to the communication of scientific concepts. This collaboration is continuing into the digital age. One example is a website that pairs images of plant specimens (herbarium specimens—my obsession) with images from one of the classics of the natural history literature, Mark Catesby’s two-volume *Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands* (1731-1743). The plant specimens were collected by Catesby during his stay in the New World in the early 1700s. They ended up in the collection of Hans Sloane, one of the people who helped finance Catesby’s trip. Sloane’s herbarium is considered the most significant of pre-Linnaean plant collections and is now at the Natural History Museum, London.

The Catesby website is the result of a collaboration between Amy Blackwell, an ecologist at Furman University, and her husband, Chris, a professor of classics at Clemson (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2012). He was using software called C.I.T.E. which permits the “quotation” of portions of an image to focus on particular lines of old manuscripts. This image citation software was developed as a part of the Homer Multitext project and was adapted by the Blackwells to “quote” portions of herbarium sheets (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2011). This is an excellent example of cross-disciplinary work and argues for cross-disciplinary marriages as well. It also presages future projects where scientific specimens and the
art that they inspired are brought together digitally, so that, in a sense, they can collaborate with each other.

This brings up the interesting point that not only do artist and scientist collaborate, but the objects of their work also do. As the scientist studies the specimen, the visual knowledge absorbed then influences how that person examines the artwork based on the specimen. In turn, working with the specimen also influences the artist’s understanding and therefore ability to make sense of it. As the artist and scientist go back and forth between specimen and drawing, the shape not only the resulting artwork, but their own mental images as well. This is a collaboration of minds that results in works that embody the best of both science and art. In such a relationship science and art become inseparable.

REFERENCES


SELFIE PORN: IS THE “PERSONAL” STILL POLITICAL? THE ROLE OF THE
CONTEMPORARY SOCIO-MEDIASPHERE IN COLLABORATION AND NON-
COLLABORATION IN THE ARTS

Rupert Goldsworthy
School of Visual Arts

This presentation discusses our contemporary socio-mediastephen and the role of technology in
collaboration and non-collaboration in the arts. Reduced to continual data overload and distracted,
interrupted dialogs across continents, how can current cultural producers interrupt/integrate content
and audience?

I will begin with a mental snapshot of our mediatized era: Aug 27th 2012 I’m sitting in the “fancy”
fast-food restaurant Pret-a-Manger, Heathrow Terminal 4, after Security: Loud overhead music in the
restaurant/take-out, the lyrics ubiquitously re-enforcing romantic love ideology, repetitive, nightmarish:
“Let me in, let me in, let me in your arms again” or lukewarm hip-hop beats. Food is served with
plastic utensils in a paperbox (a greenwashing strategy), a salad with not much chicken, mainly lettuce
& vinegarette, too cold, it’s been in an airport fridge for hours and now pretty tasteless. Next to the
fridge, a bread roll served in a bag that says “Crinkly old bag” & “Freshly prepared”, with a hotel-
portion of oily warm butter.

Shouting voices of servers behind the counter calling out that someone’s latte’s ready, or enquiring
“Anything else?” in that supercilious way. Little kids running about everywhere, uncontrolled by their
parents. Airport flight announcements booming. The whole experience is disorienting, dehumanizing,
overwhelming. Airport staff sitting next to me, their walkie-talkies on the lunch table. The entire
waiting zone is a cacophony of noise & sensation. Hypnotic, brainwashing, overwhelming, familiar, yet
worse than ever, stuck in an unremitting, inescapable, ruthless shopping mall zone. Here money is all,
everything is overpriced and shortchanging.

The restaurant slogan painted on the wall above the diners: “Freshly prepared, good, natural food”
even seems to subliminally remind the passengers of the virtues of “youthfulness, obedience,
normalcy”. Re-enforcing the endless tacky novelty of the “new & improved”, endorsing the heterodox,
denigrating all and anyone that is not box-fresh. Across the aisle a big sign at the candy/newspaper
store WHSmiths says “Do you want a treat?”

Britain’s post-Diana culture of need-a-hug indulgent consumer infantilization.
Endless shelves of diabetes-inducing red, white & blue candy & sugar-heavy sodas, or tabloid celeb newspaper sagas about 60s child-killers the Moors Murderers. Union Jacks, bunting hanging everywhere. Another sign in Smiths says “Buy 1, get 1 half-price”. Probably it’s not anything anybody here needs one of anyway. Its pathetic, appealing to that Brit World-War-Two post-rationing bargain mentality.

The creepy fake genteelessness of it all.

Heathrow post-Olympics 2012, oy veh!

We live in a world where security dominates our lives, cornered by smartphone spycams, terror neighborhood lockdowns, bank account hackers, Twitter account newsfeed hijacks, genetically-modified cancer-inducing produce and meat, incurable fugitive viruses hiding deep inside bodies, or news updates on rapists unapprehended, Wall St. scammers, pedophile sports coaches and celebrity DJs. Unidentified packages lurk in ads on every subway wall, nestled next to offers of grad school business courses, electronic gizmos and warnings about unused prescription drugs our kids may find and overdose on. Security and terror

II.

fears lurk in our collective minds like a background hum at all times. Spurred by financial incentives, the danger meme is everywhere, we are simultaneously alerted to threat and offered a new panacea in our panic shopping 360-degree domination zone from dawn til dusk. Snapped at by “officials”, herded into payment zones, stripped of agency, hardened by continual mishandling, the contemporary citizen lurks on the sidelines of the ongoing war for survival and basic justices. This is the modern dance.

What does this environment create? The rise of smartphone cameras, celeb Twitter feeds and low-budget reality-TV has produced a culture where younger people dream themselves out of the stagnant airport-mall-type reality into a fantasy, a retreat. If you strip the contemporary citizen of agency, some insulate themselves in an infantilized, family-centric, electronic narcissism of being on screen.

I recently read the essay “#SelfishCultureProblems: The Rise of a Self-Centered Culture” by Josh Zollman, 2012: “In today’s individualistic society, the idea of considering the wider community to be more important than the self is becoming almost impossible to understand for most people. ..[ ].. Forget about impoverished children starving in Zimbabwe. Forget about the estimated 577,190 men and women that died of cancer in 2012 (Cancer Facts & Figures 2012). ..[ ].. Twitter users have the real problems. While it is undoubtedly important for people to have methods for venting their personal frustrations and misfortunes—no matter how small, the use of Twitter and other social networking sites as an outlet for trivial, personal information reflects a distressing social trend: a rise in a self-focused, or “selfish” culture.”
In this paper I argue that the rhetoric of “the personal is political” subjectivity in “resistance cultures” championed by Brit social theorists like Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart in the 1970s has now become reformulated as endless “artistic” self-regard in the public sphere and the neglect of any and all social responsibility. —”It's my world and you just live in it” culture, the endless distressing rise of “me-me-me”-ism and the deflation of more complex uses of personal narrative. I've been thinking about the normalization of Facebook and Twitter narcissism and its relation to the original conception of “the personal being political” and how a term I originally associate with feminism and Black Power rhetoric has now become such a slack signifier.

III.

But how did we get here? The “personal is political” mantra first gained currency in the late 1960s as cultural producers sought to collapse the traditional division between private and public identity. In that era a dichotomy was sustained by traditional, patriarchal ideologies that relegated certain aspects of subjects’ identities to the private sphere—thus placing them outside political discourse and perpetuating oppression by not accounting for them.

For cultural producers of the Seventies generation, to claim that the personal was political was a way of rejecting that division: an attempt to force the recognition of hitherto marginalized identities and experiences within a public sphere and to open up discursive spaces within the political arena. In the 1970s, issues relating to personal identity (such as those pertaining to women, gay people, or people of color) were not given much currency in the public sphere and certainly not discussed as having political implications. The women's rights movements in Europe and North America during the 1970s, as well as the corresponding gay and civil rights movements, focused precisely on this false separation of the personal and the political, and sought to articulate the personal in the public sphere.

But conceptions of the term “personal” have shifted a great deal in the thirty years since this tactic came into effect. The cultural climate in the West has moved from periods where a personal perspective seemed radical, revelatory, and daring, to an era where the “politicism” of artistic strategy has been superceded by the cult of personality, now most widely associated with exhibitionism, commercial exploitation, and celebrity crucifixion.

Is the “political” still “personal,” as it was for an earlier generation? In the 1970s and 1980s, artists often thought of using the subjective in a political manner, but there has been a major cultural quake. Radical critique of society using the resonance of personal experience is still possible, and the “same but different” political issues persist, however it is hard to imagine the sincerity of such a strategy being received in the same way in the contemporary, post-everything, ironic domination of our era.
“The personal” and “the political” have few of the associations that they had in earlier eras when this phrase tagged personal empowerment and activism.

Gay U.S. writer Jack Malebranche discusses this reductivist shift from political to commercial terms in relation to the gay community. He argues that the term “gay” no longer refers so much to same-sex love or sex, but now to a “subculture, a slur, a set of gestures, a slang, a look, a posture, a parade, a rainbow flag, a film genre, a taste in music, a hairstyle, a marketing demographic, a bumper sticker, a political agenda and philosophical viewpoint.”

The social valence of a political identity based around sexual orientation has shifted to become less “politicized,” and more conceived in terms of niche consumer markets. Malebranche claims that after the 1990s, “Gay is a pre-packaged, superficial persona—a lifestyle.” This shift is mirrored across a range of formerly-marginalized socio-political groups.

Part of the problem of discussing this issue is the difficulty in tracking the cultural shifts in time and mapping a place. At the time these strategies were introduced, they were widely considered challenging and didactic—a personal engagement with a subject “outside” the paradigm of public discourse.

Contemporary culture from 2013 that uses these strategies are now often conceived of in different terms—as a narcissistic and regressive.

Theorist Katy Deepwell points out that “the personal is political—that very important slogan of Feminis —does not mean the personal is always or automatically political.” Deepwell argues that although the personal can be a starting point for political reflection, it only becomes “consequent” when developed as an engagement with the broader questions and shared collective experience that “political” artwork has sought to address.

What makes “personal” art interesting? Duchamp famous wrote that the audience must complete the work. Deepwell implies good art produces a collaborative frisson of audience engagement and connection. Successful “personal narrative” art finds the “we” in the “I.”

Contemporary artistic strategy often puts the formal tropes or subject matters of earlier eras to different uses. This pattern is evident in a trend since the early-1990s of recycling of 1970s art strategies, to produce new works that borrow heavily from the visual language of 1970s

V.

Conceptualism. Artist and theorist Victor Burgin has remarked on the 1990s trend of artists plagiarizing the formal aspects or ideas of an earlier generation. Discussing 1970s-era Conceptualism, he writes:
“[Conceptualism expressed a] desire to resist commodification and assimilation...the 'new' conceptualism is a mirror image of the old –nothing but commodity, nothing but style.”

But it is hard to agree wholeheartedly with Burgin, for as art historian Hal Foster has pointed out, Conceptualism and performance-related works themselves drew much from earlier work such as that of Duchamp and Dadaism. Art by its nature is never reverential. It has always been influenced by earlier movements and disparate viewpoints, and has often used appropriation, changed context and intent.

Art writer Michael Glover argues that it is a mistake to see much post-1990’s, so-called personal “identity politics” works such as having genuine engagement with any political perspectives. Instead Glover sees this type of work as often an unmediated, self-referential monologue, more closely related to an “exhausted Romantic narcissism.” We now see a more self-absorbed vector of engagement with the “personal”, often in relation to youth culture.

Some contemporary artists still engage in exploration along the interface of dominant narratives and personal agency. However, the accumulation of later associations related to the subject of “the political” requires an acknowledgement of changing cultural contexts.

A different era’s dominant cultural mode shape-shifts later perceptions. Added to this, there is a new type of artistic transculturation—a tendency of more market-oriented, sensation-hungry art practices that co-opt once-innovative stylistic devices and subjects associated with the more marginal, such as the political—faking their “political” intent. This tendency towards a surface imitation of earlier political work reflexively effects how these earlier works are later perceived. Although the personal can remain political in fine art praxis, these contextual shifts make the discursive “personal-political” dynamic operate amid a much more complex set of matrices.”

I’ve been teaching at university level since 1998. The 1990s and 2000s saw the rise of two trends:

VI.

The 1990s genre of “Relational Aesthetics” have been lionized from Documenta to the global biennials across the world to museum touring shows.

“Relational Aesthetics” often seems like the pillaging of “Social Practice”, the community artwork of the 1970s, the last untapped thread of Conceptualism. But the 1990s version presented in a “boutique” brand version. Where the 1970s artists saw the community as creator, and specifically worked outside the gallery system, now the Relational Aesthetics artist-initiators emerged within the political economy of the commercial gallery and high-level institutional system, the artist’s big “name” commands big funding, they are cast as articulators of this “new” discourse that articulates a space where the audience (typically an impoverished community) participate in and complete the work, usually utopian in ideal.
Concurrently a new generation of art student often makes video art about their mom, their partner and or themselves and their relationship. This project is presented in class under the rubrik of collaborative project, allowed by the social permissions they understand as “Conceptualism.” The work often formally resembles canonical works of 1960s Conceptualism. It is parred down, sparse, simple. Mom is featured but she’s hardly a collaborator in the fullest sense, more an actor at best. One of the difficulties of having a group critique with this student is that the work means so much more to them than to anyone else in the room, or to the public. The nature of the subject makes its difficult, any suggestion you might venture in terms of wider resonance or originality is hard for them to take on. Added to this, these students are often going to leave graduate school with huge school debt, they feel like entitled consumers, they hope for an art career or at least teaching, and you as an adjunct professor are in a difficult position. Do you gentle burst the bubble and risk a bad assessment or smile and let them play on? I want to return to the quote I began with from Zollman’s “#SelfishCultureProblems: The Rise of a Self-Centered Culture”: “In today’s individualistic society, the idea of considering the wider community to be more important than the self is becoming almost impossible to understand for most people.” That is a pretty distressing thought.

We are surrounded by an army of kids and young adults absorbed in Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Vine, Viber, WhatsApp. Within these realms we see the rise of super-narcissism and the phenomena of “selfie porn.”

VII.

the constant need to post pictures of oneself in admirable poses online for your friends/family/admirers/stalkers/neighbors and all those secret trackers out there who want to track your grazing habits.

Academics, artists, cultural producers of our era are swamped in a continual data overload and distracted, interrupted dialogs across continents, they are both part of and they continually interact with a community that are screen slaves, hypnotized by the hum of the computer, distracted by the bell of the iphone message, mesmerized the background glaze of endless sports TV in any public setting. We are swamped.

I want to end by asking two questions concerning our contemporary socio-mediasthenre and the role of technology in collaboration and noncollaboration in the arts.

1. What are the implications for education during these shifts? Zollman writes that the sense of community is getting harder for many people to grasp anymore, what will be a productive vector of engagement for collaboration in the arts for our era? Is a 1950s humanist educational model of
“community outreach” engagement really working in the same way for a generation who are so media-saturated?

2. Raised in the era of trophy-culture, where everyone is taught they’re a winner and often, so incredibly self-involved, how can educators and collaboration teams in the arts interact and integrate with this sociomediasphere—where the personal narrative has become an exhausted trope, where endless public narcissism is becoming so commonplace? Where can more complex, undistracted debate still exist?
NARRATIVES OF PLACE

Elissa Graff
Lincoln Memorial University

The class, “Narratives of Place,” was developed with funding from a grant supporting arts and humanities undergraduate research. The interdisciplinary course combined creative writing and photography in an integrated study of literacy as seen through programs conducted by The Children’s Reading Foundation. Students researched and volunteered with the nonprofit organization and its community programs. Then, they used the foundation’s work and child and family literacy as a lens to examine culture, socio-economic issues, public policy, public education, social entrepreneurship, and the nonprofit sector. Photography, video, and oral documentation was collected throughout the research. Students explored civic and cross-cultural engagement in a more meaningful way and this enabled the students to see effective engagement between artists/writers and a community. Also, the students were able to examine pitfalls, view the impact on the artist/writer as well as the community, and learn how the role of artist-volunteer impacts the research outcomes. In their final projects, students created in-depth analyses and instructive narratives that culminated in an exhibition/reading. Their projects were a featured publication in the on-campus literary journal, as well as orally presented at a regional conference.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, “the Andrew Mellon Foundation awarded a $500,000 grant to the Appalachian College Association (ACA) [to] expand undergraduate research expertise and opportunities for faculty and students in the humanities and humanistic social sciences at more than two dozen colleges in Central Appalachia” (The University of North Carolina Asheville, 2008). The Mellon Foundation granted a second cycle of funds, for a total of five years which supported a partnership between the ACA and the University of North Carolina at Asheville (UNCA). Lincoln Memorial University (LMU) was fortunate to participate in this program three times. The class, Narratives of Place, was designed following funding from the last and final year of the ACA-UNCA undergraduate research program.

Narratives of Place was an interdisciplinary course that combined creative writing and photography in an integrated study of literacy as seen through programs conducted by The Children’s Reading Foundation in Bell County, Kentucky. The Children’s Reading Foundation (CRF) (2013c) is a national organization whose goal is “to ensure all children learn to read early and well” (Home). The CRF functions as locally independent non-profit groups who partner with school districts and communities for the resolution of literacy issues (The Children’s Reading Foundation, 2013a). The Appalachia, Kentucky branch of CRF promotes the same mission, values, and goals as the national stance and is
governed by a board of directors comprised by superintendents of those Kentucky county school systems served by this regional division (The Children’s Reading Foundation, 2013b).

