

Author in the Arts: Composing and Collaborating in Text, Music, and the Visual Arts

Chris Gerben, St. Edward's University

Abstract: Many disciplines share similar terminology for making: creating, composing, writing, and authoring. The last term authoring, however, is problematic in how it privileges an end goal of individual authority and reward. To interrogate this term, and argue for its importance in future collaborative, interdisciplinary work, this article examines a historical course from the University of Michigan in 2001. The course produced performances from instructors and students representing writing, music, and art studies. This article explains the genesis of the course, offers a specific case study of a performance from the course, and revisits literature related to authorship and collaboration in order to better understand how future courses and scholarship related to these concepts may learn from past experimental courses such as the one featured here.

CG: *The class had these reverberations in my life. And I think that in the way a tiny drop in a great pool starts with small ripples and kind of grows...*

JC: *YES!!*

CG: *...into bigger ripples, I think...*

JC: *YES!*

CG: *...that's kind of what I'm experiencing as I go on.*

JC: *Yes.*

When you ask Jim Cogswell to describe his interdisciplinary, collaborative spirit, he describes it as a "habit." Which may be a bit like describing the Pacific Ocean as "wet." This painter and Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Art and Design at the University of Michigan has seen his work displayed in galleries, stages, billboards, and even the automatic doors of an Ann Arbor market (text on vinyl: in celebration of National Poetry Month and in collaboration with a local professor-poet.) However, the one-time English major looks back at his relative late start in art creation as the reason he sought out collaboration through other disciplines. He describes reaching out beyond the visual arts as a way to "catch up" with all that he feared he had missed in the years between his literature degree and profession in the arts.

He describes this catching up as a way to feed his latent interests. "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). For Cogswell, this sustenance gained a public face in 1997 when he designed the sets for a performance of a dancer/choreographer friend with the help of a biostatistician and a space physics researcher.

Across the Disciplines

A Journal of Language, Learning and Academic Writing

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2015.12.4.16>

wac.colostate.edu/atd

ISSN 554-8244

Across the Disciplines is an open-access, peer-review scholarly journal published on the WAC Clearinghouse and supported by [Colorado State University](#) and [Georgia Southern University](#). Articles are published under a [Creative Commons BY-NC-ND license](#) (Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs) ISSN 1554-8244. Copyright © 1997-2017 The WAC Clearinghouse and/or the site's authors, developers, and contributors. Some material is used with permission.

"The collaboration itself became a conversation," he recalls of his work with biostatistician Fred Brookstein in particular. "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."

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. A local 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, if there is one, with such collaborations, though, is that they are both brief and intensely intimate. The above production took weeks to prepare 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 or less of classes? In short, can we facilitate an ethereal creative process that both honors the real work that composers (including writers, artists, musicians, etc.) 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 only ran once more in 2001^[4] (see Course Syllabus in Appendix A.) 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 over a 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. For myself, as a student in the course and a current interdisciplinary instructor, the course had profound effects that shaped my teaching career. Although a decade old, the course still has lessons to provide.

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. He is quick to admit that in both offerings of the course, first in 1998 and again in 2001, he was supported by influential centers on campus. Facts like this are often hidden parts of any creative process, but especially in higher education; without resources and support, the final product of the course may have never been offered. This was crucial, especially as Cogswell reveals:

[The course's instructors] did not have a theoretical structure on which to base what we were doing. We did this because we had individually collaborated. We knew the value of collaboration ourselves, and the values that we would like to impart.... We knew that the experience would be intense enough that our job was to make sure it happened. Just to make sure that we could all be in the same room together, and that [the students] were producing, and that everyone was participating.

The course's interdisciplinarity, then, was informed not just by the instructors' and students' home disciplines, but by the influence and guidance offered by other academic units, too.

One source of influence 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."

