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The Construction of Authorship
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COLLABORATIVE AUTHORSHIP AND THE
TEACHING OF WRITING

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The concepts of author and authorship, so radically destabilized in contemporary literary theory—and in current discursive practice in fields as far removed as engineering and law—have also been problematized in the field of rhetoric and composition studies, where scholars have challenged the traditional exclusion of student writing from claims to “real writing” and “authorship,” explored the ways in which *authority* is experienced by student writers, and increasingly sought to map various models of composing processes.

Beginning with a 1983 essay called *Why Write . . . Together?*,¹ we have attempted to add to this conversation by probing the concept of authorship that informs the teaching of writing in the United States. We began this research guided by the following questions:

1. What specific features distinguish the processes of collaborative authorship from those of single authorship? Can these features or processes be linked to any features of the resulting products? In short, how can we best *define* collaborative authorship?
2. Is there a limit to how many people can write together? Are projects such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the *Bible*, the *Short Title Catalogue*, elaborate computer programs, encyclopedias—all often involving more than 100 authors—examples of collaborative authorship?
3. In what ways, if any, does collaborative authorship affect the way we view the traditional writer-audience relationship?
4. What epistemological implications does collaborative authorship hold for traditional notions of creativity and originality?
5. How might the ethics of collaborative authorship be examined and defined? In cases of group authorship, where

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¹ Lisa Ede & Andrea A. Lunsford, *Why Write . . . Together?*, 1 *RHETORIC REV.* 150 (1983).

6. does the responsibility lie? Who stands behind the words of a report written by fifteen people?
7. Is the emphasis on or weight of various cognitive and rhetorical strategies different when co-authoring than when writing alone?
8. What are the pedagogical implications of collaborative authorship? What do we know about the advantages or disadvantages of having students participate in collaborative writing? If advantages do exist, don't they in some ways contradict our profession's traditional insistence on students working alone? And perhaps most importantly, do we have ways to teach students to adjust readily to collaborative writing tasks?

After a lengthy research project and eight years of study, we feel confident in saying that the traditional model of solitary authorship is more myth than reality, that much or most of the writing produced in professional settings in America is done collaboratively, and that, in fact, much of what we call "creative" writing is collaborative as well, though it almost always flies under the banner of single authorship.² But what of the college classroom and the teaching of writing that takes place there? That is to say, how may we best answer the last major research question, the one that challenges our pedagogy? While we will touch on those ways in which we have attempted to address all our original research questions, in the space provided here, we wish particularly to focus on writing pedagogy, relate its current forms to an epistemology that reifies radically individual forms and ways of knowing, and explore the potential for a reconstructed pedagogy that will allow for collaborative authorship.

I. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES ON COLLABORATION

In composition studies, interest in "discourse communities" has gone hand in hand with growing interest in social construction theories of knowledge, theories which attempt to situate the known in communal contexts. "Writing as a social process" has, in fact, become something of a buzz- or catch-phrase, as articles on small-group collaborative efforts, peer-response techniques, and the social nature of writing and reading appear in growing numbers. We may best examine this movement, generally referred to as collaborative learning, by situating it in an historical

context that represents one playing out of a persistent tension in American culture—that between the individual (the isolated Cartesian self)—and the community. This tension is vividly captured by Alexis de Tocqueville in his analysis of the American character. To describe this character, he uses a newly-coined word, *individualism* (which he differentiates from *egoism*): "Individualism is a calm and considered feeling which disposes each citizen to isolate himself from the main of his fellows and withdraw into the circle of family and friend; with this little society formed to his taste, he gladly leaves the greater society to look after itself."³ As such an individualism increases, Tocqueville notes:

More and more people who though neither rich nor powerful enough to have much hold over others, have gained or kept enough wealth and enough understanding to look after their own needs. Such folks owe no man anything and hardly expect anything from anybody. They form the habit of thinking of themselves in isolation and imagine that their whole destiny is in their hands . . . Each man is forever thrown back on himself alone, and there is danger that he may be shut up in the solitude of his own heart.⁴

Tocqueville feared the results of unmediated growth of "individualism" and argued that it could be best countered by a strong tradition of community and public discourse: "Citizens who are bound to take part in public affairs must turn from private interests and occasionally take a look at something other than themselves."⁵ This strong civic involvement with public discourse was, in Tocqueville's view, the balancing factor that would keep America from developing into a society of naturally exclusive, autonomous individuals, a society which would not, he feared, easily be able to resist totalitarianism or despotism.