SERVICE PARTNER

For those unfamiliar with the Children’s Reading Foundation, there are presently twenty-one, and counting, local chapters all developed at the grassroots level, with the National Office helping “in getting started, operating legally, maintaining a website and staying abreast of research” (The Children’s Reading Foundation, 2013a). Once established, each affiliate, runs programs according to community literacy needs.

CRF’s success can be explained best by understanding that “culture forms the superglue that bonds an organization, unites people, and helps and enterprise accomplish desired ends” (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 253). Bolman and Deal (2008) state, “an organization’s culture is revealed and communicated through its symbols” (p. 254). In 2008, The Children’s Reading Foundation (2013d) became “registered as a federal trademark” with a newly created symbol and slogan. The slogan, “Read with a child. It’s the most important 20 minutes of your day” (The Children’s Reading Foundation, 2013a) is on all published documents and recognizable across the country. In addition to asserting CRF’s core values, the slogan also promotes the organization’s vision and mission. Likewise, the symbol is specific, featuring a large, green, open-faced, abstractly-drawn book, with a blue circle floating up above the book, and a smaller orange circle located just underneath the blue one. The size relationship of the circles to one another imply an adult-child relationship, directly connecting to the reading slogan, and the CRF’s mission to “encourage and educate families about their important role in raising a reader” (The Children’s Reading Foundation, 2013a).

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

This collaboration between myself, an art professor, and Lincoln Memorial University’s writer-in-residence, Darnell Arnoult, has facilitated numerous other arts and humanities opportunities, such as our school’s inaugural summer arts programming, two-months of Arts in the Gap. This particular project, Narratives of Place, was very much an experiment that evolved and formalized throughout the sixteen-week semester.

We began the process by hand-selecting three students each, seeking strengths in both writing and art, but also finding those students truly interested in investigating literacy and willing to participate in service learning. LMU has mandatory service hours, a total of ten, which are relatively easy to attain, but we needed students willing to do more than was required. We treated the class as a seminar, meeting weekly to provide background information, watch videos, entertain guest speakers, prepare for volunteer time, and to discuss individual project plans. We also completed the appropriate human subject training together, a necessary step for institutional review board permissions. We created
consent forms for both adults and minors, knowing some students would want to interview children who participated in CRF programs.

The grant provided funds for purchasing laptops and digital cameras that after the establishment of teams, were signed out to students. We partnered up those whose schedules worked best, making sure there was a camera and a computer for each pair. We also provided travel funds for the groups to attend various meetings, events, and functions occurring through the Children’s Reading Foundation’s programming.

As this course occurred during the Spring Term, much of the volunteer focus happened in connection with Read Across America planning. The Read Across America event, also known as Dr. Seuss Day, is commonly held nationwide on Theodore Geisel’s birthday but locally follows a week of Bell County reading-focused activities highlighted throughout all schools. Initially, the planning meeting was held in Middlesboro Elementary School. As the event grew closer, the meetings were moved to the Middlesboro Mall, who hosted the event.

In attendance at all weekly meetings held preceding this event were Dr. Tony Maxwell, executive director of CRF of Appalachia-KY, Ms. Debbie Knuckles, co-director of Ready for Kindergarten and a retired local teacher, and Ms. Sheila Durham, marketing director and events and promotions manager at Middlesboro Mall. In observing the weekly meetings and the major players over the month of February 2013, collaboration was evident between CRF of Appalachia-KY and the Middlesboro Mall, the Read Across America event host. Wei-Skillern, Austin, Leonard, and Stevenson (2007) explain that “crafting alliances” are essential for non-profit organizations “as a means to mobilizing resources, financial, and nonfinancial, from the larger context and beyond their own organizational boundaries, to achieve increased mission impact” (p. 191). The alliance between the Mall and CRF of Appalachia-KY had developed over several years, as a product of numerous personal connections. As is common in small communities, knowing the “right” person to ask for help often facilitates successful work. In this particular instance, both Knuckles, as a former teacher employed by Bell County and Maxwell, with connections to both Middlesboro schools and LMU, have an abundance of resources between them. Add the Middlesboro Mall, via Durham who plans all events occurring on mall property, which serves a several-county wide region, and the CRF of Appalachia-KY had the best group composed for planning a major regional activity.

The college student volunteers created large paper templates of various Dr. Seuss characters, such as Cindy Lou Hu, Horton, and Thing One and Two. These templates were taped inside store windows to be traced by other volunteers and painted with acrylics for further mall decoration.
During the big event, the students assisted by helping hand out books and balloons. They observed children and adults, documented moments of interest, and interviewed various participants. The volunteerism did not end after Read Across America. Our students found themselves engaged in numerous ways and when able, many continued to participate and work with CRF. The connections made through this course and this project has impacted their lives, CRF, and the community.
STUDENT RESULTS

What was most interesting to observe through this course was the individual development and team dynamics. Each student participant, while involved in identical volunteer time, like the Read Across America event, and therefore, all of them beginning at the same starting point, found their own unique research products. One individual chose to interview the leaders within the local CRF chapter to highlight the success and struggles of a non-profit organization. Another student, inspired by hearing the personal story of a local author who presented at Dr. Seuss Day in the mall, created a film biography about that individual. A third student, similarly moved, wrote an acrostic essay, highlighting her personal struggles with dyslexia and the value of self-worth gained through learning to read.

Ernest Boyer (1994), in his infamous call for a New American College, noted that Service, in this context means far more than simply doing good, although that is important. Rather, it means that professors apply knowledge to real-life problems, use that experience to revise their theories, and become in the words of Donald Schon at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, “reflective practitioners.” (para. 18)

Similarly, Giles and Eyler (1994), connect their writings to John Dewey because his “principles of experience, inquiry, and reflection [serve] as key elements of a theory of knowing in service-learning” (p. 79). In addition, “[s]ervice transforms learning, changing inert knowledge to skills that students can use in their communities” (Eyler, J., Giles, Jr., D. E., & Braxton, J., 1997, p. 5).

Wurdinger and Carlson (2010) include service learning in their book which highlights “[f]ive teaching approaches that intentionally promote experiential learning where students are actively engaged in the learning process” (p.7).

These approaches have stepped outside the confines of traditional education and are creating new learning environments that are changing the way students, educators, and individuals outside the field of education view learning. They all incorporate student-centered learning, which encourage individuals to become motivated self-directed learners. (Wurdinger & Carlson, 2010, p. 7)

CONCLUSIONS

Janet Eyler, has written much on the incorporation of experiential learning practices into the college curriculum, including the book co-authored with Dwight E. Giles, Jr., Where’s the Learning in Service Learning? She states that:

Experiential education, which takes students into the community, helps students both to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use. It rests
on theories of experiential learning, a process whereby the learner interacts with the world and integrates new learning into old constructs. (Eyler, 2009, p. 24)

Proof of experiential learning is often found through qualitative measures, such as through narrative accounts, like journals. Ash and Clayton (2009) point out that:

Applied learning pedagogies share a design fundamental: the nurturing of learning and growth through a reflective, experiential process that takes students out of traditional classroom settings. The approach is grounded in the conviction that learning is maximized when it is active, engaged, and collaborative. (p. 25)

Reading the accounts kept by students throughout the sixteen-week semester highlighted the various phases of development each individual experienced. For example, as a final journal entry logged on 4/26/13, Julia wrote:

Well, I feel I have made a great deal of progress since taking this on in January (has it been four months!?) and I feel I have learned to look at thing differently. I stepped into this with several preconceived notions. Many were correct, but incomplete, and others were completely off the mark. I have learned that I am capable of far more than I give myself credit for at times. I have learned that as small as my contribution may be it is uniquely mine; no other person can do my part. I have learned that even though a thing, a person, or an event, may put forth an appearance, it is very likely to be MUCH deeper than its appearance suggests, and it is important to delve deeper for a more accurate understanding. I have met and begun to know a number of people who I value deeply because of my involvement with this class, and they have each had a role in reforming the way in which I approach the world. The most important thing I feel I am taking away from this experience is that in order to live in a different world, we must shine a light on the problems and do what is within our power to change them for the better. Nothing gets better on its own (except perhaps nature) and complaining and lamenting are useless. We must act better to have better.

Narratives of Place, as an experiment, as an interdisciplinary endeavor, as a service-learning project, was a success for all of these reasons.
All photographs taken by Elissa Graff.

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INTRODUCTION

I am interested in the quandary that K-12 art teachers often bring up when we talk about their artistic identity. Many art teachers struggle to maintain their artistic identity by making art “on the side” or in the margins of their teaching responsibilities. School is seen as a rewarding but time-consuming detour from the studio. Instead of trying to solve the dilemma of split identities I want to forefront the possibility of teaching practice as a highly sophisticated art practice, rather than as a distant and separate endeavor. Some teaching practices are a kind of creative gesture that can be understood as a form of contemporary art. I want to consider the pedagogical aspects of contemporary art and how some artists deliberately create pedagogical encounters. These ideas draw attention to emergent curricula, improvisation, relational aesthetics, and participatory or socially engaged art. Instead of thinking about teaching as a drain on creative energy and studio time I want to think about how it might overlap artistic practice. Jorge Lucero calls this a pedagogy of nearness since it demands live performance. I want to broaden notions of teaching to include the practices of contemporary art.

This story is also about the content and pedagogical forms of art education. What is the content of a Tino Sehgal piece where this is no art object? What is the stuff that great teachers know? Is that the content of art education? Does it matter how that content is delivered? Is there a lesson about artistry in pedagogical methods? I also want to explore how creativity and innovation is cultivated in the classroom and the ways in which a classroom can be an ideal place to generate ideas. Creativity has received renewed attention from some art education researchers. As a concept, it is often oversimplified and reified. Nevertheless, I am intrigued by how both teacher and student passion and creativity might be fostered. My interest is in cultivating environments for unexpected things to happen. I do not want to disregard schools and classrooms as places for significant artistic and cultural production.

Meet the Teaching Artist

In large letters, stenciled on the front wall it reads I am Brave Enough…brave enough for what?, I wondered. To be a teacher? To be myself? To be an artist? To face another room full of children? High school students are like wild animals, shy and ready to bolt at any sudden movement. I try to figure out what they like to eat, and then carefully leave a bit of food at the edge of the clearing, to draw them closer. But, today they are only gnawing at the bones of my patience. I wonder, whatever happened to the fairy kingdom of the brave artist? Where is that heroic painter enduring the slings of indifference to put another brush stroke on the painting?
Walking down the empty hallways, I smell wax finish and dust in the quiet evening, before the students arrive for the evening performance of figure drawing. It is my favorite time of day, when everything makes sense again. It is the moment in a painting when the first thin washes are laid in, when the painting is just flawless possibility. The students begin to wander in, with their bags of food and large newsprint pads. They greet me like an old friend. Lounging around in small groups, talking, they know I am mostly harmless, a wild animal, too. I pick up a piece of chalk and begin the talk. The talk is mostly a question and an improvised performance on the theme of getting at the monumental gracefulness of the gesture. Tonight, teaching is a three-hour conversation, a dance, a walk around the room, with a piece of chalk tapped to a stick.

Across town, Mr. Rees is dragging his large suitcase of costumes across the empty floor toward a lonely wooden chair. Pick up sticks, he says. Teaching and artistry are like pick up sticks, a game all balanced and connected together. It is hard to pull one idea out, without pulling all the other ideas apart. But today, Mr. Rees, needs an idea and he needs it fast. Where do ideas come from? Why do some classrooms feel edgy and funny, like they are on the edge of dancing, about to invent masking tape, while others seem aimless or inert? But, Mr. Rees had no time to muse on these questions, he had to be in class in 20 minutes. Like a spy, James Rees has another life. He is an artist.

James Rees, describes the artist teacher as a dual existence: “For a long time I led a double life; that of an art teacher by day and a struggling artist at night. At gallery openings I would usually avoid conversations that would lead back to my other role as a teacher. As a high school teacher, I often defined myself as an artist, to avoid the negative connotations that go along with being a teacher. As a college teacher, I find that many students studying art education feel this same feeling of being a dual citizen and often feel that studio professors take them less seriously because of their teaching aspirations.” After all, serious artists do not aspire to be teachers.

THE TEACHING ARTIST

How do the activities of teaching and learning connect to our artist lives? Are there ways to think about the teaching artist where these roles become complimentary or even merge together? How can teachers question the often self-imposed limitations that separate art from teaching? In spite of the enormous demands of teaching, many art teachers are productive artists. I am not talking about college art teachers, after all, they are paid to be artists. It is the curious case of K-12 school art teachers that is most interesting. If the teacher happens to be a mom, the making of an art is even more remarkable. There are many ways to think about the obstacles and conflicts of the teacher who is also an artist. Case studies of teaching artists reveal very different ways of reconciling these roles (Graham, 2009; Graham & Zwirn, 2010; Zwirn, 2006). For example, stealing time from teaching in order to paint, making a studio in the corner of the classroom, or leaving smoking rubber on the parking lot when the bell rings as you speed toward the studio. There is always summer or working after school at home among your
children, being interrupted every ten minutes. Perhaps splashing your artistic urges onto your student’s paintings. Or saving the artist for some day later, further down the road. I have tried them all.

WALKING IN THE MUSEUM WITH TINO SEHГAL

But, then, one Saturday morning, I saw Tino Sehgal at the Guggenheim museum. Not just the Tino Sehgal exhibition, but Tino Sehgal himself. The inscrutable master of constructed situations, no photographs please, just standing there, watching his work unfold like fireworks in a garage. His hair was uncombed, his shirt was not tucked in, as if he had just got out of bed. Breaking all rules, I secretly filmed the series of encounters he called, this progress, as it wandered up the ramp of the museum. As I watched I caught an exhilarating idea about the artist teacher.

His work caused me to wonder, how could art teachers make their teaching into relational encounters and transform teaching into performance art? In my mind, the line between teaching and art-making became blurry. Rather than a dank and dark forest of animals, a gauntlet of gnomes gnawing at my patience, could my school and classroom be a creative beehive, a Brooklyn of the imagination? Had I been blithely spurning these pirate treasures of inspiration for the austerity of a solitary studio? I was reminded that many contemporary artists, including Tino Sehgal, often work in collaboration with others, eschewing traditional art media in favor of social interaction, relational aesthetics and performance.

TINO SEHГAL AND ART AS ENCOUNTER

I usually think of art making as the construction of things, artistic artifacts that engage viewers with beauty or other ideas. But Sehgal creates what he calls “constructed situations” as he designs environments for collaborative interactions (Collins, 2012). In New York, he took everything out of the museum. Rather than a series of objects, the exhibition was a series of encounters. On my first visit to the show, we were greeted by a very cute girl, about 8 years old, who asked us to follow her, and then peppered us with sophisticated questions like, “What is progress?” I thought she was doing a school project, and being naturally sympathetic to children and hobos, I humored her and decided to play along. She continued, “Could we provide examples to support our answers?” As we talked and strolled up the ramp, we were eventually handed over to young man in his late teens. The girl summarized our answers, and we continued our conversation on somewhat more adult terms. Further up the ramp, we were handed off to other performers, or interpreters as the artist calls them.

On some occasions, the questions we were asked kept to the theme of progress, but as the walk continued, the conversation turned from progress to seemly random topics. We discussed painting, man’s relationship to nature, the human obsession with objects, and social justice. The conversations became more deep and interesting, evolving off the topic of progress in unpredictable ways, from stories about ancient Rome, to the crystal palaces formed in salt mines, to love and the wearing of the burqa.
Older interpreters (called wizards, I learned later, by their younger counterparts), carried the conversations into scholarly realms. Trying to recount the details of the experience is like trying to remember an intense dinner conversation; it was fascinating and engaging while it happened, but in the retelling seems distant and pretentious.

All too soon we reached the top of the museum’s ramp, all the while having intimate discussions with a series of complete strangers. We were sad that it had to end, that a return to the mundane was eminent. One critic remarked, “On the way down, I feel both exhilarated and bereft. Bereft because no one is talking to me anymore. I listen to snippets of conversations with new visitors and their guides on the way up. I am exhilarated because for that brief time, I was engaged in some heavy thinking and talking with strangers, the kind of people you wouldn't glance twice at on the subway” (Eley, 2010). Without any art object, except for the environment of the museum, the artist had cultivated a series of engaging encounters.

By the time we were done with these conversation, the kind I wished I had all the time, I was not sure who was part of the show, who were actors, and who were just people, asking me if I wanted paper or plastic at the check out counter. I wondered whether couples talking in the museum alcoves also interpreters, or only part of the audience. Art had overwhelmed life. The world had been, at least for the moment, transformed. The work was both playful and profound, filled with ambiguity, uncertainty and chance within the parameters of the interpreters’ script. It was a provocative similitude of teaching. Like teaching, the work began with a plan, a path, and a few questions. But it was a plan that evolved through the play of chance, improvisation, and conversation. Yes, there was a script, but a script that was open to disruption and improvisation.

