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Postmortem: On Process and Collaborative Editing

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Why collaborate, again? It depends on how you define the word. Looking up the word “collaboration” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one finds the first definition of the word is: “The action of working with someone to produce or create something.” The second definition of the word is: “Traitorous cooperation with an enemy.” When we say that we are collaborating with other scholars and artists, which one of these definitions do we mean?

History is filled with plenty of other examples of “collaborations” that didn’t end up well, at least for some of the collaborators—just ask Julius Caesar, Joan of Arc, or Leon Trotsky, to name a few. Understanding that collaboration can go in very different directions and thinking instead about “working with someone to produce or create something,” what is the most equitable way to collaborate? What kind of organization are we going to have in our collaborations?

In order to begin to think of any collaboration as equitable, we must first ask, what is the position of each member of the collaboration and how is that connected to social, cultural, and/or economic status? How do we ensure those positions brought into alignment within the collaboration and try to ensure that members of the collaboration with more power do not take advantage of those with less? If a collaboration produces a “product,” what is the nature of the product? Is someone making money or is it being given away for free? Are the collaborators being credited for their labor?

There are some who relish the post-mortem and its opportunities to recount and reconsider the infinite decisions that led to the production as it opened, ran, and closed. Others wish to move on. And not without reason. There are other projects to attend to or the decisions that led to production weren’t in one’s favor or maybe everything is going well and the postmortem opens one last chance to sour the process by looking back. Here we think through the process of editing a joint issue between two publications that are quite different despite sharing fields of theatre and performance studies with the editors of those journals and two editors that are not affiliated to either journal. We offer this postmortem on our own process here as both a way for us to reconsider our collaborative editorial work and so that it might facilitate further collaborative work in the field through an example of what worked (and what did not).

The idea of this joint issue came about in June of 2019 during a conversation between Eero Laine and Felipe Cervera in a car driving from Rijeka to Zagreb in Croatia. Both had attended a pre-conference event for what would have been the 2020 annual Performance Studies international (PSi) conference. Like so much that was scheduled for 2020, COVID-19 changed the course of the conference. During the pre-conference event, Laine, Cervera, and Kristof van Baarle, had proposed a section of the conference to be titled Ends, and which was meant to explore the possible intersections of collaborative academia, posthumanism, mourning, and apocalyptic performance. This section of the conference was then to be organized collaboratively and offer the possibility of multiple collaborative outputs. The rest of the Ends organizing team included Kyoko Iwaki and Rayya el Zein, and all met together for the first time a few weeks later in Calgary, Canada at the 2019 PSi Conference.

Ends quickly became an active collaborative network that consequently expanded beyond the initial five members. In parallel, COVID-19 spread rapidly throughout the world, in what seemed a rather daunting and awkwardly serendipitous backdrop to the original intentions of the team. The PSi conference, like many other academic events worldwide, was cancelled but Ends continued to work. To date, the collaboration springing from Ends has yielded various outputs, each of them produced by teams that overlap among them in what is truly a global network of scholars and artists working together. These outputs include articles published in or in progress for *Theatre Topics*, *Performance Research*, workshops as part of the online PSi conference “Constellate,” and a symposium titled World Ends Day, which took place in July of 2021, among others, including this special joint issue.

The work on this joint issue started early in 2020. Kevin Brown joined the Ends editing team with Cervera, Iwaki, Laine, and van Baarle. The first few meetings were highly exciting and very generative. Many ideas floated in the air of the shared Skype room (we are talking about the pre-Zoom global wave here), and the drafting of the call for papers was equally effervescent and, indeed, efficient—no malfunctions were detected and products were manufactured on point. Soon, however, we encountered the matter of practicalities—or at least that we had to ride through some valleys before we could actually work together. Some of the questions in our initial thinking—playing with the pool of keywords that Ends was then using—were: what is the end of collaboration? To what end do we entangle ourselves with others? How might collaboration be a practice of ends and ending? Now, after nearly two years of ongoing Zoom meetings, email threads, Telegram chats and the long discussions now contained therein, we can say that the question of terminals is found in the origins: when does collaboration end? And the answer is, the moment it begins.