In part, the founding document of America, The Declaration of Independence, reflects both the profound drive toward individualism and the commitment to community and public discourse that Tocqueville found in the American character, dual ideals which are inscribed in our history and which are often seen as being in constant tension with one another.⁶ We might expect

³ ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* 506-08 (J.P. Mayer ed. & George Lawrence trans., 1969).

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.* at 510.

⁶ See ROBERT N. BELLAH ET AL., *HABITS OF THE HEART: INDIVIDUALISM AND COMMITMENT IN AMERICAN LIFE* (1985) and ROBERT N. BELLAH ET AL., *THE GOOD SOCIETY* (1991), for an examination of the ideals related to tensions in contemporary America.

² See, e.g., ANDREA A. LUNSFORD & LISA S. EDE, *SINGULAR TEXTS/PLURAL AUTHORS: PERSPECTIVES ON COLLABORATIVE WRITING* at ch. 3 (1990).

to find evidence of this tension in American education and in the teaching of writing. And indeed we do. As Michael Halloran⁷ has demonstrated, the earliest rhetorical instruction in America was influenced by Cicero and Quintilian, and the Roman concept of the "ideal orator" as the public-spirited person speaking well animated such instruction. But this essentially rhetorical emphasis on the Greek and Roman "commune," on communal values and shared meanings, diminished in the nineteenth century as oral discourse was displaced by writing, as new "objective" methods of testing arose, and as the academy emphasized competition over cooperation, autonomous electives over the classical "core" curriculum, and the autonomous individual over the social. By the end of the nineteenth century, traditional rhetorical instruction had been largely displaced by emerging English departments heavily imbued with romantic theories of "genius" and originality, with a concept of writing as an individual solitary act, and with philological and exegetical traditions that emphasized the autonomous writer and the text as individually held intellectual property.⁸

Nevertheless, some educators resisted the trend toward individualism and isolation in English instruction. Anne Gere's monograph on the history of writing groups in America reveals that peer response techniques and small group collaboration have been advocated and enjoyed by some citizens and teachers since the colonial period—in mutual improvement groups such as Benjamin Franklin's Junto, in the Lyceum- and Chataqua-generated societies, and in the women's clubs and literary societies.⁹ In nineteenth-century schools, Michigan's Fred Newton Scott and his student Gertrude Buck both advocated more natural social conditions for composition instruction and evaluation,¹⁰ while Alexander Bain's *On Teaching English* praised the practice of writing with an eye toward reading draft versions to a society of peers and revising on the basis of discussion.¹¹ And in the colleges and universities, the great popularity of literary and other

speaking societies offered an opportunity for cooperation and extensive collaboration.

As Mara Holt has demonstrated, collaborative pedagogy—while never dominant—has a rich history and tradition.¹² Basing her study on an examination of academic journals from 1911 to 1986, Holt traces this collaborative thread, arguing that "the rationales and practices of collaborative pedagogy consistently reflect social and intellectual and economic trends of the socio-historical movement in which they are located."¹³

As the twentieth century proceeded, the dominant emphasis on individualism, on writing as an individually creative act, and on "objective" testing as a means of evaluating the intellectual property of solitary writers, continued to be questioned by a marginal collaborative pedagogy. Most influential was the work of educational philosopher John Dewey, who argued tirelessly for seeing the education of each individual in a social and communal context. As he notes in *The Public and its Problems* "Individuals still do the thinking, desiring, purposing, but *what* they think of is the consequence of their behavior upon that of others and that of others upon themselves."¹⁴ Dewey's calls for "new" or "progressive" education began early in this century. Throughout his career he insisted that learning occurs in *interaction*, that social context is of utmost importance in the classroom, and that we should reform our traditional model (which privileges the individual) by enhancing "the moving spirit of the whole group . . . held together by participation in common activities."¹⁵

Dewey influenced generations of teachers and scholars, among them Sterling Andrus Leonard, who argued as early as 1916, in *Two Types of Criticism for Composition Work*, that "oral and written composition are developed in a socially organized class to carry out real projects . . . in a spirit of hearty cooperation."¹⁶ In his 1917 *English Composition As a Social Problem*, Leonard goes on to say:

We must not make the mistake of assuming that training in composition is purely an individual matter. Most self-expression is for the purpose of social communication Our whole use of language has a social setting. The futility of

⁷ See Michael Halloran, *Rhetoric in the American College Curriculum: The Decline of Public Discourse*, 3 *PRE/TEXT* 245 (1982).