SCHOOLS AND CREATIVITY

I often hear art teachers complain about how school is keeping them from their art studio, the place of real creativity. School scheduled bureaucracy and the pell-mell classroom are just holding them back. But, I wonder if school might not be a generative place for artistic practice. Creativity and innovation are big topics for education reformers. Tony Wagner (2012), for example, has suggested that many current school practices discourage innovation. This will come as no surprise to anyone who works in schools. For example, some schools penalize mistakes, cultivate passivity, and encourage individual achievement at the expense of teamwork. Daniel Pink (2010), highlights the importance of autonomy and intrinsic motivation as precursors to innovation and to successful teaching. So how is creativity or innovation nurtured? Steven Johnson (2010) suggests; “go for a walk; cultivate hunches; write everything down, but keep your folders messy; embrace serendipity; make generative mistakes; take on multiple hobbies; frequent coffee houses and other liquid networks; follow the links; let others build on your ideas; borrow, recycle, reinvent. Build a tangled bank”(p. 246).
According to Johnson, environments that are good for innovation expose a wide and diverse sample and range of spare parts, and encourage novel re-combinations and experimentation. Good ideas do not transcend their surroundings, as is often thought. They are more like a collage, built out of whatever is available. An environment that fosters good ideas helps its students explore what he calls the adjacent possible. “The trick is to get more parts on the table” (42). “Innovative systems gravitate toward the edge of chaos. This is the fertile zone between too much order and too much anarchy” (p. 52). The key is to cultivate accidental encounters and serendipitous connections. It is important to be willing to fail, to pay attention to errors, to be wrong again and again.

Jonah Lehrer echoes these ideas in his book Imagine. Unfortunately, Mr. Lehrer’s research was recently discredited because he used a little too much imagination in his fabrication of quotations in his book. Nevertheless, his notions about innovation made me think about the art class as prime territory for ideas. These included trusting your intuition, relaxing, and being open to daydreaming. They include letting go of perfection and cultivating the outsider’s perspective through travel or by being a passionate amateur in other disciplines. Being young and inexperienced can also help with the outsider perspective. Make lots of social connections and work in a team that has the right mix of friends and unknowns. Live in New York or another big city (Lehrer, 2012).

Surprisingly, copying can contribute to creativity. Austin Kleon suggests that artists learn by adopting other people’s ideas or methods. He encourages us to collect the things we love and start copying (Davis & Sumara 2008; Graham, in press; Kleon, 2012). Originality may be important, but creativity also reinforces tradition. Apparently there is a didactic importance in copying and then moving beyond copying (Freedman, 2010). Practice and facility within a domain are necessary preludes for creative interaction between an individual and the domain (Czikszentmihalyi, 1999). Pay attention to your side projects and hobbies. Give stuff away, especially your secrets. Make friends and stand next to the talent. (Kleon, 2012).

THE CLASSROOM IS THE FRENCH CAFÉ OF CREATIVE INTERACTION

All of this seems like perfect excuses for another hot chocolate break, for more daydreaming, for not cleaning the studio, for taking a walk across the Gowanis Canal, and for working on my rock collection. These attributes of creative environments and behaviors are also apt descriptions of many art rooms and the habits of some art teachers. Art class is full of the passionate outsiders, those sometimes annoyingly ignorant wild animals we call kids. What better way to create a horizontal social network of outsiders than a classroom? What better place for a collection of spare and odd parts ready for recombination than the art room? The hospitable society of the art room encourages this to happen. Forget about being all alone in the studio, the art room has all things the studio is missing. The art classroom might be a great place to get ideas.
Experimentation and mistakes, even spectacular mistakes, are important aspects of this process. Experimentation works best when there is a sense of play and divergence rather than an orientation toward a single, best solution (Graham, in press). A recent study of purpose and art making found that adolescents found a sense of purpose and fulfillment when connecting with others through the process of having others respond to their artistry (Malin, in press). Many of these students spoke of the arts as a way to make better relationships, by connecting with others, creating community, sharing their perspective with others, and bringing joy to others. Perhaps we need to pay more attention to relational aesthetics, collaboration, conversations and chance encounters. This is a classroom hospitable to conversation and sharing.

**THE PEDAGOGICAL ARTIST IN HIGH SCHOOL**

How would Tino Sehgal teach an art class? He might engage a few accomplices, construct some situations, fold his arms and let the artistic encounters and conversation ensue. Teaching could be viewed as a series of artistic encounters. The art teacher, like some artists might use the methods and intentions of pedagogy to create works of art that focus on relationality, participation, and social engagement. Teaching practices can be enacted as forms of contemporary art. The art teacher and artist might completely overlap. Not teaching and doing art on the side, but teaching practice as artistic practice.

These conceptual practices could free the art teacher to reconsider what is and what is not art and art making. The everyday gesture, the mundane, the playing around, even the arduous routine can be theorized as art practice. Gabriel Orozco, for example, often does not have a studio, eschewing its isolation to work in other places, in the street for example. When he could not spend time in the studio, he constructed an art practice from other things he was doing. Sometimes, this is an art where not much is made in the way of objects. The work is identified, and then presented, or represented to the world (Bergman, Lucero, Springgay, and Gershon, 2010).

The content of art education might be identity, family, or love and the methods could become a series of artistic encounters. Looking at school not only as a site for learning, but also as a place for cultural production makes it possible for the teacher to practice art through acts of exchange and generosity. This is a relational art that asks us to consider how the presence of the teacher alters students and how their presence alters the teacher. Instead of focusing on the transmission of content, the emphasis is on developing a perpetually evolving and transformative learning collective. Lucero, (2008) calls this a pedagogy of nearness, full of unpredictability and improvisation. It is the making of a shared history and constructing new ways of looking at and being in the world.
IN PRACTICE

In class we talk a lot about chance, of being open to the universe, and the weaving of chance with intention. I have to be prepared for surprises. Artists frequently work in the open spaces of creativity, ambiguity, myth, uncertainty, personal story, and play (Ackerman, 1999; Gude, 2010). Playing involves rules, but it also includes, freedom, imagination, risk, unanticipated outcomes, and the possibility for participants to become deeply immersed in the activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Oliver Herring’s TASK is a good example of the role of play and chance in the creation of a work of art. TASK is an improvisational event with a simple structure and very few rules. Participants agree to follow two simple rules: to write down a task on a piece of paper and add it to a designated “TASK pool,” and, secondly, to pull a task from that pool and interpret it any which way he or she wants, using whatever is on (or potentially off) stage. Herring’s art form has creating situations for interactions among people. My student’s engagement in TASK is a way to connect them to play, improvisation, and social interaction as elements of artistry.

The use of space is an essential ingredient in the work of many contemporary artists. For example, Richard Serra’s work makes the awesome power of gravity, material stress and physical scale vividly real. For a full viewing experience, his works must be walked in, through and around, physically involving the viewer in the very essence of the work. How can space be pedagogical? Parker Palmer describes how space itself is often frightening. Students can be threatened by an open invitation to learn for themselves and to help each other learn; they often would much rather have their education packaged by the teacher. For Palmer, the teaching space is a place where students need to feel welcome, a hospitable space, open to strangers and to strange questions; “this is the place where it is safe for your feelings to emerge.”

Teaching and artistry can be seen as competing roles, fighting for time and energy. But they can also be seen as complementary pursuits, where teaching informs artistry and art making informs teaching. And they can even be seen as equivalent pursuits, where teaching is the artwork and art making is teaching. Identity and roles are recurring questions among adolescent children as well as in the work of many artists. For example, Nicki S. Lee explores disparate sub-cultural identities by integrating herself into selected communities. She accomplishes this immersion through a prolonged period of research and then by adapting a given social group’s code of dress and identifying accoutrements, its recognizable behavior and body language. With the aid of elaborate makeup and wardrobe, she lives the life of a punk musician, a yuppie, a tourist, and an elderly woman, for days or months. Her artwork is this process of assuming identities and then documenting herself within each of these roles. How can we step back from teaching and see the dramatization and performance of teaching as a similar artistic activity, involving costumes, movement, visual effects, and a script? How can we explore the putting on of roles as an artistic practice among our students?
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I: INTRODUCTION

That realist literature creates empathy or understanding for its characters is a durable cliché. We sometimes even arrive at a point where we emotionally and rationally invest in criminals and miscreants.

The cliché and surface reality of emotional/rational investment can help us reveal the complex truth that literature calls into question our own conceptual/explanatory schemes. Realist literature at its best is confrontational and subversive at least in this sense: it breaks into the categories and axioms that we ordinarily use in endeavoring to capture and explain human action and character. For example, in Faulkner’s short story *Barn Burning* the reader cannot get anything if he or she comes to think of Abner Snopes as (simply) an “arsonist who should be jailed.” Now, to proceed from here into the heart of the matter via example is too easy: we need to make it hard on ourselves by articulating a precise philosophical account.

In proposing a philosophical account for the revelatory nature of some literature I can only go so far: a revelation seems resistant to a philosophical account as revelation seems to stand too close to “directly sensing” for it to need anything like an account. This point does not, however, preclude some stage setting for what makes revelation possible. Once we gain this sort of insight, we may be capable of showing why philosophical inquiry necessarily requires literature.

II: COMPLETENESS AND ECOLOGICAL EXPLANATION

In all creative activity- or perhaps I should prudently stay anchored to realist fiction- there is always a world at the beginning of the creation: it isn’t being created it must already be in place for the articulation of events to be possible at all (this claim is entirely consistent with “a world unfolding to consciousness”). Symmetrically, there is an immediate expectation of an ecology in the reader. Human imagination works against itself when it isn’t functioning according to perimeters that exist at the beginning of creative activity: one might say that the perimeters are the world and they are also the possibility of a world. In literary realism the perimeters in question are constituted by connections between all members and parts of the ecology. In Dewey’s great phrase, nothing stands alone as an “isolated finality.”

What this means is that explanations of human behavior in realist fiction are fully adequate to the behavior that needs to be explained because there exists an ecology that makes the behavior possible in
the first place. Imaginative creation is not “fanciful” even as it may seem implausible or entirely unpredictable (like the world). And this is how we—as interpreters of realist fiction—explain our empathy and/or understanding for a wildly hazardous “socio-path” such as Abner Snopes. In providing the completeness of a world (the ecology) Faulkner allows us to understand Snopes from the world that made him possible. Our own explanations from ordinary life, newspapers, news sources, law courts and all the way into social science inevitably fragment the agent from his or her own life-world that makes the agent possible: it follows that these explanations from ordinary life fail the scope of human reality.

As Faulkner explores Snopes he explores his world, his perimeters. The enormous weight of envy and bitterness that rides on Snopes’ shoulders and whips him into a state of robotic determination to burn barns is a broad reality focused into one man: no account of Snopes’ behavior can even reach the level of epistemic or ontological coherence without this hypothesis. Human actions in Faulkner’s creations are present on the surface as “individual” (as in our social reality) and then are exposed as thickly relational. Snopes can wipe the shit off his boots onto the French white rug of the plantation owner—Major De Spain— and at the same time create terror just because he is overtly exposing the tangled relations that make his own circumstance possible: this is the “depth of the story.” One might say, no revelation is possible without human beings as ecological beings; without the ecology, everything remains “on the surface” (shallowness).

The extreme emotional intensity of the scene mentioned is then possible because of all the interconnections actually being exposed. As long as Snopes remains in his shack, hidden away, the pretense of “rightful place” and “social superiority” can be maintained. At a macrocosmic level this is what is required for there to be a human condition. Cutting ties in the imagination mirrors the social work required to cut ties in reality.

“Explanation,” as I have been using the term, is not technical or a special case: it is analytic to interpreting events and human actions. The key point here is “completeness”: the idea that the world brought forth by the literary artist is always sufficient for how some character comes to exist at all. We can call this “ecological explanation” and, as I have been trying to show, it immediately implicates thick relations throughout a world. First level and banal explanations consist in interpreting human agency from the relatively strict individual case. In other words to say that Snopes burned down the barn from a painful envy and bitterness is true enough but it digs up nothing about how such emotions could ever be realized in a world or a character. Clearly the object and cause of Snopes’ envy and impotence goes far beyond a single person or even series of persons: it goes to all the ways in which those persons are tied together. When we remain at the individual and banal level, we cast ourselves as immediately superficial and thereby cut ourselves off from the aesthetic redemption of completeness. We become hostages to the various institutions that fragment the agent from the world and so ironically diminish the depth and potential freedom of the individual.
III: CATEGORICAL EMOTIONS

Perhaps there is some ambiguity or implausibility hidden within the question: what makes or made Snopes’ emotion possible? This ambiguity and or implausibility vanishes as soon as we realize that we are asking how someone like Snopes ever came to exist? We then also realize that in each element of the story, Faulkner is revealing the hidden relations that make up the human world, so that “elements” fold into the whole.

But all of these ideas can only come to life as we climb to yet another vantage point. In his novel *Affliction*, a harrowing descent into the belly of a brute psychic and environmental realism, Russell Banks creates a completeness that is adequate to revelation. We do not find “affliction” in our handy diagnostic manual of psychological disorders: the reason for this can be found in the novel. *Affliction*, a real human condition, absolutely demands ecological explanation and this is precisely how Banks reveals so much in his art.

Wade Whitehouse, the main character in the novel, is afflicted. Affliction, unlike suffering, attaches to the nature of being itself and thereby goes to destroy agency. Afflictions are constituted in such a way as to preclude their own cure. Banks has found an aspect of the human condition that vividly captures what I am calling “completeness” and “ecological explanation.” Wade’s initial shame and anger—caused by his vicious alcoholic father Glenn Whitehouse—are, at the same time, emotions woven deeply into the fabric of the town. As Banks surveys the ecology, multiple distill reasons and causes for people like Glenn immediately surface: in fact, their existence is overdetermined. Lawford, New Hampshire is brimming with shame and anger as the contemporary world, the one that provides what we call “economic and social opportunity,” passes it by in a brutal and accelerated way. Other characters tainted by the angry and nihilistic male competition emerge from an ecology drained of resources and with a past that can no longer provide substance for an ongoing identity. Violence, alcoholism, casual cruelty are all given an ecological explanation.

Wade’s particular affliction, beginning with shame, fear and anger (in a specific dosage and relationship) as a child, becomes a cluster of emotions and doxastic states. By “categorical” I mean “shame” (for example) loses its normative, episodic place and becomes the manner in which Wade comprehends the inseparable trio of himself, others, and the world. By analogy with Kant’s categories of the understanding, the shame-fear-anger cluster are what give shape to his experience rather than being derived from or simply caused by experience. A more technical analysis of “categorical emotion” is the following. For Wade “to be conscious of circumstance x” is for “circumstance x to inherently contain elements of shame, fear and anger.” “Inherently contain” means that the categorical cluster is what creates circumstance x as circumstance x, in which shame, fear and anger are constitutive of x. The affliction is, in other words, constantly creating itself in the world by being instilled into the nature of consciousness itself. These categorical states shape experience in the above way even as circumstances do not seem to relate intelligibly to shame, fear or anger: nothing in the object of
experience seems adequate to provoke such feelings or behavior. But this is entirely in line with “completeness”: one must look at the deeper circumstance, the life-world of Wade and all of the characters to see how the consciousness of an individual is intelligible and appropriate to that life-world. The dense and sometimes opaque symmetry between individual and ecology is what creates the possibility of tragedy. If we remain entirely within the banality of individual explanations, we end up with nothing but a thin description of a particular mental illness.

These categorical states, as a filter and shaper of consciousness, inevitably move persons so afflicted into the jangling area between sanity and insanity. And we cannot claim objective hold on these gross concepts: we need scalpel like existential acumen to even approach this complex mix of epistemic and normative judgment. Certainly the townspeople start to relate to Wade in that disturbed way: he must be crossing over into insanity (but is still to blame). And yet Wade’s intentional work within the battleground between sanity and insanity implicates the rest of the town in what I have been calling ecological explanation. Wade’s confused and tenuous hold in his own consciousness is first made possible by the deep ecology of Lawford. As Wade turns homicidal, we know that he is also heading for regional headlines that dismiss his story as the result of a crazed, substance abusing gunman, fully free and responsible as an isolated finality. These institutionally sponsored phrases and slogans for what lies behind this type of violence beckon denial as an aspect of communal dysfunction. What is missed is the harrowing truth that Wade was endeavoring to kill the possibility of himself or someone quite like him: he was trying to kill his life-world: a communal suicide that is far from insanity.

Only a peculiarly small-minded person could to fail to have empathy or understanding for Wade Whitehouse once “his story is told” as Banks tells it. The empathy and understanding all come from a relentless aesthetic completeness. And then we gain the position to question ourselves with some degree of confidence. Free will and the idea of a single individual somehow creating enough psychic weight for homicide will fail any explanatory criteria. Now what really matters is the extent to which our certitude about freedom and responsibility become problematic.

The categorical emotions I discussed earlier wipe out transparent self-understanding across and through consciousness. Wade cannot fully grasp his motives for the relatively simple reason that what constitute his motives are what form his interpretation of reality. The move from “inner” to “outer” and back again, which all doctrines of our free-will dogmas are built from is now chronically flummoxed. We should be alert enough to catch glimpses of this in ourselves. Ecological explanation, insofar as we have to say that it is constitutive of how we construct the narrative, immediately creates a potential conflation between “what I effect” and “what has effected me.” Under the weight of this conflation, we see—at least I hope we see, how it is that human freedom would consist in just how fully we can grasp the ecology. There is no premise that will finally force the conclusion that we cannot be aware of the ecology and so change it in various ways. The result being that freedom should never be assumed, at least not if we want to be free.
Asking the philosophical question concerning free-will and responsibility can now be turned over to the details of ecological explanation demanded by completeness which, in turn, demands a contextual basis for any answer. We happily destruct the philosophical pretense of deducing freedom and responsibility from any abstraction. And, of course, it is “the story” of Wade Whitehouse that has to keep pushing deeper into his circumstance to arrive at completeness.

