

# **COLLABORATION**

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**ABSTRACT:** The Death of the Author-God is a centrepiece of post-structuralist thought, but little attention has been given to its curious relation to religious understandings of creativity. The death of the author holds open the divine space of nothingness in-between writer and text, allowing the revitalisation of concepts of inspiration, calling, annunciation and muses. Creativity is not an expression, moving from origin to representation, from active subject to passive object, but is born in relations or collaborations with the world. It is a humble rather than ego-driven state of being, a celebratory participation in the creation of the world.

## COLLABORATION

*In the end, I go home, I pick up my guitar and write some music, and I listen to what it's telling me. Then I go about trying to realise it as best I can. That's the only plan I have. Bruce Springsteen<sup>1</sup>*

Despite the personality cult associated with rock stars, when Bruce Springsteen talks of the creative process he makes himself disappear, the way a nurse or angel fades into the background. Although Springsteen writes music, he does not identify himself with it, and speaks as though trying to realise the work of an other. Who then is the author of the work? Springsteen? The music? The guitar? And if Springsteen, which Springsteen – the one who plays, the one who sings, the one who listens, the one who has particular predilections, experiences, emotions? Perhaps, Springsteen suggests, there is no singular source of the music, just as there is no one Springsteen. Creativity might better be described as a matter of collaboration, between, for instance, the artist, the music, the guitar, other guitarists, music, singers, audiences, voices, muses.

### Creative Relations

People describing their work processes and creative experiences confirm again and again that creativity is not a property of an authorial self, and that, indeed, it requires a loss of self. Whether it occurs in the production of art, the cooking of dinner, or during a walk down a street, creativity is a relation, and happens in-between.

*By trusting my body and by making that my active collaborator, Hammerstein to my Rodgers, I have a kind of company in the isolation of working.... I say lines out loud and a lot. I live alone and my neighbours think I have a very active and busy apartment. All the voices are me and mine or us and ours. I don't know which. Allan Gurganus<sup>2</sup>*

*'There is a chorus of selves that seem to be speaking through you as you are writing. Whether you're insane or whether you're liberated, you tend to be hearing a voice, or several voices. And they are the novel. Those voices become the tale.'* Barry Dickens<sup>3</sup>

*From the very first tentative chord of the writing session I have my [tape] machine running and locked in 'record' because ... there are going to be times when my brain darts ahead, instinctively doing something impulsively and so quickly that my conscious mind will not be able to follow. ... In such a case I will not ... be able to remember exactly how I did what I did because in the strictest sense I didn't do it.* Jimmy Webb<sup>4</sup>

*The creator is ... the active relationship between artist and Artist ... The man who holds the pen as he tells his exploits has them by courtesy of his tricksterish guardian angel.* Michel Serres<sup>5</sup>

As Springsteen indicates, the other side to the creators' lack of autonomy is the active life of the creative relation. Writers cannot masterfully express themselves *in* texts, because they don't pre-exist writing: 'writer' is no more than a shorthand for the writing relation that produces both writers and text. Writers, therefore, work *with* texts, collaboratively, just as painters work *with* paint. A writer isn't someone who picks up a pen to transcribe the words of their pre-existing ideas. Writers are beings prepared for writing. They are monsters, half-breeds, cherubim, collaborations, with pens in their hands, poetic metre in their blood and beautiful phrases on the tips of their tongues.

*In working-class France, when an apprentice got hurt, or when he got tired, the experienced workers said, 'It is the trade entering his body'. The art must enter the body, too.... You adapt yourself, Paul Klee said, to the contents of the paintbox.... The painter, in other words, does not fit the paints to the world. He*

*most certainly does not fit the world to himself. He fits himself to the paint. Annie Dillard<sup>6</sup>*

*[My first notes and scribbles about a novel aren't] the surface of something else: this is it. Writing it is the way I think it. Peter Carey<sup>7</sup>*

*Speaking to others (or to myself), I do not speak of my thoughts; I speak them .... Not [as] a mind to a mind, but [as] a being who has body and language to a being who has body and language, each drawing the other by invisible threads like those who hold the marionettes – making the other speak, think, and become what he is but never would have by himself.*

*Thus things are said and are thought by a speech and by a thought which we do not have but which has us. Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>8</sup>*

If texts and paints are as alive as writers and painters, ordinary adult creativity is based on the same enchantment experienced by children and animists who hear trees talking to them. While the outsider or the incompetent worker treats the world as a set of objects to be manipulated, the skilled worker engages with it, listens to it, acknowledges the life demonstrated in its messages and relations. The music and guitar *talk* to Springsteen; for the writer, the *bon mot* actually is happy. Texts can be dancers, spouses, guests, combatants, angels, ghosts, interrogators, wild animals, abductors, analysts, forests, pathways, buildings, dreams, students, teachers, colleagues, children. And they are always lovers. But whatever their form, they are alive.

