

Collaboration as Conversation: Performing Writing and Speaking Across Disciplines

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Collaboration provides an ideal framework through which to interrogate the ways that writing and performing intersect and overlap. By highlighting the roles that shared authority and prefaced products play in defining collaboration, writing scholars are better able to articulate the ways in which performance-based curricula may offer outcomes relevant to pre-professional interests. Using a case study of a performance-based course from 2001, this chapter explores the definitions of collaboration and authoring in light of increasing demands for measurable academic outcomes.

Writing is based in oral communication. Plato favored speaking over writing. Ong saw writing as transforming speaking. Writing is dialogic. Writing is social. Truisms related to the connections between writing and orality abound. And yet, despite the long histories alluded to in these oft-repeated ideas, those of us who primarily study writing seldom dig beneath the surface of the most basic truism: that writing and speaking are related, if not intertwined. This topsoil of understanding has been often turned over, but seldom do we dig deep into the sediments underneath. Doing so raises more questions than answers: Where is the line drawn between writing and speaking—for instance—in acts of brainstorming, invention, workshopping, or presentation? Does any such line exist? And if it does, where does it fall in demarcating the territories of speech and performance? Is writing “performed” in the same way that speech is? Although related, are writing and speaking (or performing) equally valued in our institutions?

What these questions lack in novelty they more than make up for in probing the depths of what we are hoping to teach (and learn) in writing courses that increasingly comingle with high stakes testing, explicitly assessable outcomes, and writing across the curriculum/disciplines (WAC/WID) scenarios. Beyond oral communication courses (which often feature assignments taking the form of persuasive speeches, debates, or TED-style talks), writing and speaking most visibly connect in our performance-based courses (typically taught in theater, and to a lesser degree, creative writing and literature courses.) There, orality approaches performance

through myriad more unstable terms and approaches: performance writing; writing for performance; performing writing; but seldom just writing, performed.

Scholarly works addressing these nuances seem to fight the temptation to conflate or completely contrast the related activities of writing, speaking, and performing. For instance, in one example, *Writing for Performance*, the authors argue, “Writing and performance are too often contrasted as different and at times contradictory practices: performance is ‘embodied,’ while writing is ‘a record’ of the ‘event,’ especially within academic contexts.” They go on to say, “If performance-making is a practice of inscription, writing is equally a physical practice. It is a making practice, a creative practice, a critical practice” (Harris & Holman-Jones, 2016, p. 1). Such an argument is hardly new. In 1999, Ric Allsopp referenced burgeoning digital media in proclaiming: “the conventionalized (and therefore often unquestioned) relations between writing and performance are proving increasingly inadequate as interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary arts practices emerge in response to rapidly shifting [digital] cultures” (p. 76). To say that these relations have since grown more complicated is the definition of understatement.

However, such parsing seems merely academic until viewed through two very pragmatic lenses that many instructors face in contemporary times: the need to address transfer in K-20 education, and increased scrutiny of assessment and outcomes in pedagogy. The former is increasingly viewed in light of high stakes testing that takes form as early as middle school (if not sooner). In such cases, authors like Cathy Smilan (2016) note the possible overlap of desired transferable skills and strategies taught in art-based courses; “At this time in intellectual and critical development [i.e., middle school], students are honing the creative dispositions of keen observation, purposeful investigation, data collection, analysis skills, collaborative interaction techniques and unique interpretations. [These] very skills and techniques . . . are foundational to studio inquiry” (p. 167). Smilan elaborates by supporting and arguing for the inclusion of arts-related inquiry as a way to build transferable twenty-first century skills (e.g., visual literacy, communication) that are taught and sought in other more traditional coursework.