IV: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

Cormac McCarthy in his story No Country for Old Men, turns “completeness” against itself in order to create a radical evil. Anton Chigurh, the seemingly bizarre assassin/business man (yes, he is a business man), is a character who intentionally sets out to cut ties with all other human beings and then, ultimately, with the human condition. He cannot do this, he is bound to fail, but he may succeed in convincing himself and others that he really does exist apart from any ecology. Such a project seems to confer a God-like sort of control and the extent that we believe it is possible also betrays the extent to which we indulge the mythology of individualism.

The critique of individualism is itself a cliché and part of the value in McCarthy’s novel is that the nature of the narrative is an articulation of individualism. He gets beneath the surface of the moralists by constructing a radical individualism from the imagination. First, we can see that Chigurh is a purified individualism, a character on the very borders of reality and this is precisely where McCarthy wants him. Chigurh can build his quest by distinguishing between individuals only because of their presence in his plan and this just means as they are obstacles to his plan. The individuals he deals with are only historical, are only a part of a whole, insofar as they stand in some relation to his own center of orientation: his plan and procedure. For these to be elements in the content of consciousness, Chigurh must actually reduce himself to the plan while simultaneously reducing others to obstacles or mere parts of the plan. This is a form of “selfishness” that necessarily annihilates the self. His own agency is now just another aspect of the plan.

Now, for any of this to be possible or for it to reach into reality, we will need further requirements which McCarthy provides in existential detail. Chigurh has to be stripped of cognitive/emotive combinations that presuppose or take into account the salience of individual worth. Hence, unlike Wade Whitehouse, there cannot be an “internal struggle.” Chigurh cannot do what he does and how he does it with emotive/cognitive clusters like shame, fear and anger. These powerful states are self-regarding and other regarding at the same time, simultaneously in perception and experience necessarily and as such they presuppose the deep connections between persons and between persons and the environment. One step further, these states then presuppose a unity within the world or an inseparability of self, other, and environment. Chigurh can only reduce himself to his plan as he simultaneously sees his plan and himself in perception: reality as he experiences it and is conscious of it, just is his plan. Hence we have another form of categorical consciousness whereby all the emotions and cognitive states that presuppose the unity of the world and reality are gone. The environment,
consisting of towns, shops, homes, etc... are not treated with disregard exactly—instead they are destroyed according to how they are within the scope of Chigurh’s conflation of his plan to reality.

Just as we will not get a premise to force the conclusion that human beings are powerless to comprehend and then change their ecology, we should be similarly sensible in never dismissing the possibility of the total ruin of our ecology. If freedom means anything it has to include these as open possibilities. The world of No Country for Old Men is clearly at the end of its rope. Chigurh’s above described consciousness is also accompanied by the fact that he has no history: McCarthy never tells us anything about his past, whereas every other character has been given something like an ecological explanation. Chigurh is a sudden emergence which is akin to what occurs in destroyed eco-systems: weeds and weed species do not emerge from nothing, instead they emerge from what is left over after the components of the existing ecosystem are in radical decline. This particular emergence is alarming for its lack of history and for what it may mean for human identity: we are at a loss to comprehend identity without history. McCarthy is pointing to extinction. Chigurh is pointing to extinction, especially his own as we know a conflation of the self with reality is unsustainable.

And McCarthy then turns his imaginative powers to the apocalyptic modes of The Road. This is no accident. The radical nature of No Country for Old Men is marked by an evil of desolation within consciousness: a conflation between a plan and a reality that necessarily contains that plan. Realist fiction that makes this sort of evil available to consciousness needs to maintain the integrity of ecological explanation while at the same time revealing the destruction of the ecology that makes the explanation possible and this is no easy task. We can push the thesis deeper by considering or asking how this form of realist fiction has become possible. We are becoming more aware of the deep connections between persons and the world, especially in the possibility of wholesale environmental destruction. The presence of radical individualism can be measured by a denial, overt or subtle, of these very real connections and the strong empirical evidence that catastrophe is looming. Realist fiction as it depends on ecological explanations for its power and truth then becomes a form of resistance to the seductive distortions of denial.
I’M ALWAYS THINKING OF CHAUCER–SAY JAZZ

Laura Ruby
University of Hawai‘i

THE IMAGE AND THE WORD

Picture this if you will: the words we know, all the words we have acquired along with the ways of connecting them in all our respective cultures, are nothing less than the irreducible expression of a singular nature we call human.

We are selves in a world because we have words.

–Tony Quaglino

The Image and the Word New York Quarterly 47


included in Language Matters–Selected Poetry by Tony Quaglino

I’m Always Thinking of Chaucer—Say Jazz, is a 14-panel print that interweaves Chaucer’s medieval Canterbury Tales—narration, pilgrims, and their stories—with poet Tony Quagliano’s Say Jazz, and the stories he told of contemporary literary and jazz pilgrims, and is about medieval manuscripts, early books, and musicians—and 20-21 century poetry, jazz, and art.

http://www.laurarubyart.com/Pages/Chaucer.aspx

Poet Tony Quagliano’s Say Jazz gives the artwork rhythm and cadence: the moving forward and catching the past that is within the heart of jazz and the Canterbury Tales. Over the years, my late husband, poet and writer, Tony, and I created many artist-writer collaborations: our collaborations began with the word, later my artwork was complementary to those words. The Edward Hopper Retrospective moves through space and time and Cliffs evokes some aspects of imagistic poetry and concrete poetry.

http://www.laurarubyart.com/Pages/artistwritercollaborations.aspx

- Edward Hopper Retrospective
- Cliffs
- Poem—Say Jazz
- Say Jazz

to the jazz documentary film-maker
who announces he no longer
uses the word jazz
go ahead use the word jazz
it’s ok the word jazz
afro-american music might mean
jazz
docu-verite might mean
movie
use the word
you want
the jazz men the music makers
who say don’t say jazz
don’t own the word jazz
they don’t own the word jazz
use the word jazz
if you want to
don’t lose
your words
don't shuffle
your words away
use the words you want
say jazz if you want to
say jazz if
you want to say jazz
say jazz

--Tony Quagliano

• I'M ALWAYS THINKING OF CHAUCER—SAY JAZZ

I continue to create artwork that honors Tony’s literary legacy. I had been intrigued by this handwriting phrase that I found in one of Tony’s manuscripts. I was then inspired to blend my enjoyment of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* – especially the multiple structures of its storytelling – with my telling of Tony’s poetic musings on literary and jazz pilgrims, as well as modern art references; doing so by way of narrative threads that wend through both spatial and temporal dimensions, as do Chaucer’s pilgrims’ narrators.

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**NATURE OF JAZZ—AND ASSOCIATIONS WITH TONY’S AND MY APPRECIATION OF JAZZ**

So, too, the artwork’s jazz musicians spin their own improvisational constructions to Tony’s *Say Jazz* poetic lines that run through the panels, the musicians stepping up for their solos at a captured moment in time. Engaged improvisational jazz keeps the tune-memory in play and borrows from the wealth of music that precedes it, resulting in “new,” exciting, on-the-spot, musical configurations.

**JAZZ MUSICIANS AND THEIR TUNES IN THE PANELS**

Thelonious Monk
Charlie Parker—Bird
Sonny Rollins
Ornette Coleman
Horace Silver
John Coltrane—Trane
Joe Pass  *
Charles Mingus
Rahsaan Roland Kirk
Dizzy Gillespie
Miles Davis
Charlie Haden
Great Day in Harlem, 1958

MODERN ART IMAGERY

Fragments of modern painting make their quoted appearance in keeping with jazz improvisation.

Matisse—Red Studio
Kandinsky
de Kooning
Pollock
Rothko
Picasso—Les Demoiselles d’Avignon
Hoffman
Duchamp—Nude Descending a Staircase
Diebenkorn
Motherwell
Mondrian
Frankenthaler

The 20th century modern art attempted to vanquish earlier forms of 2-dimensional illusion. But, the very “erasure” of picture plane depth evoked that illusion of spatial depth. Remaining in my artwork are the emotionally frayed edges of Abstract Expressionism. Ironically, the fragments of modernist paintings become subject matter in my artwork.

MEDIEVAL MANUSCRIPTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Illuminated manuscripts were designed by the text scribe, that is, spaces were allotted for small illustrations like those for the pilgrims on horseback. Some illustrators may have misjudged their allotted spaces and crowded the images into the text—Canterbury pilgrims, Chaucer’s interjections, Tony’s voice, all, may interrupt or crowd the story.

The horseback image was a convention to show the tellers of the tales in their distinctive clothing and with hands free to hold the objects of their offices. Sitting around a feasting table was a way to show all the travelers in close proximity, but stories told aloud were probably relished and time taken around an open fireplace.
ILLUMINATED CAPITAL LETTERS

The capitals lead the eye to the beginning of the text, but also tell a story writ small inside the letter. The initial capitals in my artwork represent the first letter of each musician’s name. The medieval literary world was filled with floral and faunal embellishments. Besides the minuscules with the framing capitals, there is a wealth of framing devices. Images of Tony and Chaucer appear within a number of the illuminated capitals in this artwork. At other times small scenes play out in marginalia or in rhythmical small images distributed throughout pages.

PALIMPSEST

Medieval manuscripts have often been given a second life. A scraper/penknife abraded the earlier text on a page, or as was often the case, allowed the scribe of the moment to make revisions. (See Charlie Haden panel.) A ghost image of the previous text is alive underneath the present text. The palimpsest in jazz is its deep historical roots in American and other world music. Tony’s poetry embeds the language of respected masters of the sound and image, of Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Charles Bukowski, among others. His poetry embraces the languages of film noir, vaudeville irreverence, science, and more.

THE WRITTEN WORD

Jazz solos emerge organically, much the same as Chaucer’s pilgrims, in repast, might experience the unexpected chemistry of paired sojourners at varied tables en route to Canterbury—the Canterbury Tales is built upon an improvisational structure: Chaucer penned the words, but the narrator, host, and pilgrims took over the theme and the shape of those tales. the Tales’ host selecting, or arranging, the story’s “tune”—the pilgrims, themselves, improvising the narrative.

Tony’s writings also come from many times and many places, and his stories come from many literary genres as well. It is with this in mind that the images in this artwork are in a random order. And in my artwork, I rearrange and recontextualize, and try to find the right complementarity among many divergent but related parts. I’m Always Thinking Of Chaucer—Say Jazz endeavors to bring all together for greater resonance.

I’m Always Thinking of Chaucer—Pilgrim Gallery

http://www.tonyquaglianopoetryfund.com/Pages/literarylinks.aspx

I admire the directness of medieval European artwork, which was without pretense or guile. The pilgrims in I’m Always Thinking of Chaucer—Pilgrim Gallery artwork are contemporary errant word-users on literary pilgrimages of sorts.
Tony was a keen observer. He was like Chaucer, journeying, looking on the pilgrims, but not a part of the crowd. He told tales in many voices in a range of poetic forms. Chaucer’s first tale first began rhyming in a staid form, and the host interrupted. Tony’s narrator also interrupted Tony’s own voice by interjecting a tale within a tale in *Get Out of Poetry By Sundown*. The title of two other poems also suggest the narrator’s dilemma mixing poetic forms—*Right Attack* (a tale about writing poetry but the story told with prose) and *The Showdown* (a tale about the illusory Nobel Prize won by an innocent told in dialogue).

WORD DANCE FOR POSEURS

All these sobriquets come from *Language Matters* or other of Tony’s writings. Proceeding around the feasting table:

- eco-righteous incantor—W.S.Merwin—monotone
- the big wanna be—
• condo marxist—woman writer on the fens
• hard guy in the faculty lounge—Philip Levine (on poets)
• the bamboo babies—darrick and eril—Darryl Lum and Eric Chock, Bamboo Ridge, Inc.
• the abject groupie—Gerald Locklin in an interview with Tricia Cherin
• the jovial buzzard or (“another of the wisdom boys”) —Paul Reps (Zen Flesh, Zen Bones)
• silly bunny mullins—silly billy—Billy Collins
• the survivalist—
• pantywaist poet—Ted Coozer
• the travelling regionalist—James Houston
• witless, humorless Robert Bly (on Bly on poetry)
• the language poet at the baseball game—student of language poetry
• gaggle of buk-imitators—Gerald Locklin is top goose
• the socialist—Paul Vangelisti
• shtick transylvania—Andrei Codrescu on letterman
COMMUNITY AND INDIVIDUAL IN THE ARTWORLDS OF CHINA & THE WEST

Eugene E. Selk
Creighton University

INTRODUCTION

The image of the artist popularized by contemporary film and literature is that of a lone person, filled with emotion and inspiration, poor, who sometimes in anguish, sometimes in bursts of energy, creates art. Of course, this is widely recognized as a caricature, an invention of the Romantic era, especially Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774). But how much of this caricature extends beyond the west? I shall suggest that this is a caricature in the west but even more so in Chinese art. For much of their respective histories, western and Chinese art were collaborative and communal affairs. But the communities were different. I shall refer to the Chinese communities as communities of memory and the western communities as communities of collaboration. I shall begin with China.

XIE HE AND THE TRADITION OF TRANSMISSION OF OLD MASTERS

There is some truth to Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s famous statement that China is “changeless” and “outside of the World’s History.” What Hegel meant is that China is so weighed down by tradition that it barely changes. When applied to the history of Chinese painting this is a crude caricature. But it remains that tradition and reverence for tradition plays a much greater role in Chinese art than in the west.

One of the earliest treatises on painting and calligraphy is Xie He’s *Ancient Painters’ Classified Records* written in the second quarter of the sixth century (between 530 and 550 CE). In this work, Xie presents six principles governing the creation of works of art. The sixth principle states (in Michael Sullivan’s translation): “By copying, the ancient models should be perpetuated.” (Sherman Lee translates this as: “Transmission of experience of the past in making copies.”) All of the canons are written in short, pithy phrases of this sort—for example, the second principle is simply “bone-means use brush”—which leaves them open to a variety of interpretations. But the sixth canon is more straightforward than the others. It suggests that artists ought to learn from the great masters of the past and to reproduce their creations so that they will be preserved for future generations. Michael Sullivan comments that in the early history of Chinese painting, making exact copies of ancient, worn masterpieces was a way of preserving them. In later times, working in the manner of the past, while adding something oneself, was a way of putting new life into the tradition. Xie He’s canon became prescriptive for Chinese art for centuries afterward. It became prescriptive not only in the emphasis on copying the old masters and on the quality of the brushstroke, but also on the subjects appropriate for painting: landscapes, bamboo, birds, flowers, fish, crustaceans, and scholars studying in a pavilion surrounded by gardens and mountains. And indeed this was the pattern in Chinese painting for most of its history from Xie He until the 20th century. And frequently the inscriptions on paintings include an acknowledgement of and praise for an old master.
EXAMPLES OF CHINESE TRADITIONALISM IN PAINTING

Here are a few examples of this copying and quoting tradition in Chinese painting. The tradition began early in the history of Chinese art.

This painting from the 1100s is an anonymous copy of a painting from the early 500s by Zhang Sengyou (active 500-550). And as late as the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), Lan Ying painted a work entitled *White Clouds and Red Trees* (1658, Palace Museum, Beijing) and on the inscription states that he was “imitating Zhang Sengyou’s bone-immersing technique.”

*Eighty-seven Immortals*, from the early 1400s by an unknown artist is a copy after Wu Zongyuan who was active in the first half of the 11th century (d. 1050 AD). Wu Zongyuan in turn copied from Wu Daozi who was active in the 8th century and, whom Sherman Lee calls “the greatest name of the Tang dynasty, if not the greatest name in Chinese painting.” No originals by Wu survive. This 14th century copy may be close to his style and subject. So here is a copy of a copy spread over seven centuries.
Copy by unknown painter of *Eighty-seven Immortals*. handscroll, ink & color on silk. 14th century. C.C. Wang Collection, New York copy after Wu Zongyuan (d. 1050), who in turn copied from Wu Daozi (active 720-760 AD).

Wu Zhen’s (1280-1354) painting, (1347) looks back to the monumental landscape style of Northern Song *Poetic Feeling in a Thatched Pavilion*, especially to the brushwork of Ju-Ran (fl. 10th century). Indeed, the painting *Fisherman* might be almost taken for a Ju-Ran.9


Wu Zhen. *Fisherman*. C.1350. ink on paper, handscroll. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC.

Attributed to Ju Ran (fl. 10th century).
Three centuries later, Wang Yuanqi (1642-1715) writes on a landscape which he painted on an autumn day in 1680s.

By a dim light and during heavy rain I painted this in the style of Wang Meng to counteract a mood of depression.9

Wang Meng lived in the 14th century. (1309-1385)

In the Ming period (1368–1644), Tang Yin (1470-1523) reaches back to the great 12th century Song master Li Tang (c.1050-1130).10
EXAMPLES OF CHINESE TRADITIONALISM IN 20TH CENTURY CHINESE PAINTING

I conclude these examples of appeals to old masters with a few works by Qi Baishi (1864-1957) whom Wen Fong calls “the most highly respected traditional-style painter of China in the twentieth century.” Qi and many other 20th century Chinese painters were strongly influenced by the 17th century painter Bada Shanren (1626-1705). Bada (birth name was Zhu Da) was born a prince and member of the Ming court, but joined a monastery after the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644. He took up painting late in his life and developed a style marked by “clean and sparing brushstrokes.”

Qi Baishi. *Catfish.* 1937. ink on wrapping paper. Inspired by a 17th century painting by Bada Shanren. Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC.
Bada Shanren (1626-1705). *Fish*. late 1600s.