We issued a call for work created by three or more authors and with few other restrictions. Quite simply, we asked theatre and performance scholars to work

together, to think together, to write together. The subject matter of the articles was incredibly open in that work only needed to fall under the broad purviews of the two journals: dramatic theory and criticism and performance studies. And the field responded fantastically. We received dozens and dozens of proposals from hundreds of theatre and performance scholars and artists from across the planet. In the end, the editorial team faced a number of very difficult choices and our anonymous peer reviewers helped us in making others and we are pleased to have such a strong, and strongly collaborative, set of contributions to this joint issue. We're quite conscious of the work of collaboration and throughout the process have been impressed with the ways authors have engaged with their own processes.

As editors, our own processes have been bound to journal processes, and *JDTC* and *GPS* have vastly different setups. One is hosted by a university department, while the other by an international organization; one enjoys the privileges of established infrastructure and supporting roles, the other runs on a skeletal team that performs all roles; one has a decades-long tradition and the other one is in the process of establishing one. *GPS* uses intext MLA citations and *JDTC* uses Chicago Manual of Style notes. And then, look at the people that edit this issue: we are located on different continents, have different employment statuses and are at diverse points of our academic career; of the five of us, three do not share English as our native language, two of us are migrants—and so on.

Foregrounding such matters only benefited our editorial work. The initial review and selection of abstracts was carried out by all five of us and each of us brought our own approaches and ideas to the process—some of us thinking more thematically, others in practical terms of words counts—each of us negotiating our own sense of editorial work and its relation to and engagement with authors. We found we worked on differing scales, seeing potential and even excellence in work in sometimes different, sometimes complementary ways.

A joint issue of this scope would have been impossible for any one of us. Through our shared work, we came to trust our interlocking expertises and affinities. We counted on each other for second and third opinions on articles from initial review to interpreting peer review to copy edits. Our combined backgrounds and knowledges meant a more comprehensive editorial expertise. We trusted our peer reviewers and sent each of the pieces in this joint issue out for review and then we trusted each other to guide our authors through the processes of feedback.

We also spent a perhaps surprising amount of our editorial time on logistical processes, aligning various protocols and organizational structures for files, for communications, for mechanisms of feedback. What seemed commonplace or obvious to some of us in working with authors was tedious and unnecessary to others. The role of the editor as described by one of us was baffling to others. The finer differences between detailed and regular email correspondence and formal, finalized letters on letterhead were debated, embraced, and dismissed. The purviews

of the two journals were scrutinized, re-articulated, and questioned. We shared files in Dropbox but kept spreadsheets in Google Drive because the journals use different file-sharing programs. We had a perhaps too long conversation about what files should be stored in the folder labelled “Accepted”—should the files be moved there once authors had been notified that their work had been accepted? Or was the folder for the accepted drafts once they were received? This is to say nothing of our differences of opinions on file naming conventions and at least one of the editor’s painstaking approaches to file versioning.

This was all necessary work on the back end of the joint issue. The work of five editors could have devolved into five separate editorial projects. Instead, these regular negotiations of process allowed for a broader collaboration between the journals themselves—in terms of the content as well as methodologies and approaches to research and publication. As this joint issue illustrates, the combined editorial range of *JDTC* and *GPS* encompasses many corners of the fields of theatre and performance studies. The journals themselves also afford different approaches to the material and the editorial team collectively considered the citational ethics and the role of media and how feedback was shared with authors and what scholarly and artistic conversations were engaged and emphasized. The logistical attunement thus also encompassed an expanded editorial sensitivity, which, we hope, led to better articles and a stronger overall issue shared by the two journals.

We mark all of this here to bring the work of collaborative editing to the fore. When shifting the critical analysis towards the things and systems that became evident in the work, what becomes clear is that we need a critique of how collaboration has been thought and engaged. The work of editing, of course, involves selecting and developing articles from proposal to publication, but even more, it seems, the work of collaborative editing is in coming around to understand the institutions and functions and ideas of scholarship from another perspective. That is, collaborative editing might make you rethink the foundations of academic work and your relation to it.

