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## ***Contemporary Collaborations and Cautionary Tales***

*collaboration ... association ... ensemble ...  
contamination ... cooperation ... complicité ...  
teamwork ... partnership ... corruption ...  
relationship ... alliance ... working together ...  
infection ... negotiation ... common ...  
commons ... betrayal ... quisling ... union ...  
commonwealth ... commonweal ... contagion  
... mutuality ... comradeship*

This chapter draws upon a keynote presentation given at the second Symposium on Collaboration at Middlesex University in May 2013. What propelled the direction of this paper, and as I began to research its contents, was a growing and rather uneasy sense that the passionate and poetic panegyric I imagined offering in praise of collaboration – based on thirty years engagement with devised theatre practices – was not good enough. Collaboration both as principle and practice became more complex, nuanced and (sometimes) murky the more I read around the subject. Consequently, as I constructed the paper, my intention – rather than complacently (re)state the obvious attractions of collaboration – became instead, and remains now, an opportunity to reflect critically and quizzically on the various practices of collaboration within and beyond the fields of cultural production, and in theatre, dance and performance in particular.

As rhetoric, aspiration, organizing strategy, political structure and relational principle collaboration has become ubiquitous over the last decade. Of what does this proliferation speak and what wider story does it tell? I pose these questions since I believe that even tentative responses suggest that as artists, practitioners, academics and makers we would do well to heed – and understand – the varying motives at work when collaboration is proposed or claimed. To shed light on the disparate ways that

collaboration is invoked within the cultural industries I initially consider the various (and often contradictory) meanings ascribed to the term and then reflect briefly on how collaboration – sometimes blandly called ‘team work’ – is increasingly proposed as a managerial strategy across all forms of material and immaterial production. Recognizing who argues for collaboration, how it might be positioned within the wider context of neo-liberal<sup>1</sup> socio-economic regimes - and in whose interests - should make us pause for a moment of productive and critical reflection before we embark on projects propelled, funded and/or sanctified in the name of collaboration. The chapter concludes by glancing at what I believe are some inspirational and generative models of collaborative practice in the arts, whilst also considering those qualities in collaboration that we would most like to propose and defend. I finish with a poem entitled ‘We’.

As I think through the articulation of any argument which largely employs the lens of art as cultural production I regularly ask myself how the novelist and cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1921–88) might have written about the issue, in this case collaboration. At the end of his lecture ‘Drama in a Dramatised Society’ Williams says:

I learned something from analysing drama which seemed to me to be effective not only as a way of seeing certain aspects of society, but as a way of getting through to some of the fundamental conventions which we group as society itself. These in their turn made some of the problems of drama quite newly active. (Williams in O’Connor, 1989: 11)

So, following Williams, this chapter considers how collaboration in the arts is currently being expressed and how this articulation connects with a range of managerial practices in the wider economy. Alongside the lens Williams might employ on this subject I shall

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<sup>1</sup> By ‘neo-liberal’ I am referring to the dominant economic and political regimes in the West over the last three decades which have privileged the rule of the market, cutting public expenditure on social services, deregulation, privatisation and an attempt to eliminate the concepts and practices of ‘public good’ and ‘community’.

repetitively summon up, as kind of choric mantra, a question my friend and ex Dartington colleague, John Hall (currently Professor of Performance Writing at the University of Falmouth) would often insert into dialogue and conversations, both academic and more socially informal. “But, who are the ‘we’ in all this”? John would regularly interject, thereby prompting – indeed, demanding - a pause for (self) critical reflection on the often lazy assumptions lying behind the claim of the plural ‘we’, and of whom the ‘we’ actually spoke.

### **Collaboration: etymology and usage**

At its most obvious and fundamental ‘collaboration’ means working with one or more people to undertake a task and to achieve shared goals. It also, as the on-line *Free Dictionary* reminds me, implies ‘to cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupation force in one’s country’ (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/collaboration>). I return to this more troubling usage below. The first and most regular convention is perhaps equally unsettling, although probably less treasonable. Here, there is hardly any human endeavor which cannot be considered collaborative. I collaborate regularly, but briefly, with the supermarket checkout person as I present and then pay for the goods in my shopping trolley. Whatever I may privately feel about the politics of food production or packaging, and Tesco’s role within this ethical minefield, I ‘collaborate’ with the lowly paid employee at the checkout over a ‘contract’ implicitly agreed by my presence in the store. I place my groceries in a trolley and then pay Tesco’s for the pleasure of removing them from the building to my home. I collaborate, more or less willingly, with the checkout operative in this transaction. Perhaps, in this Tesco’s example the two usages of collaboration identified above begin to bleed uneasily into each other.

Moving from the supermarket into the theatre it also becomes blindingly obvious that all performance-making is hard-wired to be collaborative. It cannot help but be collaborative if, at its most basic, we understand collaboration to mean a process whereby two or more people come together to make and show something. And, of

course, filmmaking is perhaps even more obviously a collaborative process as the lengthy list of credits illustrate at the close of any feature film or documentary. Making theatre necessitates collaboration between director, actors, writer, scenographer, technical workers, administrators, choreographers, musicians and so on and so on. And this, of course, speaks nothing of the act of collaboration that is entailed in the reception and reading of any work. I will return to this later.