Qi Baishi. *Insects and Plants*. 1943. album of twelve leaves.

Bada Shanren. *Pine Tree and Rock*. late 1600s. ink on paper, private collection

Qi Baishi. *Persimmon* (early 1940s). ink on paper

This is one of the most famous of Qi’s paintings. He radically simplifies the form. Persimmon is a symbol of good fortune in at the New Year. The style of the painting—single fruit with large calligraphy—is also influenced by the 17th century painter, Bada Shanren (1626-1705).

Qi Baishi. *Scuttling Crab*. 1919. The colophon states: “Fukan saw this painting and liked it so much that I present it to him as a gift.”

In sum, Qi Baishi, while remaining traditional in subject matter—the scholar in a pavilion, landscapes, flowers, fish, and crustaceans—borrowed his style of radically simplified forms from Bada Shanren. He did introduce a few stylistic innovations—the harmonious combining of meticulous depictions of insects, flowers, and birds with the plants which have the appearance of being freely sketched. But these are not radical, and are only shifts in the tradition of economical brushstrokes on paper.

THE SCHOLAR-AMATEUR AND ARTISAN-PROFESSIONAL DISTINCTION IN CHINESE ART

As noted at the outset, part of the popular image of the modern western artist is that the artist works out of personal inspiration without regard to public expectations or demands. Is there a counterpart to this in Chinese art? In the art world of Chinese artists, a distinction arose in the 11th century between two classes of artists: scholar-amateur and artisan-professional.13 The distinction is between those artists who were well-educated and well versed in poetry and calligraphy, but did not create art works for their living. They created works out of inspiration and for the entertainment and enlightenment of their friends. By contrast, artisan-professionals worked for the courts producing portraits or decorations for palaces. For these artists, producing for the court was their profession.

This classification of artists suggests that scholar-amateurs created for individual expression. By contrast artisan-professionals created in response to patrons. This implies that the creation of art for scholar-amateurs was a highly individualistic affair similar to the idea of the artists which emerged in the west during the Romantic era. Is this warranted?

Craig Clunas traces the possible origin of the amateur-scholar image of Chinese artists to Guo Xi (after 1000 – c.1090), an 11th century, Northern Song painter. Guo was a court painter and his work, Early Spring, is one of the earliest surviving Chinese landscape paintings.14

Guo left writings on art, and from his treatise *Lofty Ambition in Forests and Streams*, may lie the idea of the artist as a “heroic creator.”\(^{15}\) Guo stresses the free inspiration of the artist, and asserts that the inspiration of the artist does not come from external phenomena but from “within the heart/mind of the artist.”\(^{16}\) Clunas comments that this idea of the artist “as a romantic free spirit” was “massively influential on Chinese art in later centuries.”\(^{17}\) As noted, this image became commonplace in the West during the Romantic era albeit anticipated by Vasari in some of his comments on Giotto, Michelangelo and Raphael. Both Clunas and Cahill are skeptical about this image. Clunas notes that Guo worked for the court and as such “his position as a member of the imperial court may well have constrained him in all sorts of ways.”\(^{18}\) James Cahill is even more skeptical. As one of many case studies, he cites a diary of Cheng Min, a late 17\(^{th}\) century artist, a supposed scholar-amateur, which indicates that he created paintings, carved seals, and painted fans in return for food.\(^{19}\) Clunas and Cahill propose that Cheng’s painting for survival was probably much closer to the situation of most amateur-scholars than the myth—a myth perpetuated by artists themselves.\(^{20}\)

In sum, the vocation of the artist for much of the history of China was not all about individual expression. Artists remained within the tradition of following the style of an old master and painted the usual subjects: landscapes, bamboo, rocks, orchids, plums, pins cranes, and Mandarin ducks.

**THE ROYCIAN COMMUNITY AND CHINESE ART**

How shall we characterize the place of the individual artist and community of artists for much of the history of Chinese art? Josiah Royce (1855-1916), the prominent late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) century American philosopher, offers a theory of community which is helpful in clarifying the apparent differences and similarities with respect to individualism and community in the Chinese artworld. Royce proposes that one of the conditions essential for the existence of a true community is a group of individuals who have the power to extend themselves in time. Community is founded upon “the power of an individual self to extend his life, in ideal fashion, so as to regard it as including past and future events which live far away in time, and which he does not now personally remember.”\(^{21}\) Then Royce links this trait of our humanness with his notion of community: “The rule that time is needed for the formation of a conscious community is a rule which finds its extremely familiar analogy with the life of every individual human self. Each one of us knows that he just now, at this instant, cannot find more than a mere fragment of himself present. The self comes down to us from its own past. It needs and is its history.”\(^{22}\) For Royce, an essential part of what constitutes a community is a sharing by individuals of a common past. We might call such a community a *community of memory*.

Royce’s analysis of community captures the type of community which existed for much of the history of Chinese art. The communities of artists were not communities in one time or place, but communities of memory, often stretching back centuries. But is this feature of the Chinese artworld present in the west?

**THE RENAISSANCE ARTIST AT WORK**

I now turn to the west. Contrary to the popular image of the artist at work, Renaissance artists, for the most part, did not work in lonely isolation and did not emphasize expression of feelings. With few exceptions, in the Quattro and Cinquecento, artists typically belonged to a guild, a sort of union where membership was required before one could be employed in the business.\(^{23}\) Within the shop, there was a master who obtained commissions and oversaw the work.\(^{24}\) He was in charge of overall design and
iconographic interpretation. Thus the production of art for most Renaissance artists was collaborative; it was a cooperative venture within organized workshops. The master would make up the basic design of the work, but the apprentices might then execute much of it. And apprentices were required to follow the style of the master. The modern idea that originality is essential to the very idea of art was not held by most artists during the Renaissance. The master was a "craftsman-businessman," who except for his product, was no different from any other craftsmen who worked near him. Apprentices entered the shop of a master in their early teens and often remained for six years. A fully trained apprentice would attempt to set up a shop of his own. This pattern of art production is close to the way artists in the west worked for much of the history of western art up to the Romantic age.

This was certainly collaboration but was it community? In the Roycian sense of community, it was not, at least not in a strong sense. The artisans in the workshop did not look back to old masters. The master who ran the workshop may have been influenced by his master, and almost all Renaissance artists praised Giotto. But for the most part there was no conscious attempt to perpetuate the memory of a master. There certainly were tacit borrowings of subjects and styles from earlier models (a Madonna and Child, or nativity scene, or martyrdom of St. Sebastian), but there was nothing like the reverence of Chinese painters for the old masters. One might call Renaissance workshops communities of collaboration rather than communities of memory.

**DIALOGUES OF WESTERN ARTISTS WITH WESTERN OLD MASTERS**

One objection which might be raised to this comparison of China and the west is that there are many examples in the history of western art of artists dialoguing with and quoting earlier artists. One of the famous dialogues is between Georgione’s *Sleeping Venus*. c.1510), Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (c.1538), and Édouard Manet *Olympia* (1863).

![Georgione. Sleeping Venus. c.1510. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.](image)


Another example is Picasso's many paraphrases of other artists. Beginning as early as 1950, he produced a series of such works.


In 1957, he created fifty-eight large oils on Diego Velázquez’s *Las Meninas* (1656-1657).  

And from 1959 to 1962, he created over 150 sketches and drawings and 27 paintings after Manet’s *Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe*.
And in 1962, he created *The Rape of the Sabine Women (after David)*.


Another artist who has dialogued extensively with past artists and with movements is Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997). In his 1966 *Yellow and Red Brushstrokes*, he focuses on the brushstroke.

This appears to be a reference to the Abstract Expressionist artists, especially the painterly members of this movement. There is an irony here. In Abstract Expressionist works, the brushstrokes were presented to look natural—to look the way an artist would paint without any cleaning up or polished overlay. But Lichtenstein carefully paints the brushstrokes and the brushstrokes themselves are highly finished, polished.

Later in his career, he commented on a wide variety of 19th and 20th century artists and movements—Monet, Van Gogh, Picasso, Cubism, Mondrian, and even a classical Greek sculpture.
In all of these works, Picasso and Lichtenstein translate the subject matter of the works of the old masters into their style. This differs dramatically from the dialogue with old masters of Chinese artists. Although Chinese artists adjusted the style of the old masters to their style, they seldom dramatically changed the style. Chinese artists share a bond with their precursors, what I have called a community of memory. By contrast, Picasso, Lichtenstein and other Western artists who dialogue with classic paintings simply use the old masters as an occasion to express a new style and often a new message. In the Chinese examples, the paintings and the inscriptions are expressions of reverence for a particular old master or a tradition. By contrast, the western examples cited above are closer to a play on.

CONCLUSION

There is much that is common about the social world of Chinese and western artists. For most of the history of both, patrons dictated the subject matter and materials of the paintings. But within this patron-artist relationship there was enough leeway for artists to develop distinctive styles. As the late Ming artist Dong Qichang (1555-1636) wrote, “Those who study the old master and do not introduce some changes are as if closed in by a fence. If one imitates the models too closely one is often farther removed from them.” But I have proposed that the weight of tradition was much stronger in the history of Chinese art than in the west. From the 6th to the close of the 19th century, Chinese artists very consciously worked within the traditions of old masters. Change was slow and halting until the post-Mao period. This is a community of memory, or perhaps communities of memory. There is nothing quite like such a community in the west.
NOTES


6. Ibid., 236.


8. Ibid., 413.


15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid., 56.


21. Royce, 244.


23. Ibid., 13.

24. Ibid., 15.


26. Carsten-Peter Warncke argues that these works have a political and social dimension. Whereas in the Velázquez painting, the focus of the work—at least for the viewer and everyone in the painting—are the king and queen entering the room. But in Picasso’s variations on the painting, the focus is on the painter, perhaps reflecting Picasso’s view of the new social status of the artist in modern, liberal societies. See Carsten-Peter Warncke, *Picasso 1881-1973*, ed. Ingo Walther; trans. Michael Hulse (NY: Taschen, 1997), 209.

ÔOKA MAKOTO, RENSHI, AND POETIC COLLABORATION

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Ôoka Makoto is a distinguished contemporary Japanese poet. He has been described as “the T. S. Eliot of Japan” because of his stature as a great poet who is also an influential critic and scholar. Among Ôoka’s claims to fame is his invention of the renshi form of linked verse and his use of it as a means to poetic collaborations with writers in several countries. In my paper I will describe what a renshi is and the process involved in creating one. I will do so as scholar dedicated to interartistic matters and as a poet who participated in one of Ôoka’s best-known renshi experiments, which was published as the book What the Kite Thinks.

MY COLLABORATION WITH ÔOKA MAKOTO,
JEAN TOYAMA, AND WING TEK LUM

Let me start by telling you a little about how I happened to have the good fortune to be enlisted in the collaboration that led to a book of linked poetry. In 1991, the Dean of the Summer Session at my university, the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, secured funding to bring Ôoka Makoto to Hawai‘i. As Ôoka was famed for his international collaborations involving a form of linked poetry that he called renshi—a free-verse form related to the ancient Japanese form of linked verse known as renga—a plan was formed to organize Ôoka’s visit around the composition and presentation of a renshi involving three Hawai‘i poets and Ôoka himself. I was delighted to be chosen as one of the three Hawai‘i poets, along with Jean Toyama and Wing Tek Lum, who would participate in this collaboration. Ôoka, as the master and leader of this effort, relayed to us the ground rules while he was still in Japan. I will quote from his introduction to our book to give you a version of his explanation of those rules: “. . . a poet takes the last line or last word of the previous poem written by another as the title of his own poem. In thus capping the previous poem, the poet has some sense of continuity or of expanding or developing its ideas, but in a different direction.” Ôoka sent the first poem by fax and we composed the next three while awaiting his arrival. He arrived with the fifth link in hand. During his visit in Hawai‘i we sat around a table together and composed three more sets of four links. A highly enjoyable reading and discussion of the first sixteen links concluded the public program. We continued the renshi long distance until we had a total of thirty-six links. The completed renshi was subsequently published in 1994, as What the Kite Thinks. That volume contained the complete sequence as well as commentaries by the four poets.
RENGA TRADITIONS IN JAPAN

As both a practitioner and a historian of Japanese poetry, Ōoka was appreciative of the great traditions of Japanese linked verse, most famously practiced by the 17th-century poet Bashō. Japanese linked verse—traditionally referred to as renga—was a form of group writing in which one poet would add a link to a chain of poems as a means to continuing a sequence in an attractive and effective way. The new link would be a continuation in that it would be written as a completion of the second half of the preceeding poem. Despite the strict structural rules of the form, which required a sequence of line lengths—each new link was expected, in what Ōoka felt was the best examples of the form, to take off in a different direction, thereby transforming the linking section of the previous poems in some interesting way. In weak versions of linked verse there was, in Ōoka’s view, a mere happy sitting in a circle and a sort of clapping of hands in congenial comradeship of playful word play. In the best examples of linked verse, such as those produced by Bashō’s circle, each poet maintained his “solitary mind” so that each link was a transformation as well as a continuation.

In my research for this project I have endeavored to bring into focus for myself the long and continuing history of renga activity in Japan. Two books have been of particular assistance. Earl Miner’s Japanese Linked Poetry (1979) is a distinguished work that is considered the definitive study of the form available in English, but, for the practicing poet and general reader, a more pragmatic and fully explanatory approach to the subject is available in Hiroaki Sato’s One Hundred Frogs: From Renga to Haiku to English (1983). Many other books, articles, and renga collections throw light on these matters. My bibliography makes available an extensive array of other sources of information on the history of linked verse.

A considerable obstacle one faces in endeavoring to come to grips with what renga was and is relates to the very popularity of the Japanese form generally known as haiku. Because haiku emerged out of a complex of renga practices and haiku is of such high interest to so many the complex tradition of Japanese linked verse that led to the emergence of haiku tends to get lost in the shuffle for non-Japanese readers and writers. A chief instance of this problem is the celebration of Bashō, the great master of both renga and the form that came to be known as haiku. The trajectory of renga development saw linked verse develop before and after Bashō towards extremes. At times it tended to be highly sophisticated in elitist ways; at other times it inclined towards becoming a party game characterized by vulgar jokes; at still other times these two tendencies intermingled. Bashō’s success as the crucial master of renga had to do with his sense of balance between profundity on the one hand and wittiness on the other. He came across as both spiritually insightful and inclined to laugh at the universe. His love of the natural world and his respect for and understanding of the history of Japanese culture combined with his wit and leadership qualities made him a literary professional of the highest order. It is, however, important that the way that he pursued his career as a literary professional was as a traveling master of renga collaborations. He made his living by conducting what Hiroaki Sato frankly
describes as “poetry workshops.” Contrasting Sato’s comments on the fruitful journey that led to the composition of Basho’s best known long work, _The Narrow Road to the Deep North_, with those of Nobuyuki Yuasa, a prominent translator of the _The Narrow Road_, reveals how Sato’s view of Bashō as a professional poet differs from the more typical view of Bashō as a saintly individual governed entirely by a quest for spiritual truth.

Here is Nobuyuki Yuasa on the famous journey: “. . . the Narrow Road to the Deep North was life itself for Bashō, and he travelled through it as anyone would travel through the short span of his life here—seeking a vision of eternity in the things that are, by their own nature, destined to perish. In short, _The Narrow Road to the Deep North_ is Bashō’s study in eternity, and in so far as he has succeeded in this attempt, it is also a monument he has set up against the flow of time.” [37]

Here is Hiroaki Sato on that same trip:

> He undertook the journey partly to expand his turf, so to speak, as a renga poet. . . . This five-month period was Bashō’s most productive: he presided over poetry workshops, to use a modern term, thirty-six times, or once every four days. The intensity of his work on renga may partly account for the structure of _Oku no Hosomichi_, which some say resembles that of the thirty-six-part sequence. [91-93]

There is not necessarily a contradiction between the approaches of Yuasa and Sato. Bashō was, no doubt, seeking to address both “eternity” and the need to make a living as a professional poet. It is, however, useful to keep in mind the importance to Bashō of his professional poetic life, and not succumb, as Yuasa does, to the common notion that Bashō was traveling entirely for spiritual sustenance. One must keep in mind how widely valued renga activities were for the various sponsors of renga sessions who supported Bashō as he poetically wandered. The host and the other participants in the renga sessions were engaging with Bashō in collaborations that have not usually survived for us to consider, but they were important to all involved, including Bashō, who retained various portions of the contributions to these sessions in the works he decided to publish and preserve. Bashō was first and foremost a literary man, and his success in the practice of renga underscores the value literary collaboration had for him. Bashō himself spoke to the issue of his twin reputations as an author of hokku (the term haiku was invented by Shiki in the nineteenth century) and as a master of linked verse: “Many of my followers can write hokku as well as I can. Where I show who I really am is in linking haikai verses.” [Drake 7]
HOW IS THE EXAMPLE OF TRADITIONAL RENGA PRACTICE BOTH LIBERATING AND CONFINING FOR POETS IN OUR OWN TIME

Despite the way haiku is regarded in American public schools, where the genre is seen as the epitome of easy-to-write short verse, appropriate for the youngest and most unskilled of would-be poets, haiku and the various related forms of Japanese poetry are, when properly regarded, highly demanding forms of writing. Haiku, tanka, and the renga, are all governed by rules and expectations of pattern and allusion. One needs to know much about the history of Japanese culture in general and Japanese poetry in particular to fully appreciate individual poems. The rules for renga have been of special complexity. To supervise the writing of a renga a master such as Bashō had to know how season references needed to be handled, when especially favored images (such as of the moon) could be used, when miscellaneous imagery was acceptable, and so forth. Although such rules were, indeed, made to be broken and often were, the knowing of the rules and the manipulating of them has always been (and continues to be) a demanding discipline, as can be discovered by examining the efforts of contemporary clubs that continue these forms in their most traditional forms. In fact, renga writing has often been a difficult game in which the rules can get in the way of inspiration.