Likewise, the connected concern of assessment is reflected on in experimental theater courses, such as in Henry & Baker’s observation: “Tempering the current over-emphasis on ‘outcomes’ with a more capacious understanding of teaching and learning that uses students’ written performances not as an index of competence but rather as a means to glean latent potential and to configure re-behaving to boost iterative performances aimed at learning” (2015), and in more traditional introductory courses based in theater. One such example from Baruch College is described as “offer[ing] an ideal forum in which to explore the means and methods of effective oral and written communication” (Hughes et al., 2006, p. 85). The introduction to theater course described here not only fulfills a performance and communication outcome, but also does duty as a WAC fulfillment, allowing

instructors and administrators to assess multiple skills sought across disciplinary lines: writing skills, speaking skills, and collaboration, among others.

These brief examples demonstrate not just our field's interest in the relationship between writing and performance (literacy and orality), but the interests of many fields, including those of our colleagues in theater, communication, general education, and WAC/WID. The common thread through all of these interests is a recognition not just that writing and speaking are related, but that through their relationship they open up new possibilities of addressing and achieving desirable outcomes. Throughout the vast literature on writing and performance we continually see mention of one such desired outcome: the importance of collaboration, not just because writing/speaking is dialogic, but because performance is collaborative at every turn—performer and audience, writer and editor, writer and interpreter, actors and actors.

In an age of high stakes testing and concrete outcome-obsessed culture, these collaborations present an opening for a very real payoff of skills desired across disciplines. That so many institutions are awakening to this fact is both refreshing and overdue. The tricky part, however, is communicating to these institutions (and to our policy makers, students, and each other) that this payoff often comes only via muddy and convoluted paths where issues of expectation, assessment, and role-playing are anything but clear. This is one reason why the case study—although highly contextualized—remains one of our best tools for analyzing the nuances of connections between writing and speaking, and desired outcomes like collaboration that are valued across many disciplines. One such case presented itself to me in 2001, and some 17+ years later I'm still unraveling the intertwined lessons.

Collaboration as Conversation

Jim Cogswell, painter and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Art and Design at the University of Michigan, feeds on collaboration. "When I reach outside of [visual art] I feel as though I'm bringing something back inside of that world, and it's very nurturing even if I don't understand it completely. It's a different kind of sustenance" (personal interview, March 1, 2015). For Cogswell, this sustenance gained a public face in 1997 when he designed the sets for a performance of a dancer/choreographer friend, Peter Sparling, with the help of a biostatistician and a space physics researcher. "The collaboration itself became a conversation," he recalls of his work with biostatistician Fred Brookstein. "And it may not be an entirely verbal conversation. He responds to something I do. I respond to something he does. And, of course we use language to mediate this exchange, but it is an exchange offered through what I am best at and what he is best at" (J. Cogswell, personal interview, March 1, 2015).

The result of this particular exchange (in truth a collaboration with over twelve scholars, designers, dancers, and technicians) was “The Seven Enigmas,” a multimedia dance production (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ou4vIsucbX-swatches?v=ou4vIsucbXs>). A review of the finished product noted how the combination of “modern dance, a sculpture installation, footage from the Hubble Space Telescope and a computerized video projection” helped produce a successful “result [that] is a synergistic art experience that transcends the assumption that modern dance is hard, heavy and too complicated to understand” (“Finding the edge”). Judging by this review, instead of complicating the essence of the performance, the interdisciplinarity of the production helped make the piece more accessible and, perhaps, successful.

The problem and beauty with such collaborations is that they are both brief and intensely intimate. The aforementioned production took two years to prepare, a month to mount, and days to run, but when it was over it was gone, and only the four main collaborators were left with the intimate knowledge of the exchange. By extending this case to pedagogical contexts, it raises important questions for instructors interested in similar interdisciplinary work: Can such partnerships and collaborative processes be codified into coursework? If so, how can one bundle the successes and failures, and organic and forced interactions, into fifteen weeks of classes? In short, can we facilitate an ethereal creative process that both honors the real work that composers (including writers, artists, musicians, among others) do while also standing up to the rigors demanded in academia?