*The painting has a life of its own. I try to let it come through: Jackson Pollock. Each painting has its own way of evolving.... When the painting is finished, the subject reveals itself: William Baziotos. Only when he no longer knows what he is doing does the painter do good things: Edgar Degas. In the brush doing what it's doing, it will stumble on what one couldn't do by oneself: Robert Motherwell<sup>9</sup>*

*I'm working on a novel and it's acting like most such creatures - insists upon being my wife. You poets don't know how lucky you are with your one-night stands. This novel is a most possessive matrimonial partner and won't let me out of her sight for even two days.* Norman Mailer<sup>10</sup>

*'It has been like a love affair with them. They have all got personalities'* Eric Clapton, speaking of his guitars<sup>11</sup>

*Even in relationships with inanimate objects and with nature in general, something very like communication is involved. Consider, for example, the work of an artist. Can it properly be said that the artist is expressing himself, i.e., literally 'pushing outward' something that is already formed inside of him? Such a description is not in fact generally accurate or adequate. Rather, what usually happens is that the first thing the artist does is only similar in certain ways to what he may have in mind. As in a conversation between two people, he sees the similarity and the difference, and from this perception something further emerges in his next action. Thus something new is continually created that is common to the artist and the material on which he is working.* David Bohm<sup>12</sup>

A scientist himself, David Bohm says that scientists and artists engage in similar processes of communication. Scientific creativity emerges from dialogue with nature. Dia: through, between. Dialogue: a medium carrying you as you carry it, supporting and transporting in a flow.

*It occurs to me that a song, a vessel or a voice is like a carrier wave: a set of vibrations that makes it easier for a life to flow along it, through it. It's the difference between hauling something over land and letting it go through water. It doesn't matter to me whether a song is old or new; if my life can carry it, it can carry me.* Gordon Bok<sup>13</sup>

As part of the world beyond me, the text has knowledge from which I can learn in dialogue. It is my parent as well as my child, and we write not to reach some pre-established ending but for the sake of the relation itself, to produce a word, a paragraph, a page to keep our dialogue unfolding in suggestive ways. I do not write what I know, but for the pleasure of the relation, trusting that if I am open with the text we will eventually find out what it was I didn't know that got the writing started. I must be purposefully purposeless.

*The writing has changed ... from an expression of your notions to an epistemological tool. The new place interests you because it is not clear. You attend. In your humility, you lay down the words carefully, watching all the angles. Now the earlier writing looks soft and careless. Process is nothing; erase your tracks. Annie Dillard<sup>14</sup>*

*Without the inherence of the angel in the word – and angel means originally 'emissary', 'message-bearer' – how can we utter anything but personal opinions, things made up in our subjective minds? .... Words, like angels, are powers which have whole mythologies: genders, genealogies ..., histories, and vogues .... For words are persons. This aspect of the word transcends their nominalistic definitions and contexts and evokes in our souls a universal resonance. James Hillman<sup>15</sup>*

The common claim that creativity is one percent inspiration and ninety-nine percent perspiration is obviously misleading. Not just an intuitive flash, or point of origin, inspiration is an ongoing ethics. If the writing is to answer the call that moves it, writers must maintain a fearless openness to the world and their text. In order to find their way they must allow themselves to lose it, to be led, to be carried away. This is inspiration's rigour and method. It operates in fast flowing writing, but also in the painstaking processes of adding, cutting, shifting and polishing.

*Creativity has to be sustained.... An artist does not have a creative vision and then apply it mechanically, in a sequential process by means of rules, techniques, and formulae. Rather, these latter flow out of the sustained creative vision in a creative way. David Bohm and F. David Peat<sup>16</sup>*

*I just follow the river of the idea on the typewriter. Then the river dries up and I can't think of anything else, so maybe I go back and run with it again, to see if this time it goes any further. And maybe in the course of that, another image comes up so I try that. Peter Carey<sup>17</sup>*

The same unsettling and doubled structure exists when we 'pursue our lives'. It unsettles orthodox causality and suggests we live with a lively and mystical sense of predestination or of being called, a sense that parallels the idea of strange attractors in chaos theory. Our lives are pulled along as well as pushed along and projected forward.