The subsequent conversation involved Cogswell (a painter), Richard Tillinghast (a poet), and a musician. Together, they brainstormed the interdisciplinary, collaborative course that would later become *Turning Points*, team-taught with musician Eric Santos and technical advisor Tom Bray. Throughout our interview, Cogswell emphasized that it was only because of the behind-the-scenes expertise of technical advisor Bray that the course was able to succeed in 1998. But it did succeed, and was offered again three years later through a grant from the Center for Research and Learning and Teaching (CRLT), the country's longest-running center dedicated to pedagogy and the learning sciences. Very quickly, the conversation around the course involved multiple stakeholders from across campus.

In the proposal for the class reboot in 2001, Cogswell and his co-instructors explained to CRLT:

The faculty who taught this course had all been involved in various interdisciplinary collaborative projects with artists from other areas of the University at some point in the recent past. We were all deeply aware of how stimulating these collaborations were to our growth as individual artists. Our artistic vocabularies were enriched by these collaborations. We found ourselves connected to a network of artists within the University through friendships and working relationships that extended beyond the specific collaborative projects that initially brought us together. The pleasure of those friendships, the artistic stimulation in our continued dialogue, and the broader awareness of personal, pedagogical, and artistic resources within the University community as a result of our continuing relationships motivated us to take the next logical step and teach this course.

They further explained that in constructing groups of writers, artists, and musicians, and giving a simple pedagogical directive (Create!), they believed that their "motivation was to focus on collaborative form, that is to say, a unique product in which no single artistic discipline dominates, in which no artistic contribution is relegated to background or conceived as backdrop to the others."

CRLT not only funded the course, they became an integral part of the process of developing it: preparing the instructors to work together, visiting the course to perform mid-semester evaluations, and videotaping the final performance for future research. The class became a pedagogical experiment pulling in participants from two schools, one department, the university museum, and CRLT. As a result, authority was shared not only across disciplines but also across administrative units on campus, a rarity in logistics and governance even at a school as historically interdisciplinary as the University of Michigan.

The course itself was run much like 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 between three and four weeks to design, script, and produce a performance that may never be produced (or seen) again after the trial run (see Course Videos in Appendix B.) 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 at least one 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 entire semester was populated with makers who would come and go each week. Students were encouraged to take what they could from each visit, but were never required to critically engage with outside work beyond their own personal assessments. There were no papers, reports, or even journals required or collected. The influence, it was hoped, would be reflected in the performance pieces.

What made the course unique (if ultimately controversial for conservative approaches to curricular outcomes and assessments) was that Cogswell and his co-instructors ultimately assessed based on what he calls "engagement," both throughout the course in things like attendance and discussion, and in personal growth exhibited in how far people pushed themselves out of their pre-determined identities (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. With 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, you know process can just lead to more process. There has to be some kind of moment of truth." So even though Cogswell and his team explicitly encouraged the valuing of creative and collaborative processes, the course did reward students with a final "product" that was publicly celebrated. That being said, the product (or final showcase) 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 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 remain showcased online in the form of *YouTube* videos^[2]. 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 pieces 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 in the form of a tangible product or video.

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," etc. 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" (1969/1986) which states that our belief in the social situation surrounding an author is just as important as the words she puts on the page. In other words, 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'" (qtd. 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, it's true, 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 temporarily 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?

Addressing these questions brings us back to Jim Cogswell and his interdisciplinary course. Throughout a recent interview, Cogswell repeatedly used the word "makers" 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. Because most under-interrogated ideas about authors involve individuality and reward, these ideas also expose what it means to create, or make, anything. 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 or awarding of grants.

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, I believe that 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, readers will admit, 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. In short, it carries a lot of weight. 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^[3] is only recently reawakening to its historical roots in orality (e.g. Selfe, 2009; Elbow, 2012), 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, however 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, etc.) 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" (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. (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 writers and authors inherently invoke 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 author 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. As will be discussed below, 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.