⁸ See Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature* (1987) for a recounting of this history, which treats English departments but not rhetorical instruction and/or theory.

⁹ ANNE R. GERE, *Writing Groups: History, Theory, Implications* 32-54 (1987). See also David Potter, *The Literary Society, in History of Speech Education in America: Background Studies* 238-58 (Karl R. Wallace ed., 1954).

¹⁰ FRED NEWTON SCOTT, *Composition-Rhetoric*, *Designed for Use in Secondary Schools* (1897); Gertrude Buck, *The Metaphor—A Study in the Psychology of Rhetoric, in Five Contributions to Rhetorical Theory* (Fred Newton Scott ed., 1899).

¹¹ See ALEXANDER BAIN, *ON TEACHING ENGLISH* (1901).

¹² Mara Holt, *Collaborative Learning From 1911-1986: A Sociohistorical Analysis* 235 (1988) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas (Austin)).

¹³ *Id.* at 235.

¹⁴ JOHN DEWEY, *THE PUBLIC AND ITS PROBLEMS* 24 (1927).

¹⁵ *Id.* at 54-55.

¹⁶ STERLING A. LEONARD, *TWO TYPES OF CRITICISM FOR COMPOSITION WORK* 509 (1916).

much of our past teaching has been due to our mental blinders to the social function of language. One has only to compare the situation of ordinary conversation with that of a class exercise in oral composition to realize how far we have forgotten the social genesis of speech. Worthy social conversation cannot be made at command of any person in authority. Ordinary human beings would not endure hearing the same item of discussion repeated by each person present. Nor would one care to say what everyone else had already said. Yet these are some of the striking characteristics of a composition exercise. If we are to make our training real, we must naturalize it, which is to say we must socialize our teaching of composition.¹⁷

Dewey's interactionist or constructivist approach to learning and knowledge gained increasing support in the 1930s from the work of George Herbert Mead, who argued that meaning is not individually wrought but is instead constructed through social interaction.¹⁸ In *Invention as a Social Act*, Karen Burke Lefevre cites Mead's work as providing a theoretical foundation for a view of invention as collaborative, noting that "other social thinkers, such as Martin Buber and Ludwig Wittgenstein, [move from] what have traditionally been regarded as private psychological entities out into the realm of social interaction and contextualization of knowledge."¹⁹ In addition, Piaget's work with children took a social constructivist approach to knowledge and learning as he demonstrated that children learn through *interaction* with others and with things in their environmental contexts.²⁰

Dewey devotees²¹ did much to rigidify and trivialize his original arguments; his influence faded during the exigencies of the war years. The critique of traditional education, with its teacher-centered classrooms and its emphasis on "working alone" and on "originality" continued, however, primarily in Britain. M. L. J. Abercrombie's *Anatomy of Judgment*²² and her later *Aims and Techniques for Group Teaching*,²³ for instance, evolved from work with medical students. Abercrombie was convinced that small-group

discussion provided the most effective way to help those students become more sophisticated and accurate at diagnosis and, hence, better physicians. Reacting to a Report of a Committee of the Royal College of Physicians, which argued that "the average medical graduate . . . tends to lack curiosity and initiative; his powers of observation are relatively undeveloped; his ability to arrange and interpret facts is poor; he lacks precision in the use of words,"²⁴ Abercrombie devised an experimental teaching course that would help students, through collaboration, learn to recognize diverse points of view, diverse interpretations of the results of an experiment, and thus to form more useful and accurate medical judgments:

My hypothesis is that we may learn to make better judgements if we can become aware of some of the factors that influence their formation. We may then be in a position to consider alternative judgements and to choose from among many instead of blindly and automatically accepting the first that comes; in other words, we may become more receptive or mentally more flexible. The results of testing the effects of the course of [collaborative group] discussions support this hypothesis.²⁵

Abercrombie's emphasis on contextualizing knowledge and her realization that communally derived diagnoses are generally more accurate and effective than those of a single medical student served as a direct challenge to the traditional individualism and isolated competitiveness endemic to most medical school curricula and higher education.