*Like all her books this one chose her. 'All ideas are given to you. I was just reading Mavis Gallant's introduction to her Selected Short Stories and she says that all her stories begin with her having an image. It just appears, with all sorts of other things attached to it. There's no telling where those images come from.... Things appear, and the things you write about are the things you can't get rid of'. Suzy Baldwin, quoting Margaret Atwood<sup>18</sup>*

*When I'm writing fiction, I begin with the inkling of a thought which is in the process of unravelling itself in front of me. I set off after it, trying to hear all its minute gradations as it works itself out. It's as if I am trying to record something in the process of being born. I listen, with all the ears of my body, trying to write it down. Hélène Cixous<sup>19</sup>*

*Certain lines appear and I go, 'I'm not sure that's me but I can understand where that's going and I'll follow it. I'll let it have its head' Neil Finn<sup>20</sup>*

Accordingly, my primary task as a writer is to ensure that *my* purposes don't cripple the work that the text and I accomplish between us. I must renounce my conscious control to be led by the life of the relation. I must try to avoid trying too hard, because conscious effort destroys the purposeless space and time in which creativity occurs. Instead of pulling back and defending my self when it slides into trance or sleep, delirium or free fall, I should extend these un-self-conscious ways of being.

*Poise is critical in singing. When we're poised we're balanced, and when we're balanced, we sing easily. When we're tight and restricted, we sing hard. I wince when students say, Oh, I'm trying so hard. Don't try hard, I say, try gently. ... Self-consciousness is crippling and you have to get rid of it. ... There's this sense of trusting yourself and keeping out of your own way. No matter how good you become, you can still get in your own way. Amanda Lohrey<sup>21</sup>*

*Part of my function as a writer is to dream awake. ... If I sit down to write in the morning, in the beginning of that writing session and the ending of the session, I'm aware that I'm writing. I'm aware of my surroundings. It's like shallow sleep on both ends, when you go to bed and when you wake up. But in the middle, the world is gone and I'm able to see better. Stephen King<sup>22</sup>*

*[T]here comes a moment, when painting some object from the outer world, when the excitement about whatever it was made you want to paint it and the immensely complicated practical problems of how to represent that feeling in colour, shape, texture, and so on, all disappear as conscious problems. One becomes lost in a moment of intense activity in which awareness of self and awareness of the object are somehow fused. Marion Milner<sup>23</sup>*

*We speak of 'inspiration,' and the word should be taken literally. There really is inspiration and expiration of Being, action and passion so slightly discernible that it becomes impossible to distinguish between what sees and what is seen, what paints and what is painted. Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>24</sup>*

As these accounts suggest, creativity is not so much a capacity that the gifted possess (as proprietors) as a capacity that possesses (haunts, inspires) those who accept its gift. It is not an emanation of the Author but a capacity that finds voice only when we let it take ours. Who speaks, for example, when one writer quotes another? Is it the 'original' writer? Or is it in quotations that the quoting writer feels that they find their voice? Are the quotations also where the original writer finds out what the words might mean? Even a text without quotation marks is a collaboration with other writers, as Roland Barthes puts it '*woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages ... which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony*'.<sup>25</sup> So when Victor Gollancz wrote his semi-autobiographical confession of religious faith, it took the form of an anthology, '*to be read from beginning to end as a consecutive whole; as if, that is to say, it were a continuous piece of writing by one hand, all now appearing for the first time*'.<sup>26</sup>

Without these collaborative processes that sweep us away, rapturously, we'd be incapable of experiencing our work as *creative*, the birth of new being. These processes imply, however, that my text is written without my knowing it. As writer I do not immediately know my text, but must learn about it by adopting the position of reader. I read because I'm curious to discover what I've done. By the same logic, I hesitate to read letters I've written because I know that the 'I' that reads might not coincide with the 'I' that writes, and that the letter, once read, might not be sent.

The mark of the creative process is the text's strangeness. On reading it, I wonder where particular words and images came from, and whether I intended their reach. Surprised to see half-thoughts and obsessions that I'd forgotten, I wonder whether I am slave to my demons and, further, whether the demons are mine or I am theirs. I wonder how these horrible pages could have felt so perfect yesterday: 'what was I thinking?' I ask myself crankily. We look at our previous book, *Passionate Sociology*, and find clear accounts of issues that we didn't

recognise at the time of writing, or didn't know we knew, and we give thanks to texts that have knowledge and life beyond their producers.