This process is 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 in many corners of higher education. 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" (qtd. in Ede & Lunsford, 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 ten 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 a background score, and the visual artist was free to create objects (e.g. sculptures, videos, etc.) but in many cases they all 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. Obviously group-writing assignments ask for similar negotiations. But even when students write individually in different media we see the evidence of similar invisible choices or 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, 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* did just this, 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, in his historical overview of multimodal projects, Jason Palmeri asserts:

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. 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." 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.

Case Study: Grace

In order to demonstrate how my views of authoring and collaboration were influenced by *Turning Points*, I offer here a small case study by ironically focusing on the finished product. As a member of the course, I co-produced one piece with another writer, a musician, and an artist. The video of the first, and final, performance can be found online, although the piece was meant to be experiential, and so any contemporary viewing is automatically different (if not diminished) from the original. The piece, perhaps melodramatically, was called "Grace."

Turning Points 01 - "Grace"

"Grace" was a space. In the darkened studio, plastic tarp had been laid on the ground, and a thin ring of dirt—approximately twenty feet in diameter—marked what was "outside" the piece and what was "inside." While outside the circle was a group of benches, it's perhaps interesting to note that as the class was let into the studio, most immediately rushed toward the inside of the circle. Only as the piece went on did participants move to the outside, eventually sitting or lying on the benches beyond the dirt ring. Multiple bowls were placed inside the ring, and were filled with various liquids such as water or milk. Small coins were strewn about the ground, and as people came into the space, many intuitively picked up the coins in order to throw them into the bowls; some seemed to be making wishes (like one would in a fountain) and some seemed to make a game out of it. Mostly, though, people milled about "experiencing" the space (or maybe just waiting for it to be done). One of the results of this piece was that people were simply invited to experience the scene without any immediate directions or directives.

The scene was not silent. Above people's hushed voices played a soft piano piece that was meant to be as unobtrusive as possible. It was background music: gentle and welcoming. The effect was to not notice the music at all, especially as it played on top of sound effects of drops into a pool. This aural soundscape created what participants later described in the studio critique as a park on a Sunday afternoon, a hint at a memory that was evoked (and co-constructed) in light strokes. Part of our creative process involved creating this joint-memory only through subtle cues: we discussed beforehand what some of our memories of serene scenes were, resulting in everything from the sounds to the lighting taking on rounded edges that seemed associative to us. The fact that students arrived at this same assessment meant, to us at least, that our creation was a success.

As students interacted with the space, they became its performers, fluidly scripting what it meant to experience it. They weren't the only performers, though. After several minutes, one of two actors

subtly walked into the scene. He was a preacher of some sort, dressed in a dark suit and approaching people individually. He was one of two performers who infiltrated the scene in order to alter people's perception of it. The second performer was a man (me) in a heavy flannel jacket and stocking cap. He roved around asking people for money, sipping out of a pint of whiskey, and picking coins off the ground. As these two performers roamed the space, the class members grew increasingly uncomfortable (or at least self-conscious): some moved outside of the ring and others congregated into small groups. In critique, students later noted how the space suddenly felt different, inhospitable. The piece ended with a verbal confrontation between the preacher and the drifter, and a heightened tension on the music, concluding with them pushing on each other and ending with a kind of freeze-frame effect of the two suspended in light as each member of the class moved outside of the circle, silently moving from performers to observers, from authors to audience.

If this piece sounds just a bit art-school pretentious, that's because it was to a degree. The artistic rendering of the park was minimal, but the bowl of milk, for example, was never explained (nor justified.) The music and sound effects are helpful but ultimately more evocative than descriptive; a similar effect could have been achieved without an original score. And the acting was, I will fully admit, amateurish. Initially, people gladly engaged with the preacher and drifter; after all, these were their classmates dressed up in stereotypical caricatures. And though students eventually moved aside to let the action play out, our creation of a scripted conclusion never transcended the artificiality we created. Partially because of this, the end went on for far too long. As we discovered (and discussed in critique) there is a reason television shows end on a freeze-frame that is only held on the screen for a few seconds. The one in the piece went on for minutes, and though the unexpected, if not uncomfortable, silence became a part of the project, it ultimately helped to heighten the absurdity of this thing created artificially in a darkened studio.