The difficulties involved in renga have added challenges not present in the writing of haiku and tanka, but the rules also open up possibilities. The concept of linkage and the appreciation for the value of following rules presented by the renga tradition enables the possibility of poetic collaboration. Rules to dictate how one poem links to another, how turn-taking is decided, and what the individual poems must look like determine how the collaborative process unfolds. Some degree of limitation imposed on each collaborator helps the individual and the group to fulfill the possibilities of linkage. Too much freedom can be as burdensome as too much restriction.

ŌOKA’S RENGA ACTIVITY

Ōoka brought what he felt was the best form of linked poetry into a late-twentieth-century context. He wanted to allow all participants, including poets from outside Japan, to participate in a new form of linked verse that would enable the satisfactions of congenial collaboration while also allowing each poet to maintain his or her idiosyncratic style and tendencies of thought. Ōoka’s liberation and reinvention of linked-verse grew out of who he was and where he had been as a writer and scholar.

Although always attentive to the traditions of Japanese poetry, Ōoka began his poetic career as a modernist poet of a surrealist bent, and there is to his inclination towards linked verse a twin awareness of the example of European surrealist collaboration as an aider and abedder of his renga practice. He began in 1971 to collaborate on linked free-verse with a group of poets who were, like him, associated with a poetry magazine known as Kai (Oars). The continuing work of this group led to the publication in 1979 of a collection that they called Oars: Linked Poetry. Ōoka’s enthusiasm for incorporating
western free-verse technique within linked verse is crucial to the nature of his importance as an innovator in the collaborative sphere. Other Japanese poets have participated in free-verse renshi of various sorts in Japan, and traditional renga and approximations thereof have also been produced, but Ōoka’s pursuit of an international context for his particular brand of free-verse renshi is one of his special claims to fame.

In fact, Ōoka’s surrealist tendencies undoubtedly enabled his grasping of the potential for international collaboration. His surrealist turn enabled him to turn away from insular Japanese poetic practices while adopting the dreamlike and accidental drift of surrealist practice. He thereby subscribed to a Western style of creativity that allowed his subconscious mind to govern his thoughts and supply his imagery. His familiarity with surrealism undoubtedly also kept him thinking about surrealist modes of collaboration such as the “exquisite corpse” pieces that had been grist for the mill of Breton and company. It kept him aware that a serious collaborative effort could be conceived in a modernist mode without the constraints and overly restrictive rules of traditional Japanese renga.

Ōoka conceived his modernist renshi as fulfilling a significant collaborative function. He desired the whole to be more than the sum of the parts. In an introduction to one of his linked poetry collaborations Ōoka asserts that the individual poet should endeavor to surrender consciousness of his or her separate self to facilitate merging with the poetic sensibility of the group as a whole so that the resulting poem achieves a unity of feeling. He does not mean by this, however, that the individuals should lose their unique voices. Their separate identities should, if the collaboration is to be a strong one, emerge all the more vividly because of their appearance in a group setting.

During the collective creation of a renshi, each poet must make a constant effort to dissolve his or her own self-consciousness into the space of the group. On the other hand, and this is the most fascinating part, collective creation holds within it a great paradox: the self, which seems to have been sacrificed to the group, actually asserts itself all the more clearly. The very method by which self-consciousness is eliminated ensures that the individuality of each poet inevitably shines forth. In fact, the most important quality required of a poet participating in collective creation is that he or she be extremely individualistic. This is indeed a paradox, yet poetry itself comes into being only through a similar paradox consisting of both individuality and supra-individual words. [“Renga—Linked Poems” in Play of Mirrors 206]

Ōoka’s style of collective poem has, it seems to me, a special aspect not explicitly stated by Ōoka. The “constant effort to dissolve his or her own self-consciousness into the space of the group” is manifested as an effort of each poet to make each poetic link live up to the successes of its companions by achieving a universal expression of a truth that speaks to the human situation. This modernist mission of striving for essential truth is implicit in the first and subsequent links contributed by Ōoka to many of his renshi. This essentialist mission is, however, traditionally Japanese as much as it is provocatively
modernist. Geoffrey Bownas has asserted that a striving to capture the essential by means of reference to the particular has been a characteristic feature of Japanese poetry after Bashō: “Above all, they should so express the nature of the particular as to define, through it, the essence of all creation; their seventeen syllables should capture a vision into the nature of the world.” Earl Miner characterized the reliance on the essential that is so important to Japanese poetry this way: “…[Japanese] poets seek out those places where flowers seemed essentially to be flowers, the moon characteristically the moon, and the dew especially dew-like. This is the idea of essence (hoh’i) that we shall see meant so much to linked poetry. [Miner 34]

One of the upshots of this fusion of traditional Japanese essentialism with a related tendency in modernist verse was the Imagist movement in England and America in the early 20th century; another is the poetry of Ōkka. Ezra Pound so valued the clarity and compression of tanka and haiku that he sought to emulate aspects of Japanese verse in his early imagist poems. Ōkka, too, saw that a fusion of Japanese and western modernist essentialism, especially as handled in a surrealist manner, could be compelling.*** This is, I think, particularly apparent in the links Ōkka wrote for What the Kite Thinks and the influence his striving for dream-enhanced essential truths had on those of us who were collaborating with him on that project. As an Ōkka renshi develops and the contributors become locked into his mission of truth the linked poem as a whole takes on a unity of sorts—even though the essential assertions are emerging by means of a medley of voices. Indeed, I can testify that this sensibility of grasping after elusive essentials became contagious for us as we collectively wrote What the Kite Thinks. Here is an example of a surrealist/essentialist link that Ōkka composed for What the Kite Thinks.

21. As if Forever

As if forever
a woman cherishes ice cream on her lips,
a boy plays with life in his poems,
and death is polishing in his hands
beautiful newborn human bodies.

Though the dust-filled blue sky
shines far away as if forever,
the Earth suddenly
becomes a big hole
at my back. [27]

The imagery here has a clarity and is suggestive of essential matters—ice cream, life and death, the sky, and the planet Earth—and these basic things return their essential and universal characteristics even though they are shifted in a delicately personalized way.
WHAT THE KITE THINKS AS A KEY DEVELOPMENT

When Ōoka arrived in Hawaii in 1991 to engage in the collaboration that would become the book *What the Kite Thinks*, his renshi activities would seemed to have reached a happy point with regard to their availability in the English language and Ōoka’s enthusiastic advocacy of the value of such international collaborations. Two key books of his appeared in English translation in 1991. One of his best books of literary criticism to be translated into English, *The Colors of Poetry: Essays on Classic Japanese Verse*, was published in 1991; as was an impressive collection of his verse, *Elegy and Benediction: Selected Poems 1947-1989*. An “Epilogue” in *The Colors of Poetry* provided one of Ōoka’s most elegant explanations of the purpose of renshi as a “magnetic field” where the “solitary mind” of the individual poet interacts with a “banquet” gathering of other poets. Our collaboration with Ōoka arrived at a nice time for it to be a matter of much excitement. Furthermore, Hawai’i was a particularly fitting place for a renshi to be undertaken in view of the inherent diversity of our population.

There is much further I could say about modern experiments in linked verse, and more can emerge in discussion—for instance, Octavio Paz and Charles Tomlinson and two other poets (one from Italy and another from France) composed a collaborative sequence that they called renga, one of my colleagues from Hawaii was the leader for two local-Hawaii perspective renshi—but I would like to put those matters aside for now and conclude by reading the first four and the last links of *What the Kite Thinks*, the linked poem on which Wing Tek Lum, Jean Toyama, and I collaborated with Ōoka Makoto in 1991.

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ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO THE EMERGENCE OF ŌOKA’S RENSHI EXPERIMENTS

To clarify the context of Ōoka’s linked-verse experiments a number of other recent collaborative projects should be discussed.

OCTAVIO PAZ’S EXPERIMENT IN MULTICULTURAL COLLABORATION

A 1969 international collaboration attempt demonstrated to Ōoka, although he was not involved in it, that a multicultural renga-like collaboration/conversation/party could be extraordinarily interesting. This experiment received considerable attention at the time because of the fame of its leader, Octavio Paz, whose achievements would eventually earn him a Noble Prize for Literature. Paz, a Mexican poet
and scholar, represented the Spanish language. Charles Tomlinson, also a highly respected poet, represented English. The other two participants—Jacques Roubaud (French) and Edoardo Sanguinet (Italian)—were also poets of significance in their own countries. This ambitiously complex poem was published in a multilingual edition with the title Renga. The intricate system of linkages employed in this collaboration utilized the structure of the sonnet as the basis of its structure. This experiment in linked poetry was an important demonstration of how attractive international experiments in linked poetry could be. This effort, which was ultimately published in several languages with the title Renga, was composed by its several authors in a small basement room in a small Paris hotel. It was entirely western and had no direct affiliation with the Japanese tradition aside from the studious interest in that tradition of the participants.

It is not clear that the 1969 Paz-led collaboration had any specific influence on Ōoka’s activities, but it is possible that the Paris linkages and the international attention they received helped Ōoka realize the potential linked verse possessed for bringing together in collaborative endeavor a culturally diverse collection of poets.

The sonnet form was used in Paris in place of Japanese verse forms because—as Charles Tomlinson explains—“its clear divisions. . . gave cohesion to our efforts.” [Tomlinson, Charles. “Renga and Renshi: Linked Poems, Linked Traditions.”] To create a complex and rich pattern of collaboration a system of linking the individual sections of the poem from one poet to the next was devised. The complexity of the pattern resulted in a lack of the elegant brevity and seeming simplicity of form that is a source of pleasure in Japanese renga, but the density of the Paris Renga has a certain appeal, despite its strange mixture of imagery and rhetoric.

A CANADIAN EMULATOR OF PAZ

Surprisingly the unique and difficult Paris poem of 1969 was to have a Canadian imitator. A Paz-influenced “renga” was staged in London, Ontario on Saturday 16 February 1980. The collaboration was organized by Patrick Deane. The other participants were Shelia McColm, David White, and Peggy Dragisic. Deane closely imitated the rules established by Paz but replaced the 14-line sonnet form with a 16-line sonnet-like form. The complex rules for interweaving the linking poems that Paz established were closely paralleled in the Deane-led collaboration. [Deane, Patrick, Sheila McColm, David White, and Peggy Draagisic. *Renga*. Ilderton, Canada]

ANOTHER COLLABORATION BY TOMLINSON AND PAZ

But Tomlinson and Paz were, themselves, not finished with their attention to the possibilities of renga, and they created another collaboration of sonnets that they composed by sending their links back and
forth by mail. They entitled that two-poet renga *Airborn*, at the suggestion of Tomlinson’s wife, because of the airmailed nature of the collaboration.

**TOMLINSON COLLABORATION WITH ŌOKA**

Tomlinson’s ongoing linked-poetry efforts resulted in his being drawn into Ōoka’s developing international project. Tomlinson was invited to Japan where he collaborated with Ōoka, two other Japanese poets (Kawasaki Hiroshi and Sasaki Mikiro), and a young British writer (James Lasdun) in a renshi collaboration that took place at the “Hatake Hotspings in the setting of the Daiseyna Hotel.” The collaboration was given the title *Departing Swallows*. For this 1998 renshi Ōoka, who is described by Tomlinson as “our renshi master,” articulated a set of rules that seem aimed at keeping the renshi within bounds as a work with short links that more fully parallel the succinct links of traditional Japanese collaborations. Tomlinson’s summary of Ōoka’s directives is worth quoting at length.

Although we avoided many traditional stipulations, we did abide by the old rule that the moon should not be mentioned too often. The five and three line alternation of stanzas seems a happy compromise with Japanese forms. Clearly Makoto Ōoka was thinking of the frequent use of the five and three line stanzas of tanka and haiku, though contrary to these, there was no arbitrary syllable count.

Another difference between *Departing Swallows* and *What the Kite Thinks* is that Ōoka specified that the last line of the previous poem be the first line of the following poem, (and not simply the title). For this culminating renshi, one of the last Ōoka completed before what seems to be his retirement, he kept to the ease of writing that free-verse poetry allows for writers in both English and Japanese, while keeping to limitations of length for individual poems to enforce the sort of brevity that resonates in traditional Japanese links. The linking to the first line rather than the title also makes this form of renshi more parallel to the renga of earlier eras. However, the complex rules of imagery of Japanese renga tradition and the complex interweaving forms adopted by Octavio Paz’s *Renga* are both put aside. The form of renshi finally decided upon by Ōoka is, thus, a more concentrated form than what he used in *What the Kite Thinks*. It is my suspicion that his sense of the effectiveness of the short-poem nature of the links in *What the Kite Thinks* was key to his movement to the more refined form he used with Tomlinson in *Departing Swallows*. I have not, unfortunately, had an opportunity to ask him about this.

The more concentrated form of renshi that was Ōoka’s ultimate choice has not been followed by most of those influenced by his work, as we shall see in two renshi collaborations developed in Hawai‘i recently.
JEAN TOYAMA

Though Ōoka ultimately expressed a preference for a tanka-like brevity, the three renshi led by Jean Toyama in recent years show that renshi with links of unrestricted length can have appeal for writers. What such a renshi enables is a unique sort of anthology of free-verse poems by a group of writers that does not necessarily need to aim towards the concision and essentialism identified with the Japanese tradition and many phases of Ōoka’s work.

Writing under the rule that the last line of the previous poem becomes the title of the poem that follows, Toyama has imposed no other conditions on her renshi collaborators. One of the Toyama-led renshi began in 2007 as a blog on the website of Bamboo Ridge Press. In addition to Toyama the collaborators in 2007 were Juliet Kono, Ann Inoshita, and Christy Passion. The blog stimulated lots of interest and the renshi was published by Bamboo Ridge Press in 2010 under the title No Choice But to Follow. That collaboration has the local-to-Hawaii orientation identified with Bamboo Ridge magazine whose 30th year anniversary of publication was the announced motivation for this special renshi effort.

Because there was no implicit or explicit limitation on length or personal focus, it is not surprising that the links of No Choice But to Follow sometimes extended to considerable length and put aside essentialism for the highly personal tendencies associated with the confessional and family-history content that dominates much of American poetry these days. The vivid and frequently long poems of Christy Passion are distinctive and seem, in particular, to separate from the collaboration as arias that demand to be regarded as separate from the sequence. In various ways poems by the other poets also separate from the whole by means of personal focus and length.

The popularity in local literary circles in Hawai‘i of No Choice But to Follow inspired the same group of four poets to write a renshi entirely dedicated to a historical subject—the “Massie Affair,” a famous instance of racism, false identification, and lynch-mob mentality that erupted in Hawai‘i in 1931. By adopting a historical event as the focus for a renshi, the collaborators added a new dimension to linked poetry—making the linked verse a vehicle for a single-subject meditation by several voices. This is, of course, quite a large change from the discontinuous nature of most renga and renshi I have discussed so far, but, despite how contrary it is to the Japanese tradition, it is interesting in its suggestion that linked poetry can have a singular subject-matter focus and a realism of content. As of this writing, the Massie renshi has appeared only on the Bamboo Ridge Press website and has not been published in book form or in the magazine. As with No Choice But to Follow, many of the individual poems in this collaboration are lengthy.

Jean Toyama engaged in another renshi before she launched her two Bamboo Ridge Press collaborations. This earlier work was a collaboration with Eleanor Wilner and Nell Altizer. An excerpt from this renshi, which seems to have had no title, was published in Michigan Quarterly Review in
In this case, the three poets seem not generally to be in poetic sync. Altizer’s poems seem very dense and Wilner’s very long. The three poets have been stimulated to contribute good examples of their individual styles, but the pieces do not nest together with any level of comfort. Wilner’s pieces, in particular, seem to speak to each other but not at all to the pieces by her collaborators. The risk that one or more of the poets will be inclined to be individualistic in ways that are disruptive, which is always a risk in a collaboration, seems to have been the case here. Wilner’s endless verses are disruptive in a similar way to some of the long contributions of Christy Passion to the two Bamboo Ridge Press renshi. This is not to say that these poets should not show off their abilities; it is just to note that disruptive tendencies are apt to count against the collaborative feel of linked poems. I am arguing here for the value of rules, implicit or explicit, that pertain to length, focus, and tone.