At roughly the same time, Edwin Mason, in his book, *Collaborative Learning*, presented a strikingly similar challenge to British secondary schools and, along the way, coined the phrase "collaborative learning." Charging that "to work in a school day after day and feel that we are doing more harm than good, and that with the best will in the world, is too much to bear,"²⁶ Mason set out to reform the school system, which he believed was "meeting neither the needs of the young nor the demands of the world."²⁷ As a result, Mason proposed a radical restructuring of this system, one which would replace the current competitive, authoritarian, overly specialized or departmentalized and hence "alienated" program with one emphasizing interdisciplinary

17 STERLING A. LEONARD, ENGLISH COMPOSITION AS A SOCIAL PROBLEM at viii-ix (1917).

18 GEORGE H. MEAD, MIND, SELF & SOCIETY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF A SOCIAL BEHAVIORIST (1970).

19 KAREN B. LEFEVRE, INVENTION AS A SOCIAL ACT 63 (1987).

20 JEAN PIAGET, THE CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY IN THE CHILD (1954).

21 Reductivist renderings of Dewey's work seem to have been uncritically accepted by E. D. HIRSCH, See E. D. HIRSCH, CULTURAL LITERACY: WHAT EVERY AMERICAN NEEDS TO KNOW (1987). Hirsch uses Dewey as a whipping boy in his cultural literacy argument.

22 M. L. J. ABERCROMBIE, THE ANATOMY OF JUDGMENT: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROCESS OF PERCEPTION AND REASONING (1969).

23 M. L. J. ABERCROMBIE, AIMS AND TECHNIQUES FOR GROUP TEACHING (1970).

24 ABERCROMBIE, *supra* note 22, at 15-16.

25 *Id.* at 17.

26 EDWIN MASON, COLLABORATIVE LEARNING 7 (1970).

27 *Id.* at 8.

study, small group work, collaboration, and dialogue—largely in the spirit of John Dewey. The remainder of his remarkable book describes such a curriculum and advises teachers on how best to implement it.²⁸

As Abercrombie's and Mason's work began to have at least a small impact on pedagogical thinking, so too did that of the Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* appeared in 1968.²⁹ Arguing that literacy is best taught in the social contexts of people's own lives, Freire faulted traditional education with promoting not genuine public literacy, but passivity, alienation, and conformity instead. In his work, Freire aims to empower his student-colleagues to reclaim, reinterpret, and hence reenact their own lives and to gain growing awareness of how social forces work in dialogic relationship with individual experience to enslave—or to liberate—and to create the realities they inhabit *communally*. Freire's work has most recently been presented as a challenge to the traditional teaching of writing in Ira Shor's *Freire in the Classroom*, which calls for a commitment to social and political contextualizing of all learning and on a renegotiation of power and authority in all classrooms.³⁰

These examples demonstrate that the drive toward radically individual autonomy, competitiveness, and isolated selfhood has always been countered, often only in a whisper but at other times in a louder, clearer voice, by a call for community, for shared public discourse, for working together for some common good. And, as Anne Gere has shown, we could write part of the history of writing instruction in the twentieth century in just such terms.³¹

II. CONTEMPORARY WRITING PEDAGOGY AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The last twenty years are generally regarded as having witnessed a large shift in writing pedagogy, sometimes as a growing awareness of process and context, sometimes (following the work of pioneers like Moffett, Emig, and Britton)³² as a move from teacher-centered to student-centered learning models. Cer-

tainly, we wish to acknowledge the effects of these largely positive shifts, most of which in our view run counter to the traditional valorization of autonomous individualism, privately held intellectual property, competition, and hierarchy. But in spite of these largely pedagogical efforts, most day-to-day writing instruction in American colleges and universities still reflects traditional assumptions about the nature of the self (autonomous), the concept of authorship (as ownership of singly-held property rights), and the classroom environment (hierarchical, teacher-centered).