But does this contemporary critique, and the harsher one delivered in 2001, indicate that the piece was a failure? Does it imply that the pedagogical exercise of the assignment was fruitless? And, does it lead us to conclude that the authors of the experience wasted their time or the participants in the class had theirs wasted? In response to every question, I'd say "no." The reason is that such criticism relies on the final product as the thing being evaluated. For those of us in the group, the piece was already a success before it was ever performed. We needed no classmates' nor instructors' approval for our decisions. Although I was brought in as a writer, I ultimately acted and contributed ideas to the physical creation of the scene. I worked with students from other disciplines to contribute to the musical score and landscaping, and as a result was able to compare my group members' creative processes alongside my own in real time. Because of this, the performance, though admittedly flawed in many ways, was the articulation of our collective ideas, and the only product, or artifact, that we could be judged on. By traditional views of authorship, we neither gained authority (alas, no one complimented my acting skills, and the artifacts of my writing were hidden in the piece's staging) nor were rewarded for our work (this piece was not chosen for an encore performance in the final presentations.) However, because the course was constructed around the idea of creating and making, it allowed the members of the group to reflect on the process of making more than on the product that was produced. Reward was extrinsically intrinsic.

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 succeeded, let alone happened, without the technical expertise and generosity of a third party, in this case Tom Bray. 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. The same could be said for the institutional support from UMMA, CRLT, and the instructors' individual home departments.

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 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), 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 (co-)authorship in the academy (both in writing studies and beyond.) 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.

As this article has offered, 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, of course, is no surprise to those of us in writing studies. That being said, as we argue for and enact collaborative, interdisciplinary pursuits on our campus, it is worth reminding ourselves (and our colleagues) of this one important fact.

Those of us in writing studies are privileged enough to be able to devote ourselves to interrogating the composing processes and products that can be developed in both traditional and more experimental courses like the one offered in this article. As this article has argued, by viewing such advances in composition and communication through the lens of authorship, we are better equipped to marry our history to our future, and our discipline's knowledge to that across campus and around the world. Like in the course, composition's contributions need not necessarily be heralded above other disciplines, nor should they be silenced: all education is collaborative.

Appendix A - Course Syllabus

TURNING POINTS: COLLABORATIONS IN THE ARTS

WINTER TERM, 2001

Instructors:

Jim Cogswell, School of Art & Design

Eric Santos, School of Music

Richard Tillinghast, Department of English

Graduate Assistant: DJ Sparr, School of Music

CLASS ONE, MONDAY, JANUARY 8

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Instructor introductions
- Student roll call, brief introductions/name and area of work. 30min.
- Drop/Add and other enrollment issues.
- Discuss class policies, attendance, participation expectations and requirements, review semester schedule. 30 min.
- Concept and experience of collaboration: instructor roundtable w/ class participation. 30 min.
- Tom Bray/Steve Eberle, orientation to facilities and procedures. 30 min.
- Hand out reading material.

CLASS TWO, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 10

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Workshop in collaboration/ virtual collaboration. 1 hour
- Assign teams and themes for Collaboration #1
- Break out into teams to set up procedures and brainstorm ideas for Collaboration #1

CLASS THREE, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Show and Tell: Introduction to student work, 6 minutes each. Artists and writers.