For Cogswell, the answers to these questions came in an interdisciplinary course he co-created in 1998, and ran only once more in 2001. The course, *Turning Points: Collaborations in the Arts*, taught thirty students—self-designated as ten writers, ten artists, and ten musicians—and asked them to form ten teams of three to perform three different collaborative projects in changing personnel configurations over the 15-week semester. The simple, direct prompt for each grouping was the same each time: *Create*. What Cogswell found in teaching the course both reified beliefs he’d always had about collaboration as well as confirmed the habits that he’d nurtured across his professional career.

Text, Music, and the Visual Arts

Turning Points wasn’t just the result of Jim Cogswell’s “habit” of seeking out collaborations and interdisciplinary partnerships. The major catalyst for the course came from the University of Michigan Museum of Art (UMMA), which in the winter of 1998 was set to host an exhibit featuring Claude Monet, titled *Monet at Vétheuil: The Turning Point*. Cogswell’s course was eventually named after this particular showing. The exhibit looked at the impressionist’s work at a time in his career when

he was in conversation with other artists, including Claude Debussy and Stephane Mallarme. And, because it was Monet, the UMMA expected, and got, big crowds. Cogswell recalls: “they knew it was going to be a blockbuster and they wanted to do something special. They said, ‘there ought to be an interdisciplinary arts course on the occasion to celebrate this artist who is also in conversation.’ All they did was start the conversation” (personal interview, March 1, 2015).

The subsequent conversation involved Cogswell (a painter), Richard Tillinghast (a poet), and Bright Sheng (a composer). Together, they brainstormed the interdisciplinary, collaborative course that would later become 2001’s *Turning Points*, team-taught with musician Eric Santos and technical advisor Tom Bray (who Cogswell emphasized was the key to success in getting the course off the ground in 1998.) The course itself was run much like Smilan’s idea of a studio course in art studies, or a workshop in writing studies. Students and instructors shared group discussions before breaking off into smaller brainstorming and revising circles. Once there, each team of three was given between \$50–\$100 for supplies, a scheduled meeting with Bray to go over technical requirements for the performance, and three to four weeks to design, script, and produce a performance that may never be produced (or seen) again after the trial run. This process, repeated three times with three different teams throughout the semester, constituted the main intellectual engagement for the makers of the course.

However, the course wasn’t just performance and critique. In addition to instructor and student regular show-and-tells (thus giving everyone in the course an opportunity to display their personally-authored pieces), the semester was filled with field trips to different departments and studio spaces on campus, observations of live rehearsals from local productions, lectures by visiting artists and composers, viewings of digital work by performers, and visits from local poets and artists who work in collaboration with one another. The semester was populated with makers who would come and go each week. Students were encouraged to take what they could from each visit. There were no papers, reports, or even journals required or collected; the influence, it was hoped, would be reflected in the performance pieces.

Cogswell and his co-instructors ultimately assessed students based on what he calls “engagement,” both throughout the course in things like attendance and discussion, and in personal growth exhibited in how far students pushed themselves out of their pre-determined identities, or roles (e.g., writer, musician, artist.) But this engagement was also concrete in that students ultimately self-assessed what they considered the “best” work that represented the collective intellectual journeys in the class. Alongside instructors, students voted on a handful of performances from the semester that would be showcased for a final, public performance at the end of the course. Cogswell says, “The final showcase became a moment when the teams had to self-evaluate what was most valuable about what they’d done. Without that self-evaluation, process can just lead to more process. There has to be some

kind of moment of truth” (personal interview, March 1, 2015). So even though Cogswell and his team explicitly encouraged the abstract valuing of creative and collaborative processes, the course did reward students with a final “product” that was publicly celebrated. The product (or final showcase), however, was completely divorced from grades in the course, and was meant to be ephemeral, surviving only for the one performance and then never (re)produced again.

These products were displayed during a 2001 public performance across multiple sites on campus. Of the more than 30 pieces originally performed in the course, twelve were decided upon to be produced again for an audience beyond the class. Many of the performances have since been archived as *YouTube* videos (e.g., Figures 4.1 and 4.2).



Figure 4.1. Screenshot of Turning Points video performances (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGjkU-S4hJU>; courtesy of James Cogswell).