*I took [the poets] some of the most elaborate passages in their own writings, and asked them what was the meaning of them – thinking that they would teach me something.... [T]here is hardly a person ... who would not have talked better about their poetry than they did themselves. Then I knew that not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius or inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them. Plato<sup>27</sup>*

At the end of writing, I hope to be surprised, then, and also utterly unsurprised, to see the text fall into place. It is complete if I'm taken aback by it at the same time as I'm fondly taken back to the forgotten origin of the project. But are these memories recalled or produced? Like *deja vu*, they're uncanny reminders of hopes, intuitions and knowledge I've never quite had. Rather than expressing myself, I write to momentarily satisfy or recognise or reach myself. Outside these moments, the text is always just beyond me.

## **The Author**

These everyday experiences of creativity undermine fantasies of an active, singular, knowing Author, yet attachments to such notions persist. The passive understanding of creativity encapsulated in Roland Barthes' phrase 'Death of the Author'<sup>28</sup>, for example, is regularly ridiculed and condemned as a deathblow to creativity, and university students eager to do original work feel confused and betrayed when asked to consider the implications of the Author's death. We propose, nevertheless, that creative experiences are dependent upon letting go of familiar forms of selfhood associated with agency, ego, will, identity and the subject: only the author's death can give birth to creative ways of being.

This relational understanding of creativity can seem frightening in a rational secular society which privileges ego states and exhorts us to be active agents in control of our lives. Authorship is celebrated in such contexts because it's taken as an ethical model -- like great authors, we should *all* express our identity in our work and life. But this is a curious ethics, for in assuming a self that stands alone it fails to acknowledge the ethical implications of relationality. As Martin Buber says, ethical life is necessarily dialogic: responsibility involves the response *and* address of the I-Thou relation through which I become.<sup>29</sup> We work and live collaboratively, and the death of 'the Author' recognises the ethical responsibility, and impossibility of autonomous control, that this implies.

When we reconsider accounts of creative experience it's clear that people often cling to the model of active authorship *despite* contrary experiences. If people take creative experiences seriously, whether these involve artistic pursuits or such ordinary practices as watering the garden or preparing the vegetables, they might recognise a way of being that evades the standard vocabularies of self - a passivity that feels intensely alive, a losing of oneself that feels like a homecoming. This is an experience of interbeing, a being empty of a separate self. And so, in Jorge Luis Borges' story 'Everything and Nothing', Shakespeare is presented not as a singularly heroic but an empty figure:

*History adds that before or after dying he found himself in the presence of God and told Him: 'I who have been so many men in vain want to be one and myself.' The voice of the Lord answered from a whirlwind: 'Neither am I anyone; I have dreamt the world as you dreamt your world, my Shakespeare, and among the forms in my dream are you, who like myself are many and no one.'*<sup>30</sup>

Shakespeare may have been adept at simulating someone, a vital and powerful personality, but he wrote as no one. And so do others.

*As the public gasbag 'author', I remain outwardly colourful, personable, regional, dogged, left-leaning if well-dressed, raffish, opinionated on behalf of*

*keeping lazier interviewers happy. As the cringing, self-critical, hyper-private 'writer', I remain the colour of, say, lint. That's the artist.... How lavish and Godlike is Lint Man's open-endedness.... Of all the fictional lives I've ever tried inventing, his remains hardest to know. He is that favourite toy of boys today: The Transformer. Proteus again... He is Tillich's God: 'the ground of our being.'*  
Allan Gurganus<sup>31</sup>

*I think Mary Poppins arose out of the deep well of nothingness from which poetry and fairy tales (the traditional tales) also come. It is a well that, no matter how much you take out of it, is always full to the brim. So, of course you can feel free to read any old myth and legend into the stories. I have learned that the author is only half the book. The reader is the other half and has much to tell the author.... Another thing I have learned is that authors receive intimations, put them down and then strut about with feathers in their caps and ascribe the intimations to themselves, never attempting to learn from them. But they are not ours. They are something given. That's why I believe in anonymity. P.L. Travers<sup>32</sup>*

*The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. ... I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me. It is no effort for me to confess that he has achieved some valid pages, but those pages cannot save me, perhaps because what is good belongs to no one, not even to him, but rather to the language and to tradition.... I recognise myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar....*

*I do not know which of us has written this page.<sup>33</sup>*

The gap: the relation with the text which is me *and* not-me: in-between self and other, inside and outside, me and not-me, Rodgers and Hammerstein, someone and no one, writer and reader, musician and guitar, Borges and I, Gasbag and Lint Man.