We may look to contemporary composition studies as an illustration in point. Over the past few years, a number of scholars have attempted to understand this emerging field of study by, essentially, a naming of parts, by a taxonomizing. Thus, Richard Young identifies as the two major "groups," the "new Romantics," and the "new Classicists," the former stressing the interiority and essential mystery of writing, the latter stressing exteriority and structured procedures for composing.³³ Patricia Bizzell modifies and amplifies this distinction, grouping composition studies into two camps—those who view writing primarily as "inner-directed" and "prior to social influence" and those who view writing as "outer-directed" and based on "social processes whereby language-learning and thinking capacities are used and shaped in . . . communities."³⁴ In several essays and a monograph on twentieth-century writing instruction, James Berlin offers another taxonomy, contrasting what he calls "objective" and "subjective" rhetorics with a tripartite division of "transactional" rhetoric.³⁵ Similar arguments are advanced, though from differing perspectives, by several others, including Lester Faigley and Stephen M. North,³⁶ but are probably put most strongly by LeFevre. In *Invention as a Social Act*, LeFevre contrasts what she calls the Platonic view of inventing and composing ("the act of finding or creating that which is . . . written as individual introspection;

²⁸ Richard Young, *Arts, Crafts, Gifts, and Knacks: Some Dichotomies in the New Rhetoric*, in *REINVENTING THE RHETORICAL TRADITION* 53-60 (Aviva Freedman & Ian Pringle eds., 1980).

²⁹ Patricia Bizzell, *Cognition, Convention, and Certainty: What We Need to Know About Writing*, 3 *PRE/TEXT* 213, 215 (1982).

³⁰ See James Berlin, *Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories*, 44 *COLLEGE ENGLISH* 765-77 (1982). See also James Berlin, *RHETORIC AND REALITY: WRITING INSTRUCTION IN AMERICAN COLLEGES, 1900-1985* (1987) [hereinafter Berlin, *RHETORIC AND REALITY*]; James Berlin, *Rhetoric and Ideology*, 50 *COLLEGE ENGLISH* 477-94 (1988) [hereinafter Berlin, *RHETORIC AND IDEOLOGY*].

³¹ See Lester Faigley & Thomas P. Miller, *What We Learn from Writing on the Job*, 44 *COLLEGE ENGLISH* 557-69 (1982). See also Stephen M. North, *THE MAKING OF KNOWLEDGE IN COMPOSITION: PORTRAIT OF AN EMERGING FIELD* (1987).

²⁸ See generally Mason, *supra* note 26.

²⁹ PAULO FREIRE, *PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED* (Myra B. Ramos trans., 1970) (1968).

³⁰ FREIRE FOR THE CLASSROOM: A SOURCEBOOK FOR LIBERATORY TEACHING (Ira Shor ed., 1987).

³¹ GERE, *supra* note 9.

³² See JAMES MOFFETT, *TEACHING THE UNIVERSE OF DISCOURSE* (1968); JANET EMIG, *THE WEB OF MEANING* (1983); JAMES N. BRITTON, *LANGUAGE AND LEARNING* (1970).

ideas begin in the mind of the individual writer and then are expressed to the rest of the world") with a social view of inventing and composing.³⁷ This social view takes a constructivist approach to knowledge and posits that the "self," in some ways similar to Wayne Booth's "range of selves" or Foucault's "subject positions,"³⁸ is socially constituted and that, hence, writing is essentially a social and collaborative act. Interestingly, in his recent essay *On the Very Idea of a Discourse Community*,³⁹ Thomas Kent argues that social constructionists such as LeFevre are, from the perspective of Donald Davidson's coherence theory of truth and knowledge, internalists, not externalists.

These taxonomies of composition studies overlap and differ in a number of ways and, as all taxonomies inevitably do, they limit—indeed they often distort—what we perceive about our own field of study. We mention them here, therefore, not to endorse any particular taxonomy of rhetoric and composition studies but to make one point that strikes us as particularly telling: the composition theorists and teachers most often identified with collaborative learning and peer response techniques—James Moffett, Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, Ken Macrone—are usually identified with Bizzell's "inner-directed" group,⁴⁰ Berlin's "expressionist" group,⁴¹ or LeFevre's Platonic group,⁴² which posits the uniqueness of individual imagination and sees writing as a means of expressing an autonomous inner self. Ironically, then, the very scholars most often associated with collaborative learning hold implicitly to traditional concepts of autonomous individualism, authorship, and authority for texts. In addition, their versions of collaborative learning generally fail to problematize the role of the teacher/authority in the writing classrooms.