Although within the arts, and in particular political contexts, many of us will invest an ethical and political aspiration into our collaborations, at root collaboration is a pretty neutral term. In itself it reveals very little about process, about purpose and objective, and particularly about the motives which have propelled the collaboration to be established and pursued in the first place. But, of course, if theatre is indeed hard-wired to be collaborative that tells us next to nothing about the experience of that collaboration. It discloses nothing of power relations, about the nature or the purpose of the exchange between participants and other art forms or disciplines; it says nothing about whether such a process was pleasurably productive, or toxically draining, creatively and innovatively generative, or enervatingly and mind/body-numbingly reductive, unchallenging and trivial.

My short-lived Panglossian perspective on collaboration (admitted above) was further problematised as I was reminded that in many political, industrial and military conflicts the verb 'to collaborate' or the abstract noun 'collaboration' speaks of treachery, betrayal and - literally or metaphorically – of 'sleeping with the enemy'. So, collaboration as perfidious cooperation with an enemy extends our reading of the term not simply to the leaders and active protagonists of Vichy France between 1940 and 1944, but also, for example, to a Marxist analysis of industrial relations where workers and their trade unions 'collaborate' – against their own 'deep' interests – with

management and capital<sup>2</sup>. Certainly in 2014 this is a rarely articulated discourse, but in the 1970s and 1980s it was a commonplace critique from the Marxist left and particularly leveled against those who were unwilling to take up the struggle, or who signed weak and unpropitious agreements with managements on behalf of a workforce<sup>3</sup>. Of course, this is complex territory and the line between collaboration and resistance is often blurred and shifting. And what is the relationship between collaboration and collusion? Furthermore, in the hands of Complicite and Simon McBurney the negative and treacherous connotations of collusion are turned on their head when, in searching for a definition of *complicité*, Michael Ratcliffe, author of a programme note for *The Three Lives of Lucy Cabrol*, writes of a 'collusion between celebrants' (Ratcliffe, 1994) and, by implication, of the roguish and creatively transgressive qualities of collaboration and collusion between actors, writer, designer and director when making work. For McBurney and Ratcliffe this 'collusion between celebrants' is also a texture and condition of a successful communicative relationship between a theatre performance and its spectators.

Thus, even before we consider the practices of collaboration within the arts, the term upon examination rapidly loses much sense of definition, or a clear and unified ethical grounding. At best it is elastic and porous, at worst anodyne, almost meaningless and counter-productive for the processes and goals of the individuals involved.

### **Collaboration within and beyond the cultural industries**

Whilst the language, strategies and rhetoric of collaboration have regularly been employed in the fields of arts and political activity, throughout the twentieth century it

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<sup>2</sup> A Marxist, or indeed many Socialist analyses of industrial relations argue that there is a fundamental division of interest between Capital (owners) and Labour (workers/employees). Capital in order to maximize profits must for ever seek to enhance productivity and reduce costs, at the centre of which are labour costs. Workers, and the unions which represent them, can never fundamentally escape this conflict of interests even when struggles are lost and pragmatic compromises have to be made.

<sup>3</sup> *The British Journal of Industrial Relations* has carried essays which articulate a Marxist perspective on industrial relations. Other key texts on this subject include: Allen (1971), Braverman (1974) and Hyman (1975). Hyman in particular has written prolifically from this standpoint.

has also been invoked as a desirable force field within management economics, business studies and industrial relations. Before turning attention to the arts it is productive to consider how collaboration has been invoked and extolled within labour relations and contemporary managerial thinking. Rudi Laermans' essay entitled 'Being in Common: theorizing artistic collaboration' (*Performance Research*, 2012: 94-102) and the writings of Florian Schneider ('Collaboration: the Dark side of the Multitude', 2006) and Bojana Kunst ('Prognosis on collaboration', 2010) all examine current usage of the term and together they make for fascinating reading as both authors position collaboration, and the processes it describes, primarily within the territory of industrial relations. Schneider says:

Collaboration [...] is widely used to describe new forms of labour relations ...  
In contrast to cooperation, collaboration is driven by complex realities  
rather than romantic notions of a common ground or communality.

(Schneider, 2006)

Both Kunst and Schneider note that in the West's post-Fordist era of industrial production the old relations of authority typified by highly stratified and authoritarian layers of management ending down the line with supervisors and foremen have been replaced by a degree of enforced, but at least notionally self-regulating collaboration between workers. *Fordism* is an epithet derived, of course, from Henry T Ford and speaks of a particular mode of division of labour, standardized systems of mass production and the economic and social systems that frame them<sup>4</sup>. This Post-Fordist self-regulating collaboration is driven by bonus targets, rewards, penalties and ever more sophisticated and incorporating forms of productivity management. Here it is understood that in a teamwork environment workers are expected to grasp that thinking, planning, decision-making and actions are more productive when carried out in

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<sup>4</sup> Jessop (1992) and De Grazia (2005) both write about industrial systems of production in the post-Fordist era. Aldous Huxley's dystopian novel, *Brave New World* (2007), first published in 1931, imagines an automated future in the year 2540..

cooperation with others. And Schneider quotes nineteenth century steel tycoon and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie who espoused collaboration as:

The ability to work together toward a common vision, the ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

(Carnegie, quoted in Schneider, 2006)

In this global economic landscape of neo-liberal principles and practices, collaboration is a means to further ends: a means to manage time more productively, to enable difficult decisions (around redeployment and spatial relocation, for example) to be made more swiftly and with minimal conflict, a means to manage (and justify) labour mobility more smoothly and a strategy to secure employee loyalty to the corporate brand.