The gap: not this thing or that thing but the invisible ground or no-thing that connects them and keep them apart.

The gap: also called liminal or potential or transitional or hypothetical space, which exists *and* cannot exist between what is me and is not me.

*What, for instance, are we doing when we are listening to a Beethoven symphony or making a pilgrimage to a picture gallery or reading Troilus and Cressida in bed, or playing tennis? What is a child doing when sitting on the floor playing with toys under the aegis of the mother? .... The question also needs to be posed: where are we (if anywhere at all)? We have used the concepts of inner and outer, and we want a third concept.... Can we gain some advantage from the examination of this matter of the possible existence of a place for living that is not properly described by either of the terms 'inner' and 'outer'? D.W. Winnicott<sup>34</sup>*

Take the example of the experience of speaking. While we may have some idea, we never know quite what we are going to say until we are speaking. We open our mouths and speaking emerges somehow, like and unlike what we had in mind. Neither inner nor outer, the speaking happens in the gap, in relation with others. And if it doesn't flow, does not take us, speak us, we are left with that terrible sense of tongue-tied effort, of words that don't connect, of thin and lifeless air. We are not in communication.

'The Author' closes the creative gap. For with 'the Author', author and text become one, identical and identified with each other: *the* meaning of the text is possessed (owned) by the Author, its source. There is no breathing space here, no space for aliveness and emergent newness in the *writing*, in the writing self, in the text. Jealously holding the key, 'the Author' locks the text away to ensure it doesn't come alive anew in creative relations with different readers and writers. 'The Author' refuses acknowledgment of the way in which, as Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, *'great novelistic images continue to grow and develop even after the*

*moment of their creation ... capable of being creatively transformed in different eras, far distant from the day and hour of their original birth.*<sup>35</sup>

But even before this, 'the Author' has a deadening effect on the writing process, by closing the gap in which writing occurs. Think of how Authorship feels: 'I have to find this within myself, get it out of myself.' 'How can I be creative if I don't have genius?' 'It is all up to me on my own'. These feelings produce fear and self-consciousness which are rightly recognised as the death of creativity. The misunderstanding occurs when would-be creators assume that, to avoid self-consciousness, they must withdraw from relations and return to the privacy of self.

*Out it comes, all these ideas are streaming through you and you can hardly keep up. And then it's over. A page is the most I'd get out of it. Perhaps I get scared. But who was it, Flaubert, I think, advising someone who was writing in a limping sort of way; he said: Don't worry, no one's going to come into the room behind you and snatch it off your desk and publish it! Take a risk! I always feel ashamed of my clumsiness. I can't bear it if anyone came in and saw the mess on my page.... Some days it's so awful I have to put my pen down and lie on my bed, or go to the movies. I feel like a phoney; an appalling phoney and someone's going to find me out. I'm going to be exposed... that's my fear. Helen Garner<sup>36</sup>*

Every writer fears being caught out as a phoney, incapable of the task they've set themselves, and the fear arises because it's justified. It's true that *I* am incapable of writing anything of worth, that, left to my own resources, *I* will fail. My blessing is that I need not rely on my own resources. I write collaboratively, in relations that allow my writing to exceed whatever *I* could do.

The answer to the writers' fear, then, isn't to withdraw from hostile relations in order to return to the self, which can then be expressed. On the contrary, the withdrawal is important because it provides the safety that allows us

to enter loving relations with our pens, texts, muses and mysteries. The grace and belonging of love set aside the need to defend ourselves, to be selves. Privacy isn't necessarily about the self, and solitude isn't an isolated condition: in privacy and solitude, in the protection of our bedrooms and studies, we're free to experience being that is ours and not-ours, we're safe to be open to relations with whatever isn't *us*. We can *hang out*, or *just be*. The home is important because it's where we can daydream and play, where we're not required to demonstrate our responsibility, control or integrity, not required to be one, where we can enter relations that create things we couldn't have produced ourselves.