The idea of collaborative authorship, at this point in arts and humanities scholarship, is more tangible than collective editorship. To draw on a corollary from theatre, we might imagine a collectively acted or performed piece of work but what would a collectively directed piece of theatre look like? How would it function? That is, the collaborative possibilities of writing and scholarship are evident in the doing—in the writing and the researching. Editing, whether by oneself or with a group, implies a different role that makes decisions, accepts, or rejects. Whereas a group of authors might write with and write through problems, a group of editors can only discuss and discuss again (and again!), evaluate and make arguments for or against their assessment. It is often easier to create with others than to evaluate and develop the work of others together.

If this response and this joint issue tells us anything, it is that the overwhelming number of bylines in our fields featuring the name of a single author is an artificial phenomenon—we can write and research and edit theatre and performance in a solitary manner, but we really don't need to. The collection of collaboratively researched and written work in this joint issue is a testament not only to the many possibilities for collaborative scholarly methods in theatre and performance studies, but also to what is actually extant in the field today. In putting it together here, our intention is therefore to continue to make the case for both an attitude and mode of engagement with one another, and with the knowledges we embody and share. But we are also realistic and acknowledge that there are limitations to simply stating the intention to share and to work together without moving beyond a somewhat wishful argument for fairer academic practices.

To conclude, we wish to give an overview of all the contributions included herein. Before doing so, it is worth noting the numbers of this issue, if anything as a gesture towards the many voices that come together to collaborate in making it possible. The issue was edited by five editors, supported by the work of two managing editors and two editorial assistants, and includes work done by over eighty authors, which was in turn read by nearly three dozen reviewers. We hope that, at the very least, those numbers invite us to think more about how we can continue to build the field collaboratively.

The joint issue opens with two collaborative projects aimed at redefining the ways the field approaches key terms in theatre and performance studies and collaboration itself. Authored by Jaswinder Blackwell-Pal, Michael Shane Boyle, Ash Dilks, Caoimhe Mader McGuinness, Olive Mckeen, Lisa Moravec, Alessandro Simari, Clío Unger, and Martin Young, "Marxist Keywords for Performance" is just a portion of the work already underway by the Performance and Political Economy research collective. Foregrounding the act of collaboration, Tru Paraha, Jo Pollitt, Amaara Raheem, and Theron Schmidt created a performative writing experience for themselves and for the readers in "Ensemblography: Making Collaboration through Performing Writing." With the notion of Ensemblography they approach collaboration not as something that exists as soon as you switch the 'collab-button' on, but rather as an unfolding choreography, a series of movements and gestures that happen over time, across the page, and often with two sides to it.

In order to counter the almost-always narrow argument that surrounds the concept of syncretism, in "Politics and Poetics of Syncretism: Case Studies of the Bonbibi Cult, the Mapilla Teyyam Performances and Three Poems of the Bhaki Tradition from the Indian Subcontinent," Akila Vimal C, Dipanjali Deka, and Pouloumi Das take a decisively polyvocal and interdisciplinary approach to rightly explore the "syncretic" from diverse Indian cultural provenances: namely, the Bonbibi cult of Sundarbans in the West Bengal; the ritual healing practice

of Theyyam in the North Malabar region; and mystic poems/songs from three different geo-cultural contexts. In “Sympathetic Vibrations: Sense-ability, Medical Performance and Hearing Histories of Hurt,” the multi-vocal collaboration by Mary King, Joan McCarthy, Órla O’Donovan, Róisín O’Gorman, and Margaret Werry resort to their different fields of study—applied social science, performance studies, and medical ethics, respectively—to develop a critically thrilling hauntological article that reassesses the performative ontology of nineteenth century medical wax moulages.