Paradoxically, too, given an apparently shared language of commonality, cooperation and solidarity, the ethos of collaboration as a managerial strategy to engender regulatory self-control of behavior and productivity, runs counter to the belief in trade union membership as the most effective form of protecting workers rights and conditions. Here the collaborative solidarity of joining fellow workers through the organizational agency of a union is replaced by injunctions and systems obliging collaboration between employees to fulfill production targets and to self-regulate their own behaviours and needs to this end. Schneider argues that:

Against the background of a postmodern control society collaborations are all about exchanging knowledge secretly [...]the concept of individual rights has vanished ...

(Schneider, 2006)

*Who are the 'we' in all this?*



**Some randomly selected titles (from Amazon) of contemporary Business and Management Studies with their glosses**

***Collaboration: How Leaders Avoid the Traps, Build Common Ground, and Reap Big Results* by Morten T Hansen (2009)**

In *Collaboration*, author Morten Hansen takes aim at what many leaders inherently know: in today's competitive environment, companywide collaboration is an imperative for successful strategy execution..... How can managers avoid the costly traps of collaboration and instead start getting the results they need? In this book, Hansen shows managers how to get collaboration right through "disciplined collaboration".

***Radical Collaboration* by James W. Tamm (2006)**

Radical Collaboration is a how-to-manual for anyone who wants to create trusting, collaborative environments, and transform groups into motivated and empowered teams. It is an eye-opener for leaders, managers, HR professionals, agents, trainers, and consultants who are seeking constructive ways of getting the results they want.

***Nice Companies Finish First: Why Cutthroat Management Is Over--and Collaboration Is In* (2013) Peter Shankman**

The era of authoritarian cowboy CEOs like Jack Welch and Lee Iacocca is over. In an age of increasing transparency and access, it just doesn't pay to be a jerk. In *Nice Companies Finish First*, Shankman, a pioneer in modern PR, marketing, advertising, social media, and customer service, profiles the famously nice executives, entrepreneurs, and companies that are setting the standard for success in this new collaborative world.

**Microsoft® Office 365: Connect and Collaborate Virtually Anywhere, Anytime: Connect and Collaborate Virtually Anywhere, Anytime (2011)**

This boxed vignette epitomizing contemporary management thinking is instructive since it indicates with great clarity that collaboration as a practice can – self evidently – serve different ends and purposes. I present these examples, not necessarily because collaboration within industry is inherently pernicious and regressive, but so as to prompt a series of questions it might be productive to ask any theatre or arts practitioner when faced with the prospect of a collaborative project. Such questions as:

- *What are the explicit (or unstated) goals and objectives of this collaboration?*
- *What are the rules of engagement and who defines these rules and protocols?*
- *For whose benefit is this collaboration being proposed?*
- *Who is excluded from this collaboration?*
- *How is power practised within collaboration?*
- *What are the long-term consequences of this collaboration?*

It should be clear, therefore, that ‘collaboration’ emerges as a slippery term: a practice whose shape and purpose remain endlessly negotiable and in flux, a highly ideological practice and – like most interesting terms – a site of dispute and contestation. I find interesting parallels here between collaboration and how Raymond Williams explores the term ‘community’ in his seminal book, *Keywords; a vocabulary of culture and society*. Williams writes:

Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (*state, nation, society* etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.

(Williams 2014: 74)

I would like now to reflect on the range of force fields – cultural, artistic, political and economic – which in present times might be propelling or seeding this movement towards collaboration. A range of paradigms inform the conceptual contours of collaborative practices. Sometimes these are mutually reinforcing but at other times are in a sharply contestatory relationship with each other. Locating these forces may help us to understand a little of the why, how and what of collaboration. Whilst in the creative landscape of arts practices, motives to collaborate may appear to be largely utopian, creative and constructed upon the desire to innovate, experiment and take risks, it is, I would suggest, naïve and simplistic to believe that all collaboration is driven by such dispositions. Moreover, even if collaboration seems to be ethically honorable, as we all know, its actual and unfolding practice remains rocky and unpredictable.