The work of Peter Elbow provides perhaps the best example of the tension and potential contradictions we have been describing. For years, Elbow has encouraged writers to work in groups, reading their work aloud for oral responses, out of which revisions grow. Many of his recommended classroom activities rely on free-wheeling collaboration, and he continues to champion

the use of collaborative learning. Yet in spite of this emphasis on the importance of audience response to revision and its advocacy of some form of collaboration, Elbow's work rests on assumptions about individualism and individual creativity that fail to sufficiently problematize traditional conceptions of "author" and that in fact come close to denying the social nature of writing. For Elbow, expressing personal authenticity requires not social interaction but mining the depths of the self, searching inside the self for a unique voice. As he says in *Writing Without Teachers*, "The mind's magic. It can cook things instantaneously and perfectly when it gets going. You should expect yourself at times to write straight onto the paper words and thoughts far better than you knew were in you."⁴³ In his more recent books, Elbow continues to represent the individual self as the essentially mysterious source of creation, frequently calling on the "magical" ways writers discover their unified voices.⁴⁴ *Writing with Power*, in fact, ends with a chapter on "Writing and Magic."⁴⁵ As Greg Myers notes in a critique of Elbow, "Magic is the only possible source for such [individual] ineffable energies. . . . [such] metaphors prevent any analysis of the social conditions of our writing."⁴⁶ Such a stance is reflected in Elbow's more recent essays, in which he argues that writers often must ignore audience (or any "others") in order to get to the heart and soul of what they want to say.⁴⁷

The composition theorist most closely associated with social construction and collaborative learning theories in general and peer group response in particular is Kenneth Bruffee, who became interested in peer tutoring as a means of helping students "practice judgement collaboratively, through a progressive set of analytical and evaluative tasks applied to each other's academic writing in a context which fosters self-esteem."⁴⁸ Yet in his early work on peer tutoring and in his text, *A Short Course on Writing*,⁴⁹ Bruffee also holds to the concept of single authorship and individual creativity (students write alone and then revise after getting

37 LeFevre, *supra* note 19, at 1.

38 See WAYNE BOOTH, CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING: THE POWERS AND LIMITS OF PLURALISM (1979); Michel Foucault, *What Is an Author?*, in TEXTUAL STRATEGIES: PERSPECTIVES IN POST-STRUCTURALIST CRITICISM 141-60 (Josue V. Harani ed., 1979).

39 Thomas Kent, *On the Very Idea of a Discourse Community*, 42 CCC 425 (1991).

40 See Bizzell, *supra* note 34.

41 See Berlin, RHETORIC AND REALITY *supra* note 35, at 756.

42 See LEFEVRE, *supra* note 19.

43 PETER ELBOW, WRITING WITHOUT TEACHERS 69 (1973).

44 See PETER ELBOW, EMBRACING CONTRARIES: EXPLORATIONS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING (1973); PETER ELBOW, WRITING WITH POWER: TECHNIQUES FOR MASTERING THE WRITING PROCESS (1981) [hereinafter ELBOW, WRITING WITH POWER].

45 See ELBOW, WRITING WITH POWER, *supra* note 44.

46 Greg Myers, *Reality, Consensus and Reform in the Rhetoric of Composition Teaching*, 48 COLLEGE ENGLISH 154, 165 (1986).

47 Peter Elbow, *Closing My Eyes as I Talk: An Argument Against Audience Awareness*, 44 COLLEGE ENGLISH 50 (1987); Peter Elbow & Jennifer Clark, *Desert Island Discourse: The Benefits of Ignoring Audience*, The Journal Book 19 (Toby Fulwiler ed., 1988).

48 Kenneth A. Bruffee, *The Brooklyn Plan*, 64 LIBERAL EDUCATION 447, 450 (1978).

49 KENNETH BRUFFEE, A SHORT COURSE IN WRITING (2d ed. 1980).

peer response, much as in the Elbow method⁵⁰) even while acknowledging the degree to which "knowledge is a social phenomenon, and the social context in which we learn permeates what we know and how we know it."⁵¹ In addition, the mode of collaboration demonstrated in Bruffee's text is generally teacher-centered: the activities are set by a higher authority (the teacher) and the focus is on the revised end product—the intellectual property—of a text produced individually.