In “From Site to Self: Immersion, Audience Research, and Polyvocality,” Kelsey Blair, Kelsey Jacobson, Scott Mealey, and Jenny Salisbury focus on collaborative practices in theatre at two levels. In examining the intrinsically collaborative experience of watching theatre, they articulate an equally collaborative inquiry that fleshes out the polyvocality needed to develop audience research. Unpacking the multiplicity of audience experience, they argue, refreshes the field’s understanding of immersion to move it away from the physical conditions of the performance and closer to the experience of collective meaning-making. Approaching collaboration from the perspective of the performer/author of improv theatre, Gretchen Busl, David Charles, and Marianne DiQuattro open theoretical inroads to the form, its elusive archivization, and its collaborative possibilities in “Collaboratively Emergent Composition: Long-Form Improvisation and the Quest to Recover *Upton Abbey*.” The authors elegantly interweave their scholarly and artistic voices, sharing a byline but clearly demarcating their contributions and those of others on their artistic team. Turning attention toward other potential modes of collaboration, Alecks Ambayec, Renata Gaspar, Sozita Goudouna, Jan-Tage Kühling, and Simon Probst offer a number of possible ways of viewing collaboration between humans and non-humans in “Changing Perspectives on Performance Collaboration: Problematizing More-Than-Human Subjectivities.” The work examines five artistic works that trouble boundaries and help us rethink what collaboration might be beyond the human.

The performance *Necropolis* by choreographer Arkadi Zaides and the broader project behind it aim to map and combine activism with acts of critical care towards the graves of the bodies of refugees that died in their attempts to reach Europe. “Tentacular Thinking in Storied Places: A Deep-Mapping of an Art-Science-Activist Worlding in *Necropolis* (2017-Onward)” brings together cartographers, geographers, activists, a dramaturg, a choreographer and theatre scholars and students. The members of Atelier Cartographique, Igor Dobricic, Michel Lussault, Philippe Rekacewicz, Christel Stalpaert and Zaides lay out the complexities and many fields connected to dead, all the while seeking to give a dignified voice to those who lost their lives while seeking a better one. “An Elephant’s Exquisite Corpse: Spectral Matters in Lynn Nottage’s *Mlima’s Tale*” by Natalia Duong, Rishika Mehrishi, and Joshua Williams was written using a methodology adapted from the surrealist exquisite corpse technique thus considering Lynn Nottage’s 2018 play in both

content and form. Analyzing this play, about an elephant killed for his tusks, the authors embrace the exquisite corpse method as a way of collaboratively working through their individual readings of the play, and arrive at a form of writing that is partial, situated, fragmentary, and polyphonic.

With contributions from Gaby Martineau, together Amanda Rose Villarreal and Bella Poynton examine the online performance form of live action role play in “*Valhalla: Agency and Genre in Emergent Virtual Larp*.” Taking a feminist and autoethnographic approach, the work highlights collaborative ways of both performing and writing together. In “When Zoom Roomed the World: Performing Network Culture’s Enclosures,” Sony Devabhaktuni, Joanna Mansbridge, and Susan Sentler review a diverse set of examples that used, or rather misused, Zoom at the height of the pandemic in 2020. They reflect on the extent to which performance practices were remediatized by this specific software, highlighting how, while they did challenge Zoom’s protocols, they also unsettle expectations of productivity and efficiency in translocal artistic collaborations.

The joint issue also features a number of shorter pieces directly related to questions of collaborative processes. In this section, we are brought behind the scenes, as it were, through focused and sometimes hyperlocal examples. The section is a sort of tour across the planet to various collaborative sites—a nomadic laboratory with roots in Denmark, Brazil, India, the UK, the US, and Turkey—bringing the reader into the processes of collaborative work in theatre and performance studies.

Cross Pollination is a nomadic laboratory promoting dialogues in-between different arts practices. In “Echolocation and Reverberation: Praxical Dispositifs in Laboratory Theatre,” Marije Nie, Adriana La Selva, Andrea Maciel, and Patrick Campbell explore embodied processes of echolocation and reverberation, sounds used to orientate a relationship to the surrounding environment in order to map praxical territories. In “From Embodiment to Emplacement: Artistic Research in Insular Territories of the Guanabara Bay,” Cesar Baio, Ruy Cezar Campos, Nathalie S. Fari, and Walmeri Ribeiro analyze how the artistic practices they created brought the local community of two islands in Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro closer to its ecological context and materiality, highlighting how embodiment is intertwined with emplacement.