But to call these videos “products” in the same way that a published piece from a writing course is a product is not quite accurate. Not only do contemporary viewings of these videos decontextualize the pieces from the overall experience of the final performance and course, they also artificially foreground the product over the process of making the pieces. As a result, although the digital longevity of the videos is one piece to understanding the creation of performances in the course, taking part in the public performance was the immediate reward, or recognition, that students in the course sought more than any long-lasting legacy.



Figure 4.2. Screenshot of Turning Points video performances (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGjkU-S4hJU>; courtesy of James Cogswell).

Author in the Arts

For many students and novice scholars, *authoring* is synonymous with individual writing, composing, and in some cases, publishing. It can be a vaguely helpful concept when used in these ways, perhaps connoting *writing-plus*, as in writing with reward, or in receiving recognition; supporting phrases like “she’s not just a writer, she’s an author” and “I’ve just authored a new piece.” Because such use implies reward for individual work, such usage very quickly becomes catalyst for conjuring up long-held romantic views about the lone genius, solitary writer, or even Michel Foucault’s “author-function” (1969) which states that our belief in the social situation surrounding an author is just as important as the words she puts on the page. Authoring as *writing-plus* positions the writing/composing process as the less glamorous means to the product as the rewarding/public end. Or, “what the historian of authorship Martha Woodmansee refers to as the ‘contemporary usage’ of the word ‘author,’ a usage which denotes ‘an individual who is solely responsible—and thus exclusively deserving of credit—for the production of a unique, original work’” (as quoted in Bennett, 2005, p. 7).

In other words, even though writing, composing, and publishing are processes, traditional conceptualizations of authoring prioritizes an end-goal of recognition and status. This baked-in *ethos* in authoring is historically congruent with the term itself, as Andrew Bennett reminds us:

The Oxford English Dictionary records that the word “author” comes from the Latin verb *augere*, “to make to grow, originate, promote, increase,” which developed into the words *auctor* and *auctoritas* in the medieval period, with their sense of authority, their sense of the *auctor* as one of the ancient writers who could be called upon to guarantee an argument’s validity . . . at the end of the fourteenth century, as *auctor*, *auctour*, and later *aucthour* and *author*. Furthermore, it identifies the author with “authority,” as a person “on whose authority a statement is made; an authority, an informant” (sb.4), and as someone who has “authority over others; a director, ruler, commander” (sb.5). (2005, p. 6)

Here, a sense of authority can be seen as a kind of reward or recognition in the same way that money, fame, or grades can be, too.

Those of us in writing studies know, however, that one cannot necessarily teach authority. It’s not a skill, *per se*. Writing courses teach ways to build and/or leverage authority, but they cannot necessarily instill it in their students much less list it as a probable curricular (or assessable) outcome. Authority must be earned through experience, evidence, or building of good will through the writing and composing processes. So, if we take this historical view of becoming an author as coming to possess authority, it raises some important questions for instructors. First, is this the same as saying that becoming an author is something that can be gained only *after* the writing process? More to the point, if the term author is historically aligned with authority, and contemporarily equated to attribution or reward, what do we gain by using it as a lens through which to view collaborative studies and/or WAC/WID work?

As a way of answering, Cogswell repeatedly used the word “makers” during our interview to refer to the writers, artists, and musicians who share the same verb to do what they do when they make: compose. Though tedious, this subtle parsing of similar words—creating, making, composing, writing, and authoring—is at the heart of collaborative studies, especially those that reach out across disciplinary and multimodal lines.

Our modern understanding of authoring, for better or worse, cuts to the bone of the messy business involved in finding and facilitating ideas, especially when those ideas are debated and shared by multiple parties. Making something involves finding and choosing source materials, contributing to them in some way

(including arranging and delivering them), and being rewarded for their (re)distribution as a created product. Applying the term authoring to this process foregrounds the “who” and “what” of the process, but may leave intact the integrity of the rhetorical creation (the “how”), allowing us to more readily focus on the making (or, in our common parlance, the process) so important in interdisciplinary work. However, the verb “making” may not carry the same intellectual gravitas that the term authoring does for many of our academic colleagues, especially when authoring as *writing-plus* is so engrained in institutional practices like tenure and promotion, awarding of grants, or grading.