TANIKA WA SHUTARO AND JEROME ROTHENBERG

A renshi led by Tanikawa Shuntaro has been made partially available in an article by Jerome Rothenberg, who was the only non-Japanese participant among the five contributors to the renshi. Here is Rothenberg’s description of the renshi rules that governed the collaboration:

In the present instance, Tanikawa, as the senior figure and acknowledged renshi-master (sabakite), only asked that the individual poems be kept short (between four and fourteen lines, I think he said), that some attention be paid to the poems preceding and following one’s own, and that linkages be subtle or mysterious rather than direct or obvious. We were also encouraged to avoid competition and to go easy on the confessional or expressionistic side of things. [Rothenberg 773-774]

Tanikawa’s expectation that each poem be short agrees with Ōoka’s finally arrived at practice, as does the expectation that each poem avoid confessional expressiveness and aim towards essentialized truth. There is, however, a distinct difference between Tanikawa’s conception of free-verse linkage and Ōoka’s. Tanikawa does not rely on the tangible link of repetition that Ōoka provides in his last-line-to-title or last-line-to-first-line approaches. Instead, Tanikawa leaves the linkage up to the individual poet and insists only that the linkage be “subtle or mysterious rather than direct or obvious.” Ōoka and Tanikawa, thus, both connect with the Japanese renga tradition of linkage in very different ways. Ōoka subscribes to a variation on the repetition and transformation strategy where a line or phrase is repeated and becomes something new, while Tanikawa chooses to omit a tangible link in favor of subtle linkages of imagery and reference that also are an aspect of the renga tradition. While Tanikawa’s belief in the value of subtle linkages seems attractively poetic, there is the problem that a mysterious linkage might seem no linkage at all and that the striving after subtlety of linkage might distract the poets from the higher goal of writing interesting poems. These twin problems do, in fact, arise for me as I read the several links provided in Rothenberg’s article. I find only a slight connection through imagery between several of the poems of the other poets he quotes and the contributions by Rothenberg himself are so
unconnected as to appear to have arrived from outer space. The striving after subtle connection appears to have become a preoccupation and a distraction for the contributors.

ŌOKA’S EXTENSIVE AND EXTENDED INTERNATIONAL RENSHI ACTIVITIES

An international team of translators would be needed to fully elucidate Ōoka’s multicultural collaborations. In 1994 Ōoka provided an overview of his renshi efforts up to that point: “To date I have made linked poems more than ten times, with poets who write in as many languages, in locations as far flung as Berlin, Rotterdam, Paris, Helsinki, Frankfort, Lahti (Finland), and Tokyo. Sometimes we work in English, sometimes with excellent translators. Several of these efforts have been published: two volumes in German, one in Dutch, one in Finnish and one in Estonian.” (What the Kite Thinks, 1)

Perhaps an enterprising scholar who knows many languages could survey and overview Ōoka’s diverse linked-verse projects.

A SOLO RENGA BY AN AMERICAN POET

It is interesting that one demonstration of the potential of the Ōoka’s renshi approach was published as a short book of poems that has the term Renga in its title but is not a collaboration. Renga: Draft 32 by Rachel Blau DuPlessis is a long poem in which the short stanzas link by repeating words from the last line of the previous stanza. This witty exercise is highly entertaining. What contact DuPlesis has had with Ōoka’s works is not clear. [DuPlesis, Rachel Blau. Renga: Draft 32. Wayne, PA: Beautiful Swimmer Press, 1998.]

A COLLABORATIVE RENGA (OF SORTS) THAT CLAIMS TO CELEBRATE AMERICA

A developing awareness of the value of Japanese linked-verse concepts was demonstrated by the publication in 2011 of Crossing State Lines: An American Renga. This high profile collaboration issued by the prominent publisher Farrar, Straus and Giroux and including many well-known and widely published poets was provoked by a celebration of America in the visual arts promoted the painter Eric Fischel. Why not celebrate America in poetry the organizers thought? The organizers advised participants to keep their pieces within ten lines and urged that they make their work relate in some way to the piece that came just before theirs. These rules were not insisted upon and, while reading the book, I could find little connection between the poems with the exception of one section where a repetitive and rather sentimental riff on the significance of the election of Barack Obama ripples through a number of pages. Although brief mention is made of surrealist collaborations by one of the editors, it is clear that the book shies away from notions of surrealist collaboration and aspires to the more rule-governed model of Japanese linked verse. That many established American poets would want to affiliate with the notion of renga linkage suggests that renga and renshi developments will continue

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JAPANESE FORMS PURSUED VIGOROUSLY ON WESTERN WEBSITES

My essay concerns primarily the intersections of Japanese traditions of linked poetry and modernist free verse that are evident in the experiments of Ōoka Makoto and some others, but it should be noted that there have been and continue to be many societies and journals dedicated to the writing and publication of poems in English that make use of Japanese forms. While haiku and tanka by single authors are the central concerns of most of these writing communities, a few of them also include linked verse in their purview. An online journal based in California called Lynx is one publication that emphasizes linked poetry above all else. This journal, which has been in operation since 1985, encourages, publishes, and discusses English-language renga. While Lynx focuses primarily on issues related to the Japanese forms and urges adherence to the traditional rules of those forms, the editors also encourage the submission of other sorts of collaborations, sometimes referred to as “symbiotic poetry.” The enthusiasm and dedication of the editors seems to have earned them a following of readers and writers interested in trying to write Japanese-like linked verse in English.

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SENSE BEYOND THE SENSE: COLLABORATION AS INNOVATION IN RUSSIAN AVANT-GARDE ART

(Symbolism, Victory over the Sun, and the Black Square)

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In December 1913, the Luna Park Theatre in Petrograd (today St. Petersburg) staged a pivotal avant-garde performance—the cubo-futurist opera Victory over the Sun [Pobeda nad solntse] (Figs. 1 and 2).1 Performed only twice—on December 3 and December 5—the opera brought together four of the leading figures of Russian Modernism: Velimir Khlebnikov, Aleksei Kruchenykh, Mikhail Matyushin, and Kazimir Malevich. The poet Velimir Khlebnikov wrote the opera’s prelude; his friend Aleksei Kruchenykh authored the poetic libretto; while the composer Mikhail Matyushin penned the opera’s music which has survived only in fragments.2 Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Matyushin invited a mutual friend—the leading cubo-futurist artist Kazimir Malevich—to design the sets and the costumes of the actors.3 Malevich, who had already illustrated some of the works of the two poets, readily embraced the proposal and created—what is widely acknowledged today as—some of the most original stage designs in modern theatre production.4 According to the artist’s own testimony, however, Malevich’s contribution to “the World’s First Production of Futurist Theatre” engendered an even larger impact that changed the development of Russian avant-garde art and the history of modern art, in general.5

Referring to his stage designs, Malevich attributed the origins of his new artistic movement—Suprematism—and its style—geometric abstraction—to the production of the world’s first “futurist theatre.” In particular, Malevich dated the genesis of, what he later defined as, his first suprematist image—the Black Square (originally titled Equilateral)—to the original “decoration” of the 1913 opera Victory of the Sun.6

Historically, the official inauguration of geometric abstraction and its new artistic movement Suprematism was proclaimed in Petrograd two years later—in 1915.7 The formal occasion was the exhibition The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings 0.10 [Poslednyaya futuristicheskaya vystavka kartin: 0.10] open at the Art Bureau [Khudozhestvennoe buro]—an art gallery run by Nadezhda Dobychina—from December 19, 1915 to January 17, 1916 (Fig. 3). The exhibit displayed two visions of artistic abstraction represented by paintings of Kazimir Malevich, in one of the rooms, and sculptures of Vladimir Tatlin, in the other.8 The thirty-nine paintings by Malevich epitomized, what the artist’s essay in the catalogue described as, his “desperate attempts to free art of the ballast of objectivity” and to achieve the “zero of form.”9 Assessing the momentum of his artistic endeavor, Malevich exclaimed “I have transformed myself into the zero of form.”10 However, according to Malevich’s earlier account, the most symptomatic image of the 1915 exhibit and the ultimate icon of the artist’s transformation into
“the zero of form”—the Black Square—predated the 1915 exhibit and pointed to the cubo-futurist opera staged three years earlier (Fig 4). In a letter to Matyushin written in 1913, Malevich explained: “The decoration shows a black square, the embryo of all possibilities, which in the course of its development acquired a terrible power.”

There is no reference to a black square in the opera’s libretto, and there are multiple variations of square forms in the artist’s original drawings. Scholars have linked Malevich’s epistolary remark to different quadrilateral shapes in his sketches: from the “deep void” or black square in the design for Act I (Scene III) that may signal the coffin in which the sun was to be buried; through the black squares on the chest and the hats of the pallbearers; to an unknown missing design and the repetitive square motif framing all sketches (Figs. 5 and 6). However, neither one of those visual synecdoches seems to fully embody the fearsome quality so vividly described by the artist. As a result, hundred years after it was written, the 1913 letter still begs the question—what is the source that generated the “terrible power” of Malevich’s “embryo of all possibilities”?

Addressing the century-old quandary, this paper shifts the focus from the search for equilateral shapes in Malevich’s drawings to the historic trajectory of the Russian avant-garde movement in the early 20th century. From such a perspective, the “terrible power” of the “embryo of all possibilities” is not the momentous result of a single geometric image or drawing. It is rather generated by the collective force of the Russian avant-garde revolution and its most remarkable collaboration—the creative synergy of Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, Malevich, and Matyushin. The two historic outcomes of this creative alliance—Victory over the Sun and Equilateral—stood at the forefront of the mighty aesthetic force that declared the end of “objectivity” in art and the death of Symbolism.

In the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the predominant and highly admired movement in Russia was Symbolism. Originating in France, Symbolism impacted both the literary and the visual arts at a time when Russia was undergoing a major conflict between old traditions and modern innovation, and a division between national traits and foreign influences. Appealing at first to the young progressive circles, French Symbolism prompted a distinctly Russian movement that united the modernist search for hidden truths with the inherently Slavic, deep feeling of mysticism. Russian symbolist poets and artists voiced and served the divine inspiration of their Muse and saw themselves as mediators between the ordinary people and the higher spiritual realm.

One of the earliest Russian symbolist poets and philosophers, Vladimir Solovyev, created a spiritual belief system that was based on worshiping the Eternal Feminine. The source of his inspiration, his Muse, combined the Christian ideal of Divine Wisdom (Sophia) with the perfection of Nature which often manifested herself as a beautiful and intelligent woman. Solovyev felt a deepest connection with his Muse when he was surrounded by the beauty of nature. Initiating the beginning of the Russian symbolist tradition, Solovyev’s poems engendered a number of ideas that became the signature motifs
of the movement such as imbedding the world of nature with hidden spiritual meaning or connecting physical beauty with the wisdom of the divine. Similarly, Solovyev’s writing instigated the deep symbolist devotion to natural and mystical light.

The next generation of younger symbolist poets discarded Solovyev’s correlation between the beauty of the ideal woman and the divine Muse of Wisdom. However, they continued the tradition of seeing mysticism in the splendor of the natural world. The white light of Solovyev’s bliss was often replaced by the golden veil of the setting sun or the image of the bleeding sunset as metaphors of inner turmoil. For instance, the symbolist poet Aleksander Blok had a tumultuous relationship with both his female Muse and his wife in real life—Lyubov’ Blok. Therefore, he sarcastically represented his Beautiful Lady as a prostitute and preferred to associate his Muse of Divine Wisdom with the Russian Motherland. His poetic commemoration of an important historical battle in which the Russians defeated the Mongols—the poem On Kulikovo Field—addressed his Muse Russia in a painful moment in which the bleeding sunset echoed the bleeding heart of the poet:

      O my Rus! My wife! Our long path  
      Is painfully clear!  
      Our path has pierced our breast like an arrow  
      Of ancient Tatar will.

      The sunset bleeds! Blood streams from the heart!  
      Weep, heart, weep.  
      There is no peace! The mare of the steppe  
      Flies at full gallop!\textsuperscript{15}

The second symbolist poet that responded to the mysticism of Solovyev, Andrei Belyi, saw the sunset sky as a glowing curtain between the earth and the spiritual realm. One of the poems in his book Gold in Azure—the poem Sunset—was specifically dedicated to the symbolist emblem of divine light:

      Distance—without end. Oats whisper,  
      lazily sway.  
      And the heart once again waits impatiently  
      for the same daydreams.  
      Clouds are hidden  
      in pale, wine-gold sorrow  
      and, having created a fringe with her arc of fire,  
      burning silver,  
      the red-gold sun set...\textsuperscript{16}
Another poem in Belyi’s book—The Golden Fleece— pictured the mythological heroes Jason and the Argonauts as the “children of the sun” sailing through the fiery veil of the sunset in search of the Golden Fleece. The juxtaposition of light and darkness or the power of natural light as a sign of spiritual presence became central themes in symbolist paintings as well.

In the context of Symbolism’s heightened appreciation of natural beauty and divine light, it is significant that the most daring anti-symbolist gesture of the next movement—Futurism—focused on the principal symbolist icon—the Sun. In fact, the plot of Victory over the Sun—as far as the futurist text allows any notion of a plot—evolved around the fantastic defeat of the sun which was captured, imprisoned in a square house, and buried by two gravediggers. What seems like an absurd turn of events is, in fact, an aesthetic action loaded with historical, philosophical, and cultural connotations. From a futurist standpoint, the deposing of the sun meant a decisive defeat of Symbolism that put an end to the symbolist model of the world, according to which, the brightest celestial body is the ultimate source of natural light, life, and spiritual enlightenment. At the same time, the death of the symbolist icon and its eternal cycles of nature signaled the advance of electricity which was not dependent upon any seasonal and daytime phases. The rejection of natural cycles led to the embracing of the new science of the early 20th century and heralded a more modern interpretation of time and space based on the theory of Relativity and the 4th dimension. For instance, the opera’s positive characters included the strong people of the future and the traveler who traveled through the centuries (e.g., A Futurelandman and A Traveler Through The Centuries). The rejection of nature and its time cycles also signaled the embrace of machines and technology and the beginning of the new age of electromechanics. The opera ended with the image of the Aviator who crashed his plane on the stage and emerged, unharmed and upbeat, to sing the last song of the performance. Thus, the opera deposed the symbol of the sun to replace it with a direct reference to the flying machine and the new man who conquered the sky. Poetically, the play overthrew the symbolist world of divine light, tradition, nature, and cyclical perpetuity to build a new modern society based on the ideas and values of Futurism.

The most open assault on symbolist poetry, however, came from the opera’s structure and language. The text broke any established canons of character development, dialogue coherence, or narrative organization. The language consisted of neologisms, play on words, irrational tropes, and ambiguous syntax. The imagery defied any logic, while the text openly rejected any traditional discursive interpretations. Thus, the enemies of progress are “fat” and “permeated with arithmetics.” The symbolist love of classical references is either rejected or treated with parody and disdain. For instance, in the first scene of Act I, Nero and Caligula appeared fused in one character who had two names to embody the corrupt influence of tradition and to warn the people not to trust “old measurements” and “former scales.” The authors of the opera explained their goal in a statement issued after the First All Russian Congress of Singers of the Future convened on July 18, 1913. In that text, Khlebnikov, Kruchenykh, and Matyushin vowed to “destroy the antiquated movement of thought... the laws of
causality, toothless common sense, and “symmetrical logic” wandering about in the blue shadows of Symbolism.”

The theatrical manifestation of their futurist rebellion—*Victory over the Sun*—attacked the shadows of Symbolism with all aspects of its collaborative production—from music and lighting to stage design and acting. Composed by the first violinist in the St Petersburg Symphony Orchestra—Mikhail Matyushin—the opera’s music was as avant-garde as the opera’s libretto. Matyushin’s score was atonal and dissonant (Fig. 7). On the days of the performance, Matyushin brought to the stage and used his personal piano that was broken and out of tune. The piano accompanied an equally inharmonious singing of a chorus of seven people, only three of whom could actually sing. In addition to the harmonic dissonances and quarter-tones, the music of the performance, reportedly, included rifle shots, propeller sounds, and machine noises.

The opera’s signature motif—the end of tradition and the beginning of a new world order—were declared in the very opening of the play—in Scene 1 of Act 1. As the photograph of the performance and Malevich’s drawing of the background curtain show the set of the scene was rendered in black and white, the walls were white and the floor was black. The first two characters that appeared on the stage to tear the opening curtain were “the two strong men from a future country”—i.e., the masculine embodiments of Futurism rising in a stark contrast with the *Eternal Feminine* of Symbolism. The idea of a new beginning and time cycle opened the very first line of the first strongman:

All is well that begins well!
………………………………
………………………………
There will be no end!
We are striking the universe.

The second strongman quickly announced the plan to capture and imprison the sun—the symbol of the old world order:

Sun, you gave birth to passions
And burned with an inflamed ray
We will throw a dustsheet over you
And confine you in a boarded-up concrete house!

The time traveler through the centuries responded by sharing his experience that, in effect, endorsed the strongmen’s plan of action:
I will ride through all centuries, I was in the 35th where there is power without violence and rebels fight against the sun and even though there is no happiness there everybody looks happy and immortal…

After a battle with the enemy, in scene 2 the strongmen declared:

The sun lies slaughtered!
The sun hid
Darkness fell…

Scene 3 depicted the burial of the sun. The walls and the floor were black, and the dark square in the center of the background curtain may well have served as a visual reference to the coffin in which the sun was buried (Fig. 5). The two pallbearers, whose costumes also incorporated the images of black squares, entered the stage, singing (Fig. 6):

The fat bed-bug smells like a grave...
Black leg...
A flattened coffin swings
A lace of shavings curls.

The chorus reiterated the pallbearers’ motif by announcing the victory of the people who entered “carrying the sun” and singing:

We pulled the sun out by its fresh roots
We ought to establish a holiday; A day for the victory over the sun
We are free.
Broken Sun...
Long Live Darkness!
The sun of the iron century has died!