Shabari Rao, Shilpa Waghmare, and Maitri Gopalakrishna were part of a therapeutic theatre project in India. Their contribution, “Enabling the Ongoing Life of Therapeutic Theatre: A Case Study of *Positively Shameless*,” brings the largely undiscussed issue to the fore of touring and taking back up performances whose initial therapeutic goal has been fulfilled, and they present several key points on how the ongoing life of such a piece and the group behind it, can be highly valuable. In “Open Clasp, Open Archive: Intimacy and Distance in an Archival Collaboration,” Kate Chedgzoy, Rosalind Haslett, Caterina McHugh, and Kate Sweeney recount their negotiations between intimacy and distance in the archiving process of the

work of Newcastle-based feminist theatre company Open Clasp and deduct good practices from their collaboration between the university, theatre company, and the community surrounding the latter. A short film makes the creative potential of the archive tangible, as well as its strong affective relation to the people whose lives were part of Open Clasp's work.

Contrasting the emphasis on digitally-mediated collaboration that other contributions offer, Maria Beach, Alex J. Bishop, Tanya Finchum, and Julie Pearson Little Thunder bring us back to basics, as it were, to remind us of the power of oral history as a method for collaborative theatre making and research. Titled "Oral History Performance as Interdisciplinary Collaboration," the piece brings together voices from theatre and adulthood studies to describe the creative process of an interdisciplinary and cross generational theatre making process. Together with İlyas Deniz Çınar, Jale Karabekir, Gamze Tosun, and Şeyda Nur Yıldırım, the project's principal investigator Rüstem Ertuğ Altınay sheds critical light on the political and scholarly struggles that comes together with a large-scale research funding in Turkey that focuses on multi-linguistic and marginal imaginations in "Large-Scale Collaborative Research Projects in Theatre and Performance Studies: Resources, Politics, and Ethics in the Margins of Europe during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

Lastly, the issue includes a section of curated dialogues. Here, we included contributions that re-enact the collaborative thinking of three teams who work in different sites of theatre and performance research. Collectively, the three contributions therefore evidence the dialogic and relational orientations that already exists in disparate debates within the field, and therefore highlight that collaboration is indeed a practice of sharing as much as a shared practice in itself. "Collaborating on Togetherness and Futurity in Disability Arts" by Kelsie Acton, Christiane Czymoch, and Tony McCaffrey is one of the pieces that cuts across journals, with a video of their collaborative thinking being published in *GPS* and an extended annotated transcript of the conversation being offered in *JDTC*. Their conversation is performative of the collaborative process they have engaged with as members of International Federation for Theatre Research's Performance and Disability Working Group, reflecting on the idea of togetherness and how this has been practiced during the pandemic. At the same time, the video offers an insight into a critical entry point for disability scholarship to think about collaboration in theatre and performance research. "From Immersion to Interference: Sites of Collaboration in *Playing with Virtual Realities*" is a dialogue between Sabiha Ghellal, Lisanne Goodhue, Einav Katan-Schmid, Nitsan Margaliot, Ramona Mosse, and Christian Stein reflects their collaboration on a VR dance performance from the perspectives of game design, dramaturgy, theatre studies, choreography and the dancers, and introduces the notion of metaphor as a liaison between these positions. Finally, Benjamin Litherland, Tom Phillips, and Claire Warden discuss the ways that a dramatic form might open collaborative possibilities across academic disciplines in

“Scholarly Grappling: Collaborative ‘Work’ in the Study of Professional Wrestling.” Their dialogue is exemplary of how theatre and performance itself offers rich opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborative scholarship and encourages us to think towards other sites and modes of thinking with other fields.

Our intention in collaboratively curating all of this work is to mark a trajectory toward collaborative work in theatre and performance studies. Taken together, this joint issue makes a case for the space between institutions, between journals, between academics to be more widely acknowledged as *the* field. Indeed, the field of theatre and performance studies does not reside in a single country, university, department, artist, academic, or student. The field is what we do together.

Correction 01.04.21: Text on page 18 of the online version of the article was updated.

In “Sympathetic Vibrations: Sense-ability, Medical Performance and Hearing Histories of Hurt,” the multi-vocal collaboration by Róisín O’Gorman, Joan McCarthy, Órla O’Donovan, and Margaret Werry resort...

was changed to:

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