As Bruffee readily notes, only in the last few years has he come to contemplate the full theoretical significance of such an epistemology for the teaching of writing and reading.⁵² Drawing on the work of scholars in a number of disciplines⁵³—Bruffee argues that what and who we are and write and know is in large part a function of interaction and of community.⁵⁴ Thus writing and reading are, essentially and naturally, collaborative, social acts, ways in which we understand and in which "knowledge is established and maintained in the normal discourse of communities of knowledgeable peers."⁵⁵ As Berlin points out, Bruffee's later works have been "from the start based on a conception of knowledge as a social construction—a dialectical interplay of investigator, discourse community, and material world, with language as the agent of mediation. The rhetorical act is thus implicated in the very discovery of knowledge—a way not merely of recording knowledge for transmissions but of arriving at it mutually for mutual consideration."⁵⁶ But Bruffee's emphasis on collaboration and consensus continues to stand in contradiction to his implicit romanticist views of creativity and authorship. These views have been criticized most recently by Mas'ud Zavarzadeh and Donald Morton, who say that

[I]here is in Bruffee no sense of the politics of cognition that organizes this socially constructed knowledge. Society and the

social for him (as for Rorty) are cognitive domains—areas of such apparatuses as agreement and convention and so forth. As a result of such a conservative (cognitive) theory of knowledge . . . the subject is presented as an uncontested category . . . Bruffee's collaborative learning/teaching is, in other words, the latest reproduction of the "management" of the subject and the latest effort to save it through "collaborative learning and the *Conversation of Mankind*." The teacher in this model is the manager of the classroom—an agent of social coalescence.⁵⁷

Bruffee's particular brand of collaborative consensus has also been criticized by Greg Myers, who charges that

while Bruffee shows that reality can be seen as a social construct, he does not give us any way to criticize this construct. Having discovered the role of consensus in the production of knowledge, he takes this consensus as something that just is, rather than as something that might be good or bad.⁵⁸

Myers is insisting that those interested in collaborative learning step back and ask *what* such practices will be used for, what aims and purposes and motives are served, where power and authority are located. Others in the composition community echo this concern. Richard Ohmann, for instance, has long criticized composition textbooks for treating student writers as though they were isolated, cut off from any cultural, political, or social contexts. Ohmann's *Politics of Letters* extends this critique to most contemporary teaching.⁵⁹ Similar critiques of the asocial and alienating nature of composition instruction appear in the works of Charles Yarnoff, David Bartholomae, Charles Bazerman, Patricia Bizzell, and particularly James Berlin.⁶⁰

Other work has recently focused on context and on the communal aspects of learning. In particular, Shirley Brice Heath's ethnographic studies demonstrate how writing and reading must

⁵⁰ See Elbow Writing With Power, *supra* note 41, at 20-24, 139-45.

⁵¹ See Bruffee, *supra* note 48, at 116.

⁵² See Kenneth A. Bruffee, *Collaborative Learning and the "Conversation of Mankind"*, 46 *College English* 635 (1984).

⁵³ See, e.g., Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (1980) (literary studies); Lev Vygotsky, *Thought and Language* (Eugenia Hanfman & Gertrude Vakar, trans., 1962) (psychology); Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution* (2d ed. 1979) (philosophy); Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) (philosophy); Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (1983) (anthropology).

⁵⁴ Bruffee, *supra* note 52, at 641-47. "[W]riting always has its roots deep in the acquired ability to carry on the social symbolic exchanges we call conversation." *Id.* at 641-42.

⁵⁵ *Id.* at 640.

⁵⁶ Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality*, *supra* note 35, at 175-76.

⁵⁷ Mas'ud Zavarzadeh & Donald Morton, *Theory, Pedagogy Politics: The Crisis of "The Subject" in the Humanities*, 15 *BOUNDARY 2: A JOURNAL OF POSTMODERN LITERATURE AND CULTURE*, 1, 14-15 (Fall, Winter 1986-87).

⁵⁸ See Myers, *supra* note 46, at 166.

⁵⁹ See Richard Ohmann, *Politics of Letters* (1987).