As a concept, authoring is a standard (or status) shared across disciplines (e.g., *auteur* studies in filmmaking) that can be recognized but not exclusively owned. Unlike *writing*, which is often seen today as a skill or a service discipline housed in the humanities; and unlike *composing* which is technical, or *creating* which is magical; *authoring* is a respected (if not loosely defined) interdisciplinary concept. Authoring as concept, though, largely remains mired in traditional connotations of individuality both in terms of agency and recognition. As a result, revisiting *authoring* as a concept of collaborative “making” across disciplines provides us with an ideal frame through which we can better understand how writing studies can inform and be informed by other disciplines that compose in their own unique ways. Cogswell’s course encouraged students and instructors alike to create/make/compose without the expected end-goal of becoming an author (i.e., in gaining reward, recognition, or authority.) Instead, every aspect of the course privileged the making process by encouraging makers to embrace their inexperience and to simply not worry about the end product. As a result, the course asked students to eschew most hope for gaining recognition or authority, and instead embrace a collaboration process that could only be successful by denying the traditional conceptualizations of authoring.

Composing and Collaborating

Writing encompasses all of the process, product, interpersonal, meta-affective, meta-cognitive, meta-reflective (and however many other) actions that an agent (or student) takes when she puts pen to paper or finger to keyboard. Chris Anson (2013), among many others, has chronicled how the “process movement” in our field rolls invention, writing, and revision into one cohesive package. And though the field of composition/rhetoric is only recently reawakening to its historical roots in orality (e.g., Elbow, 2012; Selfe, 2009), we should be mindful of the role that speaking, too, plays in what we refer to as both writing and/or composing writ large.

The study of speech, it has been argued, gets us close to understanding the concept of an author not just as a writer communicating through language, but as a construct denoting the *writing-plus* privilege discussed earlier. The difference, historically, has been that writing becomes a physical artifact that persists long after the communicative act, whereas speech is ephemeral. Channeling Roland Barthes, Andrew Bennett reminds us:

One of the fundamental differences between speech and writing is that, unlike speech, writing remains, that it lasts after the person that writes has departed . . . In other words, unlike acts of speech, acts of writing can be read after the absence, including the radical absence that constitutes death, of its author. (2005, p. 10)

This staying power of writing could be argued to provide it with more historical authority than speech. Speech is interlinked to our understanding of writing, of course, but speech (with the exception of modern recording techniques in digital video, podcasts, among others) is meant to be transient and unmoored. We can look at it as a catalyst for more speech (and more writing), but at its core as something that is contextualized only in the moment.

A large exception to this blanket characterization is performance, where speech is scripted and delivered in relatively fixed ways. Literature and drama studies frame such performance through the media of monologues, debates, and plays. Of course, such performances are widely used for entertainment and cultural commentary. In pedagogical contexts, however, Michael Carter describes performance as:

a learning situation in which teachers provide opportunities for their students to develop the enduring knowledge necessary for creating the artifacts that are the central focus of students' intended careers . . . these learning situations are opportunities for students to engage in ways of doing that may not lend themselves to explicit description and thus are marked indirectly by qualities of the doer to be represented in the artifact. (2007, p. 402)

Here, Carter advances our understanding of performance beyond scripting, acting, and media production, and instead into the creation of "artifacts" that may not be recognized as finished products in the traditional academic sense of outcomes. On the contrary, he positions performance as the expression of the learning process, an embodiment of the intellectual ephemeral.