CLASS FOUR, MONDAY, JANUARY 22

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Show and Tell: Introduction to student work, 6 minutes each. Musicians
- Reports on collaborations in process
- Trouble shoot collaborations, break out into small groups

CLASS FIVE, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Instructor Show and Tell

CLASS SIX, MONDAY, JANUARY 29

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #1
- Group 1, Group 2, Group 3, Group 4
- (Maximum duration of ten minutes each, 20 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS SEVEN, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 31

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #1
- Group 5, Group 6, Group 7 (Maximum duration of ten minutes each, 20 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS EIGHT, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #1
- Group 8, Group 9, Group 10 (Maximum duration of ten minutes each, 20 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

Assignment of groups for Collaboration #2

CLASS NINE, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Discussion of overall collaborative process
- Break out into small groups to set up Collaboration #2
- Meet together last 30 min. for progress report.

CLASS TEN, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes

CLASS ELEVEN, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes

CLASS TWELVE, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #2
- Group 1, Group 2 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS THIRTEEN, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #2
- Group 3, Group 4 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

WINTER BREAK

CLASS FOURTEEN, MONDAY, MARCH 5

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #2
- Group 5, Group 6, Group 7 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS FIFTEEN, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #2
- Group 8, Group 9, Group 10 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

Confirmation of groups for Collaboration #3

CLASS SIXTEEN, MONDAY, MARCH 12

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Discussion of overall collaborative process
- Video Tapes
- MIDTERM EVALUATIONS led by staff from the Center for Research in Learning and Teaching

CLASS SEVENTEEN, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes
- Reports from Collaborative Teams
- Trouble shoot collaborations in process, break out into small groups

CLASS EIGHTEEN, MONDAY, MARCH 19

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Presentation of collaborative work in process, an opera by Steve Rush and Michael Rodemer

CLASS NINETEEN, MONDAY, MARCH 21

UM Museum of Art

- Conversation with installation artist Lorna Simpson and poet Thylas Moss

CLASS TWENTY, MONDAY, MARCH 26

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #3
- Group 1, Group 2 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS TWENTY-ONE, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 28

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #3
- Group 3, Group 4, Group 5 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)

- Critique/discussion between presentations.

CLASS TWENTY-TWO, MONDAY, APRIL 2

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #3 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.
- Group 6, Group 7

CLASS TWENTY-THREE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 4

Media Union Video Production Studio

- Collaboration #3
- Group 8, Group 9, Group 10 (Maximum duration of ten to fifteen minutes each, 30 min. breakdown/setup between)
- Critique/discussion between presentations.

THURSDAY, APRIL 5

SPECIAL EVENT: Lecture by Performance Artist Ping Chong at School of Art & Design Auditorium, 5 pm
Class members are urged to attend.

FRIDAY, APRIL 6

SPECIAL EVENT: Forum on Artistic Collaboration with Performance Artist Ping Chong and Composer Benjamin Bagby at Institute for the Humanities, 1524 Rackham, Commons Room. 12 noon.
Class members have a special invitation from the Institute to attend. Lunch is provided.

CLASS TWENTY-FOUR, MONDAY, APRIL 9

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes
- Discussion of overall projects and collaborative process
- Discussion and class input for selection of final performance pieces

Media Union Video Production Studio

- **Open rehearsal for Curse of the Gold: Myths from the Icelandic Edda**

CLASS TWENTY-FIVE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 11

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Trouble shoot pieces for final performance
- Prepare publicity and logistics for final performance

Media Union Video Production Studio

- **Open rehearsal for Curse of the Gold: Myths from the Icelandic Edda**

CLASS TWENTY-SIX, MONDAY, APRIL 16

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes

Media Union Video Production Studio

- **Open rehearsal for Curse of the Gold: Myths from the Icelandic Edda**

CLASS TWENTY-SEVEN, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 18

School of Art & Design, Design Studio, Room 1052

- Visitors/Video Tapes
- Prepare for final performance
- FINAL COURSE EVALUATION conducted by CRLT staff

Media Union Video Production Studio

- **Open rehearsal for Curse of the Gold: Myths from the Icelandic Edda**

MONDAY, APRIL 23, THURSDAY, APRIL 26

Media Union Video Production Studio available for preparation and tech of final performance night