I would propose that collaboration as an emerging political, creative and organizational sensibility may be understood through a number of lenses and that these are not necessarily mutually exclusive:

- Collaboration as a form of economic and labour relations whose primary driving impulse is to enhance productivity, and hence surplus or profit. Here collaboration is an instrumental and utilitarian practice harnessed to highly ideological aims and objectives. In such circumstances cost savings, efficiency and higher productivity may be achieved through collective peer pressure, managerial ‘carrot and stick’ injunctions, self-regulation and shared self-identity.
- Collaboration as sites of mutuality, transformation, exchange and of a radical reclaiming of the experience of being in ‘common’. Here the drivers come from impulses to understand and construct art-making as a radical, transformative and social practice with *affects* not only on spectators but on participants themselves. Here there may be dual routes (or roots) into such positions. One of these may be traced to the utopian energies of the 1960s and their lingering,

though complex, contested and messy legacies to the present day. Here, art-making becomes a way of life: a domestic, social, economic and political practice as much as a cultural or aesthetic one. The other of these routes has its provenance – connectedly of course – in the Socialist and Labour movement where the only form of non-exploitative labour is a collaborative one in which the means of production and exchange are owned and controlled collectively by those who toil within the enterprise. In this context collaboration and comradeship are both means and ends, and in this context I enjoy Sukhdev Sandhu's description of John Berger as a one-man personification of collaboration in *Here is Where We Meet: a Season in London* (2005)<sup>5</sup>. Sandhu writes:

A one-man hyper text, making links and connections between radically disparate times and places, he has managed to create a dialogue – no: seen the inextricability – of the poetic and the political, the local and the international, the past, present and future.

(Berger, 2005: 15)

- As a consequence of our changed and changing understanding of identity and artistic subjectivity, collaboration becomes almost 'hard-wired' as it were into both the reception process of any art and also our construction as human beings. From Roland Barthes (1967) through various structuralist and poststructuralist critiques of authorship, the subjectivity of the artist is no longer understood as singular, unitary and romantically heroic. Being in collaboration de-subjectivises the artistic process. Reception Theory (see Bennett, 1990) has also taught us that the reading of a work of art – whether dance, theatre, live art, sculpture, installation, music or whatever – is not a one-way passage from

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<sup>5</sup> 'Here is where we meet' was a pioneering season in 2005 designed around the work of writer John Berger. It was intended to explore and celebrate cultural collaboration and creative / political commitment. The event was marked by a book of essays in which Sandhu writes.

the foundational art object to the receptively passive spectator. Spectatorship, as we know, resides in a complex matrix of relationships which *collaborate* or compete to construct the sense and multiple meanings we take from experiencing a work of art.

- In relation to these challenges around strongly held beliefs about the singularity of the artist as subject, Charles Green in his book, *Collaboration in Art* (2001), argues that collaboration becomes signaled in the transition from modernist to postmodern art and is exemplified by the proliferation of teamwork in the 1960s. Whilst Green's book focuses on models of collaboration in the visual arts since the 1960s, the creative processes of theatre and performance have never been quite so suffused with the paradigm of the heroic lone ineffable artistic originator. Here the picture is more complex, problematising and complicating the singular force of the originary play text by directorial and dramaturgical intervention, and through its live realization on stage by a gang of performers whose words, behaviours and actions can never be totally fixed, predictable and circumscribed.
- In parallel with critique of the singularity of creative subjectivity, the dynamics of collaboration also serve to challenge and re-appraise the boundaries of both art forms and intellectual disciplines. The will to collaboration is both cause and consequence of the urge towards inter- or cross-disciplinary practice in both the arts and in the wider landscape of higher education. Cross-disciplinarity is omnipresent in the vernacular of academic discourse and today a commonplace, if (largely) rhetorical aspiration. Of course, interdisciplinary projects are inherently collaborative – in the most basic sense of the term – and collaboration is often (but not automatically) interdisciplinary, since the 'inter' of interdisciplinarity takes us firmly into the territory of collaboration. Here we are talking of the relational, of a force field where two or more people, practices,

groups or organizations 'meet' to create an outcome (known or unknown) which, it is imagined, will be different from the one to be produced if there had been no collaboration . It is the spatial and dialectical 'betweenness' of collaboration, whether it be interdisciplinary or not, which is crucial to mark in this context. Significantly, the suppleness of what inter-disciplinarity may mean as practice shadows similar elasticity in the multiple projects of collaboration. Just as collaboration has now become the mantra of an innovative capitalism ever seeking new markets and to enhance productivity and profit, so too has interdisciplinarity been colonized and incorporated. Joe Moran's exploration of interdisciplinarity (2002) concludes with a chapter which offers a health warning for those who would uncritically support any project or practice which proudly proclaims its interdisciplinary credentials. Citing Bill Readings' book, *The University in Ruins* (1996), Moran notes that the contemporary western university has become a 'transnational bureaucratic corporation' and that when universities advocate interdisciplinarity it is as much to do with managing budgets and being flexible to the demands of the marketplace as it is with intellectual dialogue and cooperation. In North America advocacy and implementation of interdisciplinary programmes have been accompanied by the shrinking of Arts and Humanities departments. In this context interdisciplinarity has been propelled by cost saving and apparent cost-effectiveness. Of course, I am not proposing anything as trite as saying that all the impulses towards interdisciplinary collaboration are simply a managerial conspiracy, but merely proposing that we check out the drivers behind such moves.