*I understand in retrospect. It's like I'm drawing playfully, creating something that doesn't exist, a little fairy garden, drawing with the love of what I'm doing, lost in it, allowing the unconscious to come to life, not being tricked by the intellect.*

Michael Leunig<sup>37</sup>

*I believe in Whitman's vision that we're all composed of a thousand voices. ... I seem to be alone but in fact I'm trailing about sixty people. They're people that I've created but also people that I've actually, to be more precise linguistically, discovered because they pre-existed me. They've always been around and waiting to be heard.* Allan Gurganus<sup>38</sup>

## **God's Gift**

Where do ideas come from? When we say that ideas 'come to us', we're close to the nature of thinking. We might have been puzzling about something for a while, and then an idea just comes, something clicks, something falls into place. And it usually happens when we are *not* thinking about the problem. We stumble upon it. And then we start to see it everywhere - in the next book we pick up or on the next page in the book we're currently reading, in a casual conversation, in the walls and doorways of buildings, on the back of a bus, in words we ourselves

wrote. We suddenly realise that *this* is what some famous philosopher meant in the book we read long ago.

It can seem that the idea that first elated me has turned to mock me: ‘That’s my idea, but look: it is everywhere. I was the only one who didn’t understand’. Joy can thus become gloom about the possibility of ever having an original idea, ‘it has all been thought before’, ‘why didn’t I see it till now?’ But instead of responding jealously, trying to protect what’s ours, we could acknowledge that the world is speaking to us, and we could respond by turning toward it, with open heart, as we might when any friend comes to our door with a message. If we answer the doorbell, we open ourselves to the world and can hear what it is telling us in the words on our page, in the paving stones in the street, in the folds of the hills.

*Marchand says, after Klee: ‘In a forest, I have felt many times that the trees were looking at me, were speaking to me... I was there, listening.... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it’ Maurice Merleau-Ponty*<sup>39</sup>

Ideas come to us when we’re not thinking, not willing or trying. It is the same for any practice, if it is to be experienced creatively and with aliveness – painting, surfing, riding, cooking, sex, writing, singing, eating. It requires a receptive, empty, non-purposive way of being, a capacity for doing nothing.

*Nobody sees a flower – really – it is so small it takes time – we haven’t time – and to see takes time, like to have a friend: Georgia O’Keefe. So you see, imagination needs moodling – long, inefficient, happy idling, dawdling and puttering: Brenda Ueland*<sup>40</sup>

*The right art ... is purposeless, aimless! The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the goal, the less you will succeed in the one and the further the other will recede. What stands in your way is that you*

*have a much too willful will. You think that what you do not do yourself does not happen.* Eugen Herrigel<sup>41</sup>

Having said this, it is important to acknowledge that the feeling ‘this is my idea’ is not altogether mistaken. For if we reflect further on the experience of ideas coming to us, we realise that we cannot locate *any* point of origin: if the source is not inside the self, it is not, properly speaking, outside either. Where *did* that idea come from? In fact it feels most our own at the very point that we hear the world speak. We experience both, at once. We have a moment of recognition: that’s it, that’s the idea, it has come to me as I walk the street, it is in the street, it is in me. It is both and neither; it is between.

*The image offered us by reading the poem now becomes really our own. It takes root in us. It has been given us by another, but we begin to have the impression that we could have created it, that we should have created it. It becomes a new being in our language, expressing us by making us what it expresses; in other words, it is at once a becoming of expression, and a becoming of our being. Here expression creates being.* Gaston Bachelard<sup>42</sup>

*Inspiration is not the gift of the poem to someone existing already, but the gift of existence to someone who does not yet exist.* Maurice Blanchot<sup>43</sup>

If an idea is my own, it becomes my own as I become. It creates me as I create-discover it.

As teachers, and as writers of articles like this, we work together, and in this collaboration the daily experience of such gifts washes away any sense of origin. We find each giving the other their own ideas. For example, one of us is about to speak in class; the other speaks, but differently. ‘That’s just what I wanted to say, but couldn’t have put like that. You have spoken my thoughts: what I didn’t know that I knew till you spoke’. It is this lack of a sense of origin that keeps ideas alive and moving, in the air, between us. I feel them particularly in a

classroom where, with students, the collaboration is most intense. If I possessively close around an idea, claiming ownership, or if self intervenes, thoughts cannot live and breathe, or give life to new ideas. Letting go my grip on ideas and my desire to control discussion, relaxing into a space of dialogue, with trust, I feel alive, with ideas happening, coming from the space between, with a life of their own. People surprise themselves by uttering ideas they could never have formulated without the charged atmosphere in the room. The process is not based on mergers or identifications, but on the way the collaboration of difference and similarity produces a gap from which dialogue and creativity emerge.