This embodiment may take on the building of an intellectual *ethos*, or identity. Authorship scholars Janis Haswell and Richard Haswell point to this building in what they call discursive performance, defined as "construct[ing] an identity that will survive within a group or a community" (2010, pp. 5-6). They align such performances

closely with composition/rhetoric's current views of genre theory, noting "a person shapes or manipulates stock language into an identity, a performance that displays or impersonates characteristics already scripted by a particular group" (2010, p. 6). For Haswell and Haswell, such performance emerges in the form of outcomes (or products) in composition studies, where composing is how a student accomplishes such an act as "a writer." The authors disown this conceptualization of writing as product over process. Instead, they argue that an ideal composing outcome should instead focus on process, and take the name of something else to represent this shift to the building of an identity or a collective group of ideas. Eschewing centuries of etymology, they appropriate this act of building by calling it authoring, where:

teaching vests authority in authoring, [and] students will be recognized more by their promise than their performance, will be encouraged to develop personal distinction rather than group affiliations, and will be affirmed in their inner dignity rather than an "identity" assigned by the culture at large. (2010, p. 8)

In other words, Haswell and Haswell use their appropriated concept of authoring as a way to short circuit what they see as superficial performing in academic (and writing) life, where the staying power of the artifact (or scripted, staged, and enshrined performance) is more important than the act of making; the performance more important than the rehearsal.

For them, applying the terms discursive performance and "authoring" to writing studies allows instructors to focus on authentic processes of creating that aren't always readily apparent when we position students as writers in a world where "authoring" inherently invokes individual recognition in fixed forms. In their appropriation of the word authoring via a language of performance and identity, Haswell and Haswell note that the authority an author inhabits comes implicitly from within, and the process of bringing that authority forth is the action with which we should be most concerned. In other words, authoring does not precede authority; it is the very act of unearthing it and sharing it with others.

This concept of collaborative making-as-authoring allows us to interrogate the implications of the course *Turning Points* through a variety of ways. First, writing and speaking are intertwined, where the "writing" component of any piece may be a script that results in an actual theatrical performance. The course, in admitting students who self-designated as writers, musicians, or artists (and pre-assigned students into identifiable roles) also provided identities that students were free to perform their way out of. For example, as a student in the course, I knew going in that I was a writer who would be teamed with musicians and artists. The twist—what I believe comes closest to Haswell and Haswell's treatment of authoring—is that in each performance writers were asked to not only work with musicians and

artists, but to also do the composing work that they did, too. I established authority not just by writing and delivering a written artifact, but also by performing that identity with others and allowing my own definitions of what it means to create to emerge. In one performance, my role as writer stretched me to act my lines in front of a live audience and to work with the musician and artist to whom I was assigned to create an overall experience where my “writing” may or may not be recognized as such. In this frame, authoring is not simply about privileging process over product, it is about leveraging interdisciplinary performance to create an *ethos* that legitimizes the importance of making authority, but not necessarily presenting a finished artifact that reflects that authority (especially given that no one would respect my “acting” as any kind of authoritative performance.)

This making-of-authority process is of not just performance; it is the heart of what we know as collaboration, or co-authorship. Like authorship, collaboration is widely discussed but infrequently interrogated beyond traditional understanding. A common definition is attributed to Deborah Bosley in Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s canonical (1990) work on co-authoring: “two or more people working together to produce one written document in a situation in which a group takes responsibility for having produced the document” (as quoted in Ede & Lunsford, 1990, p. 15). This definition is important to consider in light of the type of interdisciplinary work produced in Cogswell’s course.

First, the reliance on “two or more people” was a foundational consideration for the course. The class did not simply partner writers with musicians, for example. Instead, by asking students to work in groups of three, the course became cross-disciplinary, or in Cogswell’s terminology, transdisciplinary. Such partnerships pushed students to negotiate the ways of thought, types of media, and forms of expression that their collaborations would ultimately take. There was no easy genre to fall into, such as an opera or a visual poem. Because of this, the latter part of the definition is likewise problematized: in such collaborations there was no inherent recognition of responsibility nor product/document to display. Yes, each collaboration resulted in a performance, but in many cases the work of the writer was spoken instead of read, the musician may have contributed only background sounds, and the visual artist was free to create objects (e.g., sculptures, videos, etc.) but in many cases worked with the technical director on lighting and ambience to create an experience more than a product. So, the resulting performance was not necessarily a product *per se*, and the recognition of the creative process was in the work itself, but seldom enumerated as the fruits of individual contribution. As a result, the individuals making up groups took “responsibility,” in Bosley’s terms, but not necessarily according to the predesignated roles they came in with: the writer may not have done the writing, the musician not the music, the artist not the art.