The opera ended with, what could be seen as, the futurist alternative to the dying world of Symbolism. The Song of the Petty Bourgeoisie—the supporter of the old world order—was silenced by machine rumble and the noise of an airplane crashing on the stage. The Aviator entered the stage unharmed and singing an “army song”:

luh luh luh
kruuh kruuh
tlee
tloomtuh
kruuh duh tuh rruh
kruuh vwubra
doo doo
ra luh
kuh buh ee
zhuh
zeeda
deeba\textsuperscript{35}

Concluding the event, the image of the Aviator personified the opera’s belief in the power of science, technology, time and space travel, as well as the people of the future. The airplane conquered the realm of the deposited sun. What looks like a nonsensical string of consonants—the army song of the Aviator—demonstrates the style of one of the most radical inventions of Russian futurist poetry—the so-called \textit{zaum} or \textit{zaum} language. Coined by Kruchenykh in 1913, the term is usually translated as “transreason,” “transration,” and “beyondsense.” The notion refers to the experimental and universal poetic language invented by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov. \textit{Zaum} consisted of newly coined words, neologisms, and combinations of sounds that led to confusion and indeterminacy in the realm of meaning. The two poets sought to free the language of \textit{zaum} from any established paradigms of meaning. However, despite that they were accused of destroying the laws of language and communication, the Russian futurist poets did not pursue the lack of meaning; i.e., nonsense. As Kruchenykh’s manifesto \textit{Declaration of the Word as Such} written in 1913 explains, the transrational language, in fact, “allows for fuller expression.”\textsuperscript{36} Thus, the two poets did not discard meaning, but searched for ways to achieve deeper and mystical realms of expression. Influenced by Slavic national mysticism, Khlebnikov pursued the primal meaning of words to create an ideal universal language. Similarly, Kruchenykh sought to recover the lost primordial Slavic mother-tongue.\textsuperscript{37}

Employing the most powerful anti-Symbolist weapon—the linguistic abstraction of \textit{zaum}—in the final song of the Aviator, the opera ends with the opening words of the Strongmen to engender the circular compositional frame of a modern never-ending cycle:

\begin{quote}
All is well that begins well
and has no end
the world will die
but for us there is no end!\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}
The very last image of the performance—the closing curtain designed by Malevich—presented a square within a larger square that evoked the repetitive progression of time and mimicked the recession within the box-like shape of the stage (Fig. 8). The inner square was divided diagonally into two equally large black and white triangular sections. Achieving a greater simplicity in comparison with the geometric sets of the previous scenes, the juxtaposition between black and white equilaterals might have sought to reinforce the main conflict of the opera—the battle between light and darkness, Symbolism and Futurism, or nature and technology.

Scholars have suggested that Malevich’s first suprematist image—the Black Square—shown in 1915 but dated by the artist to 1913, evolved from the dualistic design of the opera’s last curtain. This paper argued that the concept of the black square sprung out of Malevich’s engagement with the ambitions of the futurist revolution and reflected the collaborative spirit of the world’s first futurist opera. Assuming “terrifying power” in the course of the performance, as Malevich himself attested, the black square summarized the victory of darkness, time travel, space exploration, and technology over nature, sunlight, classical mythology, and old traditions. Similarly to the linguistic abstraction of transrational poetry, the Black Square transformed the language of painting by creating a new type of figural sign that broke the established connections between visual form and meaning. Echoing the primal “beyondsense” poesia of Futurism, Malevich—who called himself “the president of space”—imbued his “embryo of all possibilities” with primordial mysticism and sought to create a “cosmic tongue.” Cosmic associations and universal meaning were—not coincidentally—the principal concerns of Russian Symbolism. Growing in the bright orbit of Symbolism, the knotty youngsters Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, as well as their close collaborator Malevich, were neither removed from, nor deprived of any connections to the symbolist aesthetic and its universal ambitions. They were not. They just gave a new avant-garde form and name to the same old never-ending search for mystical truth, free interpretation, and deep poetic meaning.

NOTES

1. A critical review and the original photographs documenting the original performance were published in the newspaper Ranee Utro [Early Morning] a week later.
4. For reproductions of futurist books illustrated by Malevich see Journey into Non-Objectivity: The Graphic works of Kazimir Malevich and Other Members of the Russian Avant-Garde. exh. cat. (Dallas: Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, 1980). In 1913, Kruchenykh published his most famous transrational poem dyr bul shchyl in a fifteen-page booklet coauthored by him and Khlebnikov and illustrated by the Malevich. By the
end of the same year, Malevich supplied illustrations to a number of cubo-futurist projects, among them, the lithograph *Arithmetic* published in Kruchenykh’s book *Let's Grumble* and the lithograph *The Pilot* published in *The Three*, a collection of works written by Kruchenykh and Khlebnikov and edited by Matiushin. In addition to their references to French Cubism, time, technology, and non-Euclidean geometry, the lithographs reflect a complex thinking of language as a system. In a typical cubist fashion, the images treat space, perspective, and representation as a form of language that can be reorganized or codified in accordance with a new, modernist mode of encoding. What is pointedly Russian in Malevich’s illustrations is the heightened attention to the graphic composition of the letters, the systematic approach to the harmonious relations of numbers, as well as the special emphasis on the hyperbolized grammatical signs, isolated musical notes, and transrational words or sentences. In this respect, the lithographs reflected Khlebnikov’s belief in the mystical meaning of numbers, calculations, and universal roots of words. At the same time, the illustrations embodied Kruchenykh’s idea that true emotional content could be conveyed only by free transrational expression. Amidst shaken or broken relations of meaning and mark, Malevich depicted the most arbitrary language signs—comma, numbers, or letters—to illustrate the futurist poems.

5. The production of *Victory over the Sun* was first advertised as “The World’s First Production of Futurist Theatre” on the original poster of the 1913 performance.

6. *Equilateral* was the first title that Malevich gave to the painting now known as the *Black Square*.

7. The scholarship on Malevich has linked the genesis of Suprematism with a variety of historical factors: from the development of Western Cubism and Futurism or the rise of theosophy, alchemy, non-Euclidian geometry, the 4th dimension, and aviation; to the search for harmony of numbers, proportions, and perspectives. See John Milner, *Kazimir Malevich and the Art of Geometry*. (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996).


11. Among the 39 works displayed by Malevich in his first cubo-futurist exhibition, the *Black Square* assumed the utmost position reserved for the family’s Christian icon in Russian homes—high in the room’s corner. Similarly, among the 39 original titles in Malevich’s catalogue, only one title was composed of one self-referential word—the title *Quadrilateral*—the original name of what came to be known as the *Black Square*.


By the winter of 1913, Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh have already established themselves as the leaders of the literary group Hylaea which had just acquired the name Cubo-Futurism. The manifestos of the group echoed the postulates of Marinetti and Italian Futurism. Both movements scandalized the public taste, rejected the traditions of the past, and embraced theatre, urbanism, and modern technology.

О, Русь моя! Жена моя! До боли
Нам ясен долгий путь!
Наш путь - стрелой татарской древней воли
Произил нам грудь.
..............................................
..............................................
Закат в крови! Из сердца кровь струится!
Плачь, сердце, плачь...
Покоя нет! Степная кобылица
Несется вскачь!


For instance, see the depiction of the Russian capital as a nightmarish city in Alexandre Benois’ illustration to Pushkin’s poem The Bronze Horseman or the presence of spiritual and natural light in The Vision of the Young Bartholomew by Mikhail Nesterov.

The four collaborators of Victory over the Sun published the book Troe (Three) in July 1913. It described their creative intentions and provided examples of the opera’s text, designs, and music. The book also included Kruchenykh’s essay “Novye puti slova (yazyk buduschcheho smert’ simbolizmu)” [New Ways of the Word (Language of the Future Death to Symbolism)]. The essay explicated the futurist response to Symbolism: “We do not need intermediaries— the symbol, the thought… We convey out own new truth, and do not serve as the reflection of some sort of sun…” Aleksei Kruchenykh, “Novye puti slova (yazyk buduschcheho smert’ simbolizmu),” 1913, Eng.trans. in Lawton, ed., Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912-1928 (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988): 75-76.

Ibid.

Ibid., 124
23. Ibid., 116
24. Ibid., 109-110
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., 111.
30. Ibid., 115.
31. Ibid., 116.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., 117.
35. Ibid., 124.
37. Russian Cubo-Futurism devoted an acute attention to words as signs and developed a new philosophy of language. *Hylaea’s* first manifesto proclaimed the idea of the “Self-sufficient (self-centered) Word” in 1911, while the cubo-futurist almanac published in 1913 affirmed the poets’ full commitment to a “word-oriented poetry”: “We ceased to regard word formation and word pronunciation according to grammatical rules… We started to endow words with content on the basis of their graphic and phonic characteristics.” What sprang as a rejection of the abstruse verses of Symbolist poetry, evolved into an attack on language as a tool of communication and an assault on the connection between word and meaning. The most radical expression of the idea was, what Kruchenykh defined as, “transreason” [zaum] and “transrational language” [zaumnyi yazyk]. There were two different views on transreason. On the one hand, Khlebnikov pursued the primeval meaning of existing word roots and dreamed of an ideal universal language based on similar-sounding words. Lacking formal training in poetry, Kruchenykh, on the other hand, exercised no aesthetic restraints and brought the idea of the self-sufficient word to its poetic extreme—non-codified linguistic abstraction. His transrational verses consisted of raw verbal material in which the linguistic signs had no connection with any object or referent in the external (nonlinguistic) world and provided no code to the reader. Breaking all traditional links between content, convention, and sign, Kruchenykh’s poetic abstractions acquired expressiveness only through contextual relations to other verbal signs, to the author, or the performer.
FIGURES:

Fig. 1. Khlebnikov, Matyushin, Kruchenykh, and Malevich, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913. Photograph of the performance published in the newspaper *Ranev Utro* [Early Morning], St. Petersburg, 12 December 1913.

Fig. 2. Khlebnikov, Matyushin, Kruchenykh, and Malevich, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913. Photograph of the performance published in the newspaper *Ranev Utro* [Early Morning], St. Petersburg, 12 December 1913.
Fig. 3 Malevich, *The Last Futurist Exhibition*, Khudozhestvennoe buro, Petrograd, December 1915

Fig. 4 Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square (# 39 Quadrilateral)*, 1915

Fig. 5 Malevich, *Scene 3*, Stage Design Drawing, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913
Fig. 6 Malevich, *Pallbearer*, Costume Drawing, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913

![Overture](image)

Fig. 7 *Victory over the Sun*, excerpt from Matyushin’s *Prelude*, published in the magazine *Troe*, September 1913

Fig. 8 Malevich, *Final Scene*, Stage Design Drawing, *Victory over the Sun*, 1913

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COLLABORATION FOR PERFORMING EVENTS

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INTRODUCTION

Collaboration in the arts is seen important because of the strong impact it exerts on several other media and fields of action:

Communication media become more visual and display a visual approach to social networking, websites, social networking sites, and numerous social networking services. Digital books in the form of apps, eBook apps, iBook apps, PDF Reader apps, and many others create another option for artists to publish their art. Social networking contributes to the developments in net art, and involves users of the wireless technology and 3D technology such as Nintendo system, animation, communication with the use of smart phones, Skype (networked voice service over Internet Protocol), as well as iPads, video, vimeo, and moving images of many kinds.

Current trends in the visual arts include digital art interactive installations and events involving the audience by creating channels for viewers’ input. These media require the involvement of contributors and participants representing various disciplines. Interactive interfaces may serve the artistic goals or meet various everyday needs (Ursyn, 2013a,b). For example, an interactive painting “The Value of Art” (Sommerer & Mignonneau, 2010) is dealing with art auction prizes in a conceptual and pragmatic way. Electronic art events combine artistic statement with real life applications, biology inspired research, therapeutic implementations, or environmental concerns. A performance ‘May the Horse Live in Me’ awarded at the Ars Electronica 2011 was a hybrid bioart pertaining to a research on immunological barriers between species. “The Eye Writer” team awarded the Golden Nica created an eye-tracking system that would allow patients with Lou Gehrig’s disease, who cannot control voluntary muscle movement, to draw using just their eyes. A project “Pigeon d’Or” used pigeons as interface for synthetic biology in an urban environment by designing bacteria (harmless to pigeons) that turn feces into detergent, so pigeons defecate biological window soap. Works at the ACM/SIGGRAPH Art Gallery reflected environmental and social concerns, for example an inflatable sculpture ‘Moston’ was an amalgamation of Moscow and Boston containing documentary footage projection; an installation ‘Tele-present Wind’ caused the plant stalks in a gallery sway; ‘Open House’ mirrored virtual markets and created hybrid subjects occupying both virtual and physical space. “Magic Monkey” (Oh, Kim, Kim, & Shi, 2011) is an interactive art in a narrative form, where audience interacts by taking the role of Magic Monkey (painted with Processing) and creates the narrative through its own acting. “Mirror Appliance” (Nagao, Takahashi, & Tanaka, 2008) recommends clothes to produce a coordinated look suitable for a
Given day’s events and weather, according to the user’s current schedule and past behavior. Gestures of the artist can interact with digital material and be translated into concrete form by integrating motion capture technology with real time 3D printing (Charlton, 2011).

In the field of education, production of collaborative modules provides integrative instruction that engages advanced cognitive processes from the part of students (Ursyn, 2013b). Thompson et al (2013) applied an online acquisition telemetry data from video gaming activity to measure cognitive-motor, attentional, and perceptual processing in 3,360 players and found that predictors of players’ expertise depend on their skill levels. According to Hotz (2012), a three-year study of 491 middle school students found that the more children played computer games the higher their scores on a standardized test called the Torrance Test of Creativity regardless of race, gender, or the kind of game played.

Videogames and entertainment software – both delivered online and traditional, single and multiplayer action based video and computer games, in an arcade or board format, learning games, health- and wellbeing-related games are more and more depending on the input from cooperation with the visual artists. Working with specialists in various art media such as dancing or drawing enables engaging the users in practicing their abilities and skills. Several reports indicate specific benefits coming from gaming including improvement in creativity, decision-making, perception and vision changes that boost seeing in night, and hand-eye coordination (Hotz, 2012). Players can pay attention to more things at once and make faster the decision-making.

Creators of successful products, such as the Arduino that senses the environment to control lights, motors, and other actuators; the Leap Motion controller that tracks hand and fingers to interact with a computer screen; or the multisensory, time- and space-based new realities, e.g., the EON Reality or zSpace, all benefit from cooperation with people related to visual arts, who enhance multisensory qualities of the collaboration products.

Health- and wellbeing-related electronic games of various kinds are often created as art forms and serve health, fitness, education, and entertainment of users who may benefit from the networked media. Many times they include biofeedback involving human interaction with a video interface. Computer games based on biofeedback principle provide mind and body training.

Net media and the omnipresence of mobile devices and wireless networks supports the developments in collaborative creation of the email art, non-linear narrative, online performance, information art, game art, and many other actions of the Internet community (Ursyn, 2012). Physical interaction aesthetics of net art is becoming a specific form, which is distinctive from the general aspects of contemporary art.

The further text describes consecutive collaborative projects ranging from stage productions to web videos.
DANCE PERFORMANCE “FACES OF THE GODDESS”

A collaborative onstage production entitled “Faces of the Goddess” was choreographed by the UNC dance and ballet faculty and performed with a scenography containing projections of graphics programmed by the author according to a storyline written for the ballet and music created by three composers (Figure 1). Several performances were then presented to the community.

Figure 1. Anna Ursyn, stage design for “Faces of the Goddess”

“BEDTIME STORIES” – FROM THE ONSTAGE PRODUCTION TO SHORT VIDEOS

Following this production I created four video-art movies based on another onstage production choreographed by the same choreographer to music created by a composer known for many compositions created for movies. The next step included adding meteorological content. We added some time-lapsed meteorological recordings offered by a meteorologist. These four short videos involved cooperation with a choreographer, three composers, a scientist, a sound technician, camera crew, dancers, and an artist (Figure 2).
EDITING FOR VIDEO PRODUCTIONS

Making short video productions involved several activities aimed at overcoming technical and legal obstacles. In order to alter the stage performance for art video purposes, the stage production was recorded with multiple cameras. Since the performances took place during a cold season, I had to delete the coughing sounds audible on the recording. As a result, the video and audio tracks lost their synchronous quality, so I had to manually adjust movements and sounds accordingly. That meant for us doing the sound editing that would match timeline movements. Since operation like that requires time and presents technical difficulties, we had to extend the deadline with an agency representing the composer. I worked with the author of meteorological time lapsed videos and his sound technician to meet the new deadline.

The copyright to use music was time- and content-sensitive and did not cover posting the movies on the Internet. In order to be able to secure the web presence, I revised live recordings of the performances and adjusted the whole footage, matching the videos with excerpts of music composed by my two colleagues from the UNC School of Music. They both allowed me to cut their compositions to fit into my video productions. This way the footage of the ballet études were adjusted to fit different music. Two versions of “Bedtime Stories” were edited for different music scores. Figure 3 presents a still image from the art video.
Figure 3. Anna Ursyn, Bed Time Stories, a still image.

A book by Dr. Sandra Minton (2010) contains a notion of those events.

Figure 4. Sandra Cerny Milton, a cover for a book “Choreography: A Basic Approach Using Improvisation”
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Carsten-Peter Warnche argues that these works have a political and social dimension. Whereas in the Velázquez painting, the focus of the work—at least for the viewer and everyone in the painting—are the king and queen entering the room. But in Picasso’s variations on the painting, the focus is on the painter, perhaps reflecting Picasso’s view of the new social status of the artist in modern, liberal societies. See Carsten-Peter Warnche, *Picasso 1881-1973*, ed. Ingo Walther; trans. Michael Hulse (NY: Taschen, 1997), 209.