*Who are the 'we' in all this?*

### **The practices of collaboration in theatre, dance and performance**

As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, it is almost impossible to imagine theatre practices which are not collaborative. Even in productions that adhere slavishly to the authorial play text and which are directed in manner that brooks little creative input from actors, the work is still collaborative in the sense that its realization in front of an audience requires countless 'micro' acts of collaboration both within the creative process (between text, director, actors, designers, sound and lighting technicians, carpenters, choreographers, dramaturgs etc.) and beyond it. Moreover, no theatre is ever performed without the conscious or implicit collaboration of the box office, cleaners, janitors and those with administrative, financial, marketing and other behind-the-scenes roles. However, for the purposes of this chapter I shall consider some models of a more avowedly and explicitly collaborative practice beyond the 'taken for granted' relationships identified immediately above.

The growth of devised performance within the landscape of western theatre, having been hidden from history and largely unnoticed for several decades, has more recently been much analyzed and documented (for example, Oddey 1996, Williams [ed] 1999, Heddon and Milling 2006, Murray and Keefe 2007, Graham and Hoggett 2009, Mermikedes and Smart 2010, Harvie and Lavender 2010). Moreover, in the last two years, books (Britton 2013 [ed.] and Radosavljevic [ed.] 2013) on the rewards and tribulations of working as an ensemble have documented the vicissitudes of collaboration by focusing on artists and companies, all of whom aspire to forge working relationships in the toil of making theatre which are different from the commercial and pragmatic model of hiring the creative team only for the duration of one production. John Britton quotes Robert Cohen thus: '... ensemble is a long-term relationship: a day-in, day-out *collaboration* in shared living, thinking and creating'. (My italics) (Cohen in Britton, 2011: 16-17). When framing the purpose of *Collaborative Theatre: the Theatre du Soleil Sourcebook* (1999), and echoing questions posed earlier in this essay, editor David Williams asks: 'How does one collaborate with ethical and political integrity?



What processes disperse and multiply creativity and power within a collective?’  
(Williams 1999: xi). In the same book Ariane Mnouchkine herself foregrounds the importance of collaboration in her company:

Remember that the (theatre) director has already achieved the greatest degree of power he has ever had in history. And our aim is to move beyond that situation by creating a form of theatre where it will be possible for everyone to collaborate without there being directors, technicians, and so on, in the old sense.

(Mnouchkine quoted in Williams 1999: 1)

So, within the territory of devised theatre there are many different orders of collaboration operating at various levels of thought and action and with diverse rules and expectations. Heddon and Milling make very clear in their book that what we might call ‘utopian’ collaboration, where participants equally share all the roles, is rarely to be found in 21<sup>st</sup> century practices. Instead there is an acceptance of some division of labour in the creative process and of different levels of skill and expertise. Forced Entertainment’s website announces that ‘We are committed to collective practice’ ( [www.forcedentertainment.com](http://www.forcedentertainment.com) ). The Sheffield based collective which celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014 is an example of a collaborative practice where, for example, co-founder Tim Etchells is clearly signed as director and Richard Loudon as ‘designer and performer’. Whilst Etchells also leads on assembling the spoken texts this is far from the process of the ‘auteur’ handing down an unchallengeable play text for the company to deliver without question or alteration. Complicite claims that the only aspect of the company that has stayed the same throughout its history is that ‘everything changes. Each production is different from the last’ ( <http://www.complicite.org/> ). However, the website also goes on to state that the principle of working collaboratively is a constant in their approach to making work. Moreover, were we to unpick the weave of Complicite’s collaborative process we might see divisions of labour nuanced very

differently from, for example, Forced Entertainment. Whilst Complicite actors collaborate in generating material there would appear to be far greater directorial control in the hands of McBurney than there is with Etchells and Forced Entertainment. Clearly, in contemporary devised collaborations the manner in which decisions and choices are configured, negotiated and ultimately controlled varies considerably. Today, what collaboration might mean within devising practices seems at best to be a productive preoccupation and creatively contested. Submerging individual identities into a common gestalt is no longer the hegemonic model of practice in the way it might have been in the 1970s and 1980s. The acquisition of a shared vocabulary and grammar of compositional dramaturgy where seamlessly undifferentiated voices and bodies speak with a common tongue often now gives way to collaborative practices where difference becomes a dramaturgical driver and remains both visible and celebrated. Mariella Greil and Martina Ruhsam in their abstract for the 'Symposium on Collaboration II' (Middlesex University, 2013) articulate this alternative model with two questions:

Which kind of "We" emerges if people collaborate without subordinating themselves to a common identity? What is happening if they do not merely become representatives of what they have in common? Collaboration undecides regimes of identity, production and representation.

(Middlesex University Symposium on Collaboration II, Greil and Ruhsam 2013: 14)

The pleasing (and political) notion of 'undeciding' also seems to be a feature of the collaborations between disabled and non-disabled artists described by Bowditch, Bower and de Senna in their Middlesex symposium paper and where 'quite apart from the issues of authorship and ownership that any collaboration might give rise to, these collaborations offer the opportunity for "alliances" to borrow a term from Feminist criticism' (Middlesex University Symposium on Collaboration II, (Abstract) Bowditch,

Bower and de Senna 2013: 10). Whether the articulation of difference through collaboration is any less utopian than other models is highly questionable.