Such messy collaborations are not unique to this course. Group-writing assignments ask for similar negotiations. But even when students write individually

in different media we see the evidence of similar invisible choices of responsibility and shared authoring. Like orality, writing studies is currently experiencing a contemporary love affair with the concept of multimodality. And while this relationship is rightfully growing in unscripted ways, we should appreciate the thought that Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes give it in worrying aloud how they “fear that composition just ‘includes’ the multimodal, [thereby] co-opting it as an ‘extension of traditional composition,’ as opposed to exploring how multimodality challenges our rhetorical predispositions in privileging print textualities” (2014, p. 4).

An interdisciplinary project like *Turning Points* averted this concern by using different media to challenge not just print textualities but also the rhetorical idea of the author. In this way, it may be vogue to refer to the course as multimodal more than interdisciplinary or collaborative. To do so, though, privileges the artifacts, outcomes, or products more than the messy (and hidden) processes. In line with this, Jason Palmeri reminds us:

Challenging the notion that the teaching of writing and the teaching of performance are two entirely separate realms, [Edward P.J.] Corbett reminds compositionists that both actors and writers must make conscious choices about how to perform an identity (construct ethos) for a particular audience and a particular purpose. (2012, p. 63)

Palmeri (and by extension Corbett) sees performance as a kind of multimodal process that functions first and foremost as a way to interrogate the rhetorical understanding of authoring. In line with Haswell and Haswell, Palmeri notes how we ask students to perform an identity, and in doing so they “construct ethos,” or build authority. This is an important and necessary process, sometimes taught best through actual performance or self-conscious decisions present in collaboration and multimodal work. This building of authority is likewise in line with traditional notions of authoring.

But unlike many academic outcomes, this process need not rely on a finished product that embodies or implies a mastery of concepts (or outcomes). Instead, because the making is foregrounded in the authoring process (as opposed to the traditionally favored delivery, or publishing) the onus falls more on the instructors, or the curriculum itself, to allow students to assess their work and deem what deserves reward. In Cogswell’s course, this assessment took place after each performance where the instructors and students engaged in a studio critique: the entire class sat in a circle to discuss the strengths and weakness of the performance. The final judgment, and outcome, of the critique came when the class members self-selected which of the thirty original pieces would make it to the final public performance, where only a dozen pieces would be showcased. Being chosen was a reward that

didn't diminish the value of what wasn't chosen, but maintained familiarity with a system of recognition consistent with traditional creative endeavors.

This reward system also served as a dialogic and meta-reflective assessment that fulfills the long-awaited pedagogical articulation of post-process theory as espoused by Raul Sanchez, Thomas Kent, and Lee-Ann M. Kastman Breuch. Breuch most notably acknowledged that "post-process theory [makes] an important pedagogical contribution through its rejection of mastery" (2002, p. 127). Pieces chosen for the final performance were selected based on the display of breadth of creativity (e.g., spoken pieces, video pieces, etc.), practical staging decisions, and subjective favoritism. Yes, class favorites were rewarded with another performance, but this popularity was not based in a traditional network of mastery (e.g., what was done particularly well) so much as what excited and surprised the class participants. It displayed the slippery "we know it when we see it" *ethos* common in art critiques, but less so in college writing courses. As a result, this maintains if not a rejection of mastery then a constantly moving target of what is considered a communal display of collaborative creativity.