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, THURSDAY, APRIL 26

SPECIAL EVENT

Lydia Mendelssohn Theatre

- **Curse of the Gold: Myths from the Icelandic Edda**

World Premiere

- Conceived and directed by Benjamin Bagby and Ping Chong
- Performed by Sequentia in association with Ping Chong and Company

THURSDAY, APRIL 26 or FRIDAY, APRIL 27

Media Union Video Production Studio

- FINAL PERFORMANCE OF SELECTED WORKS

Appendix B - Course Videos

"Opening" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX9ZbbvZ2Zk>

"Suspensions" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MGjkU-S4hJU>

"Henry the Goat" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrAZ2zZa6Ew>

"Friends" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CKVvwPgOyQ>

"Non, Merci" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eji31lnLD6k>

"Sometimes More" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9kmzRISHfo>

"Untitled" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFCGBdZLv2s>

"Not Dead Yet" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NpuAozH0Kw>

"The Bus Thing" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwoIU861zIM>

References

- Alexander, Jonathan, & Rhodes, Jacqueline. (2014). *On multimodality: New media in composition studies*. Champaign-Urbana: NCTE.
- Anson, Chris M. (2013). Process pedagogy and its legacy. In Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper Taggart, Kurt Schick, & H. Brooke Hessler (Eds.), *A guide to composition pedagogies* (2nd ed.). (pp. 212-230). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bennett, Andrew. (2005). *The Author*. New York: Routledge.
- Breuch, Lee-Ann M. Kastman. (2002). Post-process "pedagogy": A philosophical exercise. *Journal of Advanced Composition*, 22(1), 119-150.
- Carter, Michael. (2007). Ways of knowing, doing, and writing in the disciplines. *College Composition and Communication*, 58(3), 385-418.
- Cogswell, Jim. (March 1, 2015). Personal interview.
- Ede, Lisa, & Lunsford, Andrea A. (1990). *Singular texts/plural authors: Perspectives on collaborative writing*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Elbow, Peter. (2012). *Vernacular eloquence: What speech can bring to writing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Finding the edge in outer space. (1997, July 9). *Detroit Metro Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/finding-the-edge-in-outer-space/Content?oid=2171838>
- Foucault, Michel. (1969/1986). What is an author? In Hazard Adams, & Leroy Searle (Eds.), *Critical theory since 1965* (pp. 138-148). Tallahassee, FL: University Press of Florida.

Haswell, Janis, & Haswell, Richard. (2010). *Authoring: An essay for the English profession on potentiality and singularity*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Palmeri, Jason. (2012). *Remixing composition: A history of multimodal writing pedagogy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Selfe, Cynthia L. (2009). The movement of air, the breath of meaning: aurality and multimodal composing." *College Composition and Communication* 60(4), 616-663.

Notes

[1] As will be discussed in more detail later in the article, the course was never offered again due to logistical reasons including availability of performance space and access to technical assistance. However, with academics' renewed interest and understanding in interdisciplinary collaboration, this historic course offers valuable reflection.

[2] Online videos could not have been predicted at the time of the performances, nor were students involved in a discussion about what would happen to the artifacts once they were recorded. Interestingly, it was not until the researching of this article that I discovered their existence.

[3] For many, academic writing is synonymous with composition. Parsing the difference between these terms is beyond the scope of this article. However, their perceived difference(s) from authoring remains salient.

Contact Information

Chris Gerben
Assistant Professor
Department of English Literature, Writing, and Rhetoric
St. Edward's University
3001 South Congress Ave.
Austin, TX 78704
Email: cgerben@stedwards.edu
Phone: (512) 448-8556

Complete APA Citation

Gerben, Chris. (2015, December 28). Author in the arts: Composing and collaborating in text, music, and the visual arts [Special issue on the WAC, WID, and the performing and visual arts]. *Across the Disciplines*, 12(4). Retrieved from <https://wac.colostate.edu/docs/atd/arts/gerben2015.pdf>