Alongside this shifting of ground within the territory of devising we can also note that developments in immersive and site-specific theatre offer to stretch collaborative partnership even further and particularly to reconfigure the role of the spectator as collaborating 'co-worker' in the dramaturgy of the work. In *Fair Play* (2013) Jen Harvie insightfully maps key developments in performance practices over the last two decades and within the economic and political context of neo-liberalism. Harvie notes the 'recent proliferation of performance and art practices that engage audiences *socially* – by inviting those audiences to participate, act, work and create together' (Harvie: 1). In such work the performer-audience relationship – always elementally collaborative in the production of sense and meaning – becomes more complex as spectators are granted (or claim) degrees of agency in shaping or interrupting the direction, tempo and composition of the work in question, although almost always within clearly prescribed limits. The growth of immersive theatre usually offers audiences the opportunity of moving around and within the production, thus offering spectators a degree of control over their spatial relationship with the performance. In addition to changing the normal 'contract' between performer and audience, such practices oblige audiences to interact socially with each other in a manner proscribed or made difficult in the proscenium arch theatre or black box studio. Harvie also notes that within much immersive and socially engaged theatre there is often a degree of 'delegation' (Harvie 2013: 36) to other non-artists and workers both in the pre-performance (setting up) phase and during the production itself. Setting up many immersive or site-specific performances often requires multiple collaborations with different agencies (police, local authorities, owners of buildings etc.) or individuals such as engineers, builders, electricians, park workers and so on. In 'Turning Tourists into Performers' (*Performance Research*, Vol 18, No 2, April 2013) Wrights and Sites performer, Phil Smith tells of various 'Mis-guides' the company have constructed over the years, dramaturgies, he says, of 'counter

tourism' (Smith: 110). A critical dimension of these Mis-guides is to enable or produce 'the agentive tourist' who is 'more immersed and engaged than either a passive gazing or a voluntarist, aggressive 'intervention' ' (Smith 2013: 109). A visceral and humorous example of such collaborative agency (although certainly a doomed one) is represented in a photograph with the following caption:

Testing the resistance of an artifact. Members of Phil Smith's  
volunteer panel 'attempting' to push a Victorian lamp(post) into  
the River Exe. (Smith 2013: 108)

Beyond and alongside these modalities of collaboration today other more pragmatic and utilitarian forces may be at work. In his essay, 'Being in Common', Rudi Laermans (2012) notes the proliferation of temporary collaborative projects since the mid 1990s in the world of western dance, projects bringing together not only choreographers and dancers but also sound-makers, visual artists, dramaturgs, critics, producers and academics. Laermans suggests that although these collaborations sometimes recall the practices of the Judson Church Dance Theater collective,

[t]he utopian longing for a united 'we' marked by a harmonious  
togetherness that informed 1960's dance avant-gardism no longer  
predominates ... these days collaborators will assemble for a usually  
well defined period of time, during which two or more artists network  
their interests, desires and capacities on the basis of their shared interest  
in the common exploration of a topic or issue.

(Laermans, 2012: 94)

In addition, Laermans notes other salient points from the world of dance-based collaborations: the downplaying of romantic rhetoric of moving together freely and the

quest for what he calls ‘social authenticity’, the emphasis upon and emphatic signing of ‘research’ as a coda for creative invention, and a sense that the ‘value added’ has to be realized in the here and now of the studio space and not simply of rewards ‘yet to come’. Overall, Laermans suggests that whilst collaboration still has utopian overtones of a social and not merely an art practice, in the flinty world of 21st century market place economic realities, it is the utilitarian rewards of collaboration which frame and propel many practices. Nonetheless, notwithstanding Laermans’ sanguinity about the cold realities of contemporary collaboration, he argues that all artistic production with multiple participants tests, and has no choice but to confront the ‘politics of commonalism’ in so far as the process of making insistently poses such questions as:

How to organize work? What has value? How to go on with topic X or issue Y? Which materials will be finally included in the planned performance according to what sort of choreographic logic? And how to agree when disagreeing? (Laermans, 2012: 101)

Another mode of collaboration which is spurred largely for economic and financial reasons – though often with the promise of enhanced and embellished creative outcomes – is the organizational practice of co-production. In recent years funding bodies (e.g. Arts Council of England) often specifically encourage collaborative projects: ‘the current strategic touring fund is designed to encourage collaboration between organisations’ (Arts Council of England website). Here, the bringing together of – say – two theatre companies to construct a new production has become a relatively common feature of cultural production for middle to large-scale companies. Joint artistic directors of Paines Plough (the UK’s ‘national theatre of new plays’ [<http://www.painesplough.com/about-us/introduction>]) James Grieve and George Perrin, responding to Guardian critic, Lynn Gardner’s blog where she wrote that [e]very bit of theatre is now reliant on collaboration’

(<http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/apr/01/what-to-see-theatre-shared-experience-bronte>) continue enthusiastically:

We can collaborate more and we should. Not only to make public subsidy stretch further, but because partnerships are so creatively rewarding... If collaboration is rooted in shared taste and clearly articulated objectives then the more people at the table the better. Collaborating means constructive arguments as well as agreements.