Creativity's need for collaboration raises important ethical issues, for it indicates that we cannot avoid or postpone responsibility to our relations with others. With the death of the Author comes an ethics of creativity and aliveness. As creative beings we must allow others to speak to us and must listen when they do. We are ethically bound to answer the calls made on us by others, by collaborators, students, texts, words, the woods and hills and bell towers that surround us. When they call, we should drop every thing to be with them, not to fix their lives but to attend to them, relate with them. This suggests a generous, humble way of being, and an ego-less form of love. It also suggests a commitment to affirmation and celebration as ways of being.

*Angels have serious cosmic duties to perform, relating to the wisdom and the knowledge they carry. One of these tasks is to praise.... Both Hildegard of Bingen and Thomas Aquinas teach that the devil does not praise, and that's what makes the devil different from the angels. How much of our culture in the last few centuries has indeed been a refusal to praise? What is praise, except the noise that joy makes, the noise that awe makes? Matthew Fox and Rupert Sheldrake<sup>44</sup>*

*There is no vitality except through love; no strong and constructive adult except for love; no old age and wisdom except in relation to love; no goodness or creativity, the only virtues that are worth anything, except through it, with it and in it.... As a foundation, it supports and upholds; as fire and energy, it moves, emotes, changes and transforms; as a messenger, it takes wing and delights.*

*Love is the sum of all philosophy.* Michel Serres<sup>45</sup>

*Have you noticed how the pebbles of the road are polished and pure after the rain? And the flowers? No word can describe them. One can only murmur an 'Ah!' of admiration. A Japanese writer and bonze has said that one should understand the 'Ah!' of things.* A Master of Zen Buddhism<sup>46</sup>

*Gratitude is heaven itself.* William Blake<sup>47</sup>

Love and praise are not simply *about* love, they bring it to life, in the eternity that is here and now but also there and then. They bring a vital and soft-eyed knowledge that participates in keeping the world alive and ever new. It is in this spirit of grateful celebration and dialogue that we present the quotations in this article. They bring the idea of creative collaboration to life for us, speaking to us and speaking us. They are not only 'about' the relationality or betweenness of creative processes, they enact it for us as, we hope, they also will for you.

*So your precious composition teaches you, finally about the unity of opposites. You learn to be hollow, and yet to be filled with Siren song, following it where it draws you.... You learn the reciprocity between trust and discernment.... You learn how what is most deeply your own belongs to everyone.* W.A. Mathieu<sup>48</sup>

If creativity has a source, it is a deep well of nothingness, both empty and full, full of possibilities: *emptiful*. Nothingness is another way of describing the in-between, the gap, the dia-logic space of buzzing aliveness, the spirit of creativity.

*'Did you know that the word "author" means an augmentser?'*

*'So let us produce only works which make things grow.'* Michel Serres<sup>49</sup>

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> quoted in *Good Weekend, Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 January 1997
- <sup>2</sup> A. Gurganus, 'Writers Dreaming', in N. Epel (ed.) *Writers Dreaming* (Melbourne: Bookman, 1993) pp. 96-7
- <sup>3</sup> quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 May 1999
- <sup>4</sup> J. Webb, *Tunesmith* (New York: Hyperion, 1998) p. 24
- <sup>5</sup> M. Serres, *Angels* Tr. F. Cowper (Paris: Falmmarion, 1995) pp. 119-120
- <sup>6</sup> A. Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) p. 69
- <sup>7</sup> P. Carey, 'Interview', in K. Grenville and S. Woolfe, *Making Stories* (St Leonards, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) p. 35
- <sup>8</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology, Language and Sociology* Ed. J. O'Neill. (London: Heinemann, 1974) p. 19
- <sup>9</sup> quoted in J. Cameron, *The Artist's Way* (New York: Tarcher/Perigee, 1992) pp. 55, 80, 174, xiv
- <sup>10</sup> in S. Spender and D. Hockney, *Hockney's Alphabet* (New York: Random House, 1992) p. 17
- <sup>11</sup> quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 June 1999
- <sup>12</sup> D. Bohm, *On Dialogue*. Ed. L. Nichol. (London: Routledge, 1996) p. 3
- <sup>13</sup> G. Bok, cover notes of his CD *Schooners* (Camden, Maine: Timberhead, 1992)
- <sup>14</sup> A. Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989) pp. 3-4
- <sup>15</sup> J. Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: HarperCollins, 1977) p. 9
- <sup>16</sup> D. Bohm, and F.D. Peat, *Science, Order and Creativity* (Toronto: Bantam, 1987) p. 234