It could be argued that this rejection of mastery is analogous to the rejection of an author as *writing-plus*, where authorship connotes a lone genius, writing with recognition and the social construction of authority. And while post-process remains a concept specific to writing studies, Cogswell would feel comfortable describing his course similarly as postmodern. He said of the course, "I realized that there might have been [final] results that you might have cringed at, but that that wasn't the point. I realized that we were asking people to do something that they had no experience doing and they would have to learn their way into doing, and that that struggle to do it would be what was most valuable" (J. Cogswell, personal interview, March 1, 2015). Like conceptions of collaboration studies, this postmodern approach acknowledges multiple voices, and puts the natural authority of the classroom (the teacher) into direct dialogue with the student. But in this articulation, there is no apprenticing or easy conveyance of knowledge. Instead, the knowledge is self-taught and self-realized, and never mastered in the traditional sense. In this way, authoring in this course privileges making and *ethos* (or identity) building over any perception of expertise, mastery, or recognition as reward. Despite the presence of performances, in its collaborative and interdisciplinary approach, the course complicates the traditional notion of authoring by stopping short of fixing its conclusion in a static artifact.

Turning Points

In hindsight, Jim Cogswell is clear and confident about two things related to the transdisciplinary course *Turning Points*. First, the course would have never suc-

ceeded, let alone happened, without the technical expertise and generosity of a third party, in this case Tom Bray (Converging Technologies Consultant, University of Michigan). Bray was ostensibly support staff for the course and in charge of assistance and advising in the digital video studio where the class was held. But his expertise transcended mere support, and instead he took his place alongside historically invisible co-authors like editors and mentors who have stood behind “lone genius” authors. Bray’s presence and influence positioned him as an active participant in the course, both co-instructor and co-creator. Cogswell fully acknowledges this in explaining why the course was able to take place twice in a relatively short amount of time.

But Cogswell also acknowledges a second fact related to the course, which reveals why it has not been offered again since 2001. In a word: space. The video production studio that served as the creative hub and performance space for the initial classes has been increasingly popular (primarily for drama courses) since Cogswell’s initial courses. As a result, although he admits that he could work to find alternative space, the challenges that such an undertaking bring with it aren’t worth the effort for him at this time.

Admittedly neither of these reflections about the course is about writing or authoring. Instead, the institutional and material constraints of working with limited resources serves as a kind of gatekeeper to creating, or creative composing, in this vein. Even if participants are willing (and Cogswell assures me that he is very much still willing to do this again), the forces currently in place on campus aren’t amicable. The same could be said of co-authored pieces being denied proper acknowledgment in promotion portfolios, interdisciplinary partnerships being rejected based on a department’s needs for direct benefits, and myriad other instances where incalculable pay-offs are eschewed for more quantitative outcomes.

All of this is why this profile is not offered as a how-to or best practice. Cogswell’s *Turning Points* can be seen as a success story or a cautionary tale depending on how we view the relationship of writing and speaking to (co-)authorship in the academy. The course was offered in the traditional liberal arts education mold, stressing critical thinking, discursive and interpersonal interaction, and self-reflection. And yet it was, and still is, hard to describe in terms of transferrable pedagogy, assessment, and contributions to any of the fields involved. In many ways the three disciplines represented co-composing on a larger scale, in essence making a joint discipline connected by one imperative: creating.

The kinds of collaborative, interdisciplinary, and performative creating produced in this course fit many of the ideals embodied in our understandings of authorship, but with important alterations. First, authorship should never connote an individual contribution. Even when a sole author takes credit, there are individuals and institutions backing her decisions at every move. Second, authorship may help to build, or create, authority, but it does not precede it; authority is not a

product in itself. Instead, the ongoing negotiations of identity in specific contexts is a kind of discursive authority that should be valued. Third, reward and/or recognition are not implicit in a successful understanding of authorship. Outcomes are fluid and contextual, and although by-lines and wages are worthy rewards, they are only certain types among many options. Finally, products are no more important than processes. This, in its indirect way, leads us back to further understanding the relations between writing and speaking, literacy and orality, and performance of all kinds. As social creatures, we engage in conversation every day; we evolve to be the sum results of those conversations. In effect, we are the products of collaboration, as we are the ongoing process as we write and speak to further perform ourselves.

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