(2011: <http://www.painesplough.com/about-us/introduction>)

Grieve and Perrin cite some examples of what they believe to have been successful recent collaborations within the UK: for example, the work of Plymouth's Drum theatre with the Royal Court and the Lyric Hammersmith. Complicite's *A Disappearing Number* opened after rehearsal in Plymouth and was billed as a collaboration or joint production between the Company, the National Theatre and Plymouth's Theatre Royal. Other examples of joint productions over the last two decades include: Warwick Arts Centre's co-productions with other UK and international partners; Glasgow Citizens Theatre's co-production of *Dr Faustus* with the West Yorkshire Playhouse; Northern Stage's co-production of *The Noise* with Unlimited Theatre; and Punchdrunk and the National Theatre.

And there are many more. One of the issues which emerge from these accounts and narratives is that 'co-production' regularly becomes elided and synonymous with 'collaboration'. I know little of the details, of the warp and weft of these 'collaborations', but most of these are driven – as Gardner, Grieve and Perrin acknowledge – initially at least by financial imperatives. This is, of course, neither dishonorable nor *a priori* suspect, but it leaves me wanting to know more about how such collaborations actually worked, how they were experienced by the participants,

whether new creative ground was trodden, and – perhaps most importantly – what were the unplanned and unintended consequences of their conjoining.

A question which particularly presents itself around co-productions as models of collaboration is that of *time*. One of the often attested features of experiments in collaboration between different artists and performance makers is that it takes time – more time – to establish the methods, protocols, understandings and ‘undecidings’ of the shared practice in question. Laermans, citing Kunst (2010), points out that:

... (t)emporal restrictions are probably the most limiting, if not the most crushing, constraint when it comes to artistic collaboration in general. Indeed they vastly hinder the creation and exploration of an always particular ‘common wealth’ (Laermans, 2012: 100)

When joint productions are driven by the imperative to save money, or to make reduced budgets stretch further – in a different context one might use the term ‘economies of scale’ – time will be at a premium and the slow cooking of a sensitive, critical and generous construction of the project is likely to be under threat. It would be arrogant to argue that co-productions should be opposed on these grounds, but the growth of these couplings, forged largely through economic imperatives, deserves to be researched and reflected upon through a cautious and quizzical lens.

Finally, having explored the range of (sometimes highly questionable) motivations, interests and forms of collaboration which seem to lie behind the current ubiquity of the term, and the claims behind it, I wish to consider how aspects of the original ‘utopianism’ and radicalism of collaboration are being practiced in the contemporary landscape of theatre, dance and performance. Although, as we have established, collaboration describes simply enough a working relationship between two or more

people from within the same art form or discipline, it is the encounters over time between people whose working, intellectual and aesthetic practices are different – sometimes hugely so - which sign the most ambitious, risk-laden and generative forms of collaboration. In these, I would argue, ‘risk-laden’ implies lack of certainty about outcomes, a not-knowing about the endgame, an inherent playfulness about process, a relational lightness and a critical generosity between the collaborative players involved. Entering a collaborative project with these dispositions in mind – and managing to sustain them throughout the inevitable tribulations of the process – might helpfully define at least part of a contemporary collaborative utopianism.

It seems, too, important to acknowledge that whilst collaboration between players from varying artistic or disciplinary backgrounds always implies an accretion of know-how, skill and creativity towards some kind of yet-to-be-known end-product, a place where the whole is more than the sum of the parts, there will always be loss involved as well. A genuinely radical and utopian collaboration must of necessity, I would argue, possess a willingness to make strange, destabilize and possibly jettison entirely, existing habits, practices and knowledges. Here, that most difficult of practices, the subversion of ego and the giving up of dearly held beliefs and behaviours has always to be a very present possibility. It is perhaps not too fanciful here to see such collaboration as a kind of productive betrayal, a healthy and generative contamination. Collaboration always engages with the politics of interaction and relation – it cannot help but do this – and at the centre of this must lie a refusal to ignore or erase difference, and an ever-present awareness of the dangers of a fictional consensus. And at the other end of the scale from the unsettlement of dealing with difference lies the pitfalls of coziness and satisfaction. A productive and utopian collaboration requires its players to be able to nose out the critical difference between a state of flourishing (Eagleton, 2003: 124-130) and feeling good, being happy.