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<sup>17</sup> P. Carey, 'Interview', in K. Grenville and S. Woolfe, *Making Stories* (St Leonards, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) p. 35

<sup>18</sup> *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1997

<sup>19</sup> H. Cixous, 'Listening to the Truth', in S. Sellers, ed. *Delighting the Heart* (London: Women's Press, 1989) p. 69

<sup>20</sup> quoted in *Good Weekend*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1998

<sup>21</sup> A. Lohrey, 'The clear voice suddenly singing', in D. Modjeska, A. Lohrey and R. Dessaix, *Secrets* (Sydney: Macmillan, 1997) pp. 191, 214

<sup>22</sup> S. King, 'Interview', in N. Epel, *Writers Dreaming* (Melbourne: Bookman, 1993) p. 141

<sup>23</sup> M. Milner, *The Suppressed Madness of Sane Men* (London: Tavistock, 1987) p. 80

<sup>24</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology, Language and Sociology* Ed. J. O'Neill. (London: Heinemann, 1974) p. 288

<sup>25</sup> R. Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* Tr. S. Heath. (Glasgow: Collins-Fontana, 1977) p. 160

<sup>26</sup> V. Gollancz, ed. *From Darkness to Light* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) p. 7

<sup>27</sup> Plato, *Apology* in B. Jowett Tr *The Works of Plato* (New York: Tudor, 1937) para.: 22a-c

<sup>28</sup> R. Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Rustle of Language* Tr. R. Howard. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)

<sup>29</sup> M. Buber, *The Way of Response: Martin Buber* Ed. N.N. Glatzer. (New York: Schocken Books, 1966) pp. 21, 48

<sup>30</sup> J.L. Borges, *Labyrinths* Ed. D.A. Yates and J.E. Irby. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1970) p. 285

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- <sup>31</sup> A. Gurganus, 'The Fertile "We" of One Chaste "I"', in D. Halpern ed., *Who's Writing This?* (New Jersey: Ecco Press, 1995) pp. 73-5
- <sup>32</sup> quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 February 1997
- <sup>33</sup> J.L. Borges, *Labyrinths* Ed. D.A. Yates and J.E. Irby. (Ringwood: Penguin, 1970) pp. 282-3
- <sup>34</sup> D.W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991) pp.105-6
- <sup>35</sup> M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination* Tr. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) p. 422
- <sup>36</sup> H. Garner, 'Interview', in K. Grenville and S. Woolfe, *Making Stories* (St Leonards, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1993) pp. 67-9
- <sup>37</sup> quoted in *Good Weekend*, *Sydney Morning Herald* 13 June 1998
- <sup>38</sup> A. Gurganus, 'Writers Dreaming', in N. Epel (ed.) *Writers Dreaming* (Melbourne: Bookman, 1993) pp. 99-100
- <sup>39</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology, Language and Sociology* Ed. J. O'Neill. (London: Heinemann, 1974) p. 288
- <sup>40</sup> quoted in J. Cameron, *The Artist's Way* (New York: Tarcher/Perigee, 1992) p. 22
- <sup>41</sup> E. Herrigel, *Zen in the Art of Archery* Tr. R.F.C. Hull (New York: Vintage, 1989) pp. 30-1
- <sup>42</sup> G. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* Tr. M. Jolas (Boston: Beacon, 1969) p. xix

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<sup>43</sup> M. Blanchot, *The Space of Literature* Tr. A. Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) p. 227

<sup>44</sup> M. Fox and R. Sheldrake, *The Physics of Angels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996) pp. 3-4

<sup>45</sup> M. Serres, *Angels* Tr. F. Cowper (Paris: Falmmarion, 1995) pp. 273-4  
47.

<sup>46</sup> quoted in V. Gollancz, ed. *From Darkness to Light* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) p. 101

<sup>47</sup> quoted in V. Gollancz, ed. *From Darkness to Light* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) p. 101

<sup>48</sup> W.A. Mathieu, *The Musical Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 1994) p. 122

<sup>49</sup> Serres, *Angels* Tr. F. Cowper (Paris: Falmmarion, 1995) pp. 270-273