**Some models of recent and contemporary collaboration which might lay claim to a productive but grounded utopianism ... collaborations between partners marked by difference and distinction in skill, discipline, art form, age, culture, (dis)ability, ethnicity, faith or location:**

- Lone Twin's Boat Project (2012)
- Artist, Minty Donald's 'Bridging' collaboration with Off Shore Workboats Ltd which involved a huge rope being woven 11 times across the Clyde in Glasgow (2010)
- Dee Heddon's collaborative walking projects. (2000 -)
- Collaboration between architect turned visual artist, Chris Crickmay, and dancer Miranda Tuffnell (1980's -)
- The West Eastern Divan Orchestra set up by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said in 1999.
- Merce Cunningham and John Cage (1942- 1992)
- Robert Wilson, Tom Waits and William Burroughs working together on *The Black Rider* (1990)
- John Berger working with Simon McBurney and Complicite on *Lucy Cabrol* (1994) , *The Vertical Line* (1999), *To the Wedding* (1997), and *Vanishing Points* (2005)
- John Berger's collaboration with photographer, Jean Mohr (1960's -); Forced Entertainment's collaboration with photographer Hugo Glendinning (1984 -)
- John Berger (1926 -) and WG Sebald (1944 – 2001) – writers whose dramaturgies of writing are a collaboration of forms, registers and voices
- The Choreography and Cognition project (2003-4) – a collaboration between arts researcher, Scott deLahunta, choreographer and dancer, Wayne McGregor and Cambridge University's Crucible Computer Laboratory
- *The Wall of Death* – National Theatre of Scotland's collaboration with visual artist Stephen Skrynka and the Ken Fox Troupe (2010)
- Places of collaboration and learning like Black Mountain College (1933 – 1957) or Dartington College of Arts (1961 – 2008)

In this chapter I have identified and briefly explored different contexts and rationales for contemporary collaborations both within and beyond the work of theatre, dance and performance. I have suggested that within the ubiquitousness of current calls to collaborate, there often lies a murky and questionable politics. Models of collaboration are multiple, overlapping and rarely represent categorical and mutually exclusive modes of operation or practice. In current times the motivation to collaborate in order to make unknown discoveries, to take risks and to establish new ways of working by deepening personal relationships and friendships can easily become compromised by economic and financial constraints. Such constraints may simply mean the absence of cash resource to allow the slow cooking of a genuinely productive exercise in collaboration to take place, but equally they may be the result of limitations and conditions attached to funding, and an increasingly instrumental and commodified culture which values art-making largely in terms of economic or social value added. Quietly utopian and progressive models of collaboration remain, of course, in our midst and I identify some of the qualities of these above. Such models try to resist many conventional and quotidian expectations and behaviours, but particularly the excessive commodification of time, representing a stubborn refusal to 'speed up' artistic processes with a celebration of slowness, uncertainty and *undeciding*.

### ***Afterwords I***

The models I have identified in the box above deserve a little elaboration and contextualization. Each of these merit being written up into a full length case study in its own right, but this essay had a different purpose, namely to offer an overview of how contemporary collaboration is invoked and justified in many different cultural, economic and social spaces. Of course, these examples are amongst many I could have selected, but they were chosen to exemplify what I feel to be enduring qualities of a generative, generous and progressive collaboration. As this essay has argued, there are many different 'orders' of collaboration, but all these examples, except perhaps for the West Eastern Divan Orchestra, speak of a model collaboration which takes the initiating artists

outside and beyond their own discipline and art form. Sometimes these are collaborations *between* artists: choreographer and dancer Cunningham with composer, Cage; theatre maker Wilson, with writer Burroughs and singer/composer Waits; architect-turned-artist Crickmay with dancer/choreographer Tufnell; theatre director and actor McBurney with writer and visual artist Berger; theatre company, Forced Entertainment with photographer Glendinning; and so on. Other collaborations take the partnerships *outwith* the sphere of the arts: visual artist and performance maker Donald with marine workers employed by Off Shore Workboats Ltd on the Clyde; performance maker Lone Twin's extraordinary 'collaboration' with hundreds of members of the public who contributed artifacts to the building of the boat; Heddon's performative walking encounters with many colleagues, friends and strangers; the National Theatre of Scotland with the circus entertainers, the Ken Fox Troupe (and visual artist, Skrynka), in the *Wall of Death*; and academic, deLahunta's research collaborations with choreographer and dancer, McGregor and computer engineers and software designers from Cambridge University. Dartington College of Arts and Black Mountain College are included here as highly unusual institutions (now, sadly, no longer in existence) which practiced collaboration and experimentation across and between art forms. Both places have an illustrious list of alumni who have populated contemporary arts practices over the last fifty years. All these examples articulate a complex and sometimes passionate politics of collaboration, but perhaps none more so than the West Eastern Divan Orchestra established by conductor, Daniel Barenboim and political activist and writer, Edward Said. The orchestra draws upon Palestinian and Israeli musicians who play side by side, offering a glimpse of what a future peaceful co-existence might look like between these two countries.

### ***Afterwords II: poem***

***We***

Who we?

Who I?

Why we?  
Why I?  
Where's we?  
Where's I?  
Who's not we?  
Why not those we?  
Can we?  
Should we?  
Could we?  
Would we?  
What if we?  
If not we, who?  
How can we?  
Where do we stop?  
How do we start?  
Do we continue being we?  
When do we stop being we?  
Are we in common?  
What have we in common?  
Are we for we?  
Are we against we?  
Who are the 'we' in all this?

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