⁶⁰ See Charles Yarnoff, *Contemporary Theories of Intervention in the Rhetorical Tradition*, 41 *College English* 552 (1980); David Bartholomae, *Inventing the University*, in *When a Writer Can't Write: Studies in Writers's Block and Other Composing-Process Problems* 134 (Mike Rose ed., 1985); Charles Bazerman, *Scientific Writing as Social Act: A Review of the Literature of the Sociology of Science*, in *New Essays in Technical and Scientific Communication: Research Theory and Practice* 156 (Paul Van Anderson et al., eds., 1983); Bizzell, *supra* note 34, at 213-43 (1982); Patricia Bizzell, *Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition Studies*, 7 *PRE/TEXT* 37-56 (1986); Berlin, *Rhetoric and Ideology*, *supra* note 35.

be seen as developing within a social context in which talk plays a major role.⁶¹ David Bleich's *The Double Perspective: Language, Literacy, and Social Relations* examines the ways in which learning is situated in and beyond our classrooms;⁶² his chapter on "Collaboration Among Students" offers particularly useful (and concrete) advice. At the Center for the Study of Writing, Linda Flower and her colleagues are working to relate the cognitive factors in composing to their social contexts.⁶³ Still others, focusing on professional and work-related writing, stress the importance of social and political contexts in such writing.⁶⁴

The early work of Elbow and Bruffee has been augmented in this decade by a large and growing body of scholarship on collaborative learning, much of it linked to the National Writing Project and to writing across the curriculum movements.⁶⁵ In addition to the work of Lefevre⁶⁶ and Gere,⁶⁷ we now have major studies by Collette Daurie⁶⁸ and colleagues on collaboration among young school children,⁶⁹ by Anthony Pare and his colleagues on collaboration in high school settings,⁷⁰ and by the authors represented in Bouton and Garth's *Learning in Groups*,⁷¹ to name only a few. This interest in, and growing commitment to, principles of collaborative learning grows out of, and is informed by, the philosophical tradition on which Bruffee's work builds. And, whether its advocates are aware of it or not, this tradition implicitly calls into question perceived notions of writing as inevitably and inherently *individual* and of intellectual property rights as belonging to radically individual selves. Whatever the strengths of the "collaborative learning" or "social constructionist" movement in composition studies may be, until scholars pursue the

full implications of collaboration for these traditional notions of authorship and authority, they will fail to answer—or even to address—the questions with which we opened this essay.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF COLLABORATIVE WRITING

The work on collaborative learning surveyed here emphasizes the ways in which knowledge is constructed among members of communities. The recent attention given to collaborative writing might thus seem a natural extension or a subset of collaborative learning theory. Yet as the preceding pages have suggested, collaborative learning theory has from its inception failed to challenge traditional concepts of radical individualism and ownership of ideas and has operated primarily in a traditional and largely hierarchical way. Students in collaborative learning situations may work together on revising or on problem solving, but when they write, they typically continue to write alone, in settings structured and governed by a teacher/authority in whom final authority is vested. Studies of collaborative writing, on the other hand, make such silent accommodations less easy to maintain and as a result offer the potential to challenge and hence re-situate collaborative learning theories.

Much of the work on collaborative writing has focused on the world of work. Studies by numerous authors examine collaborative writing in a number of job-related settings.⁷² Others have attempted to build collaborative writing into classroom contexts.⁷³ In a 1986 survey, Hallie S. Lemon found that composition faculty at Western Illinois University use collaboration at every stage of the writing process, including drafting.⁷⁴ Exten-

61 SHIRLEY B. HEATH, *WAYS WITH WORDS: LANGUAGE, LIFE, AND WORK IN COMMUNITIES AND CLASSROOMS* (1983).

62 DAVID BLEICH, *THE DOUBLE PERSPECTIVE: LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS* (1988).

63 READING-TO-WRITE: EXPLORING A COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL PROCESS (Linda Flower et al. eds., 1990).

64 See, e.g., WRITING IN NON-ACADEMIC SETTINGS (Lee Odell & Dixie Goswami eds., 1985); Janis Forman & Patricia Katsky, *The Group Report: A Problem in Small Group or Writing Processes?*, 23 J. OF BUS. COMM. 23-35 (1986).

65 See John Timbur, *Collaborative Learning and Teaching Writing*, in PERSPECTIVES ON RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP IN COMPOSITION 87 (Ben W. McClelland & Timothy R. Donovan eds., 1985) for a review of work on collaborative writing.

66 See LEFEVRE, *supra* note 19.

67 See GERE, *supra* note 9.

68 See Collette Daurie, *Do I and I Make 2? Patterns of Influence by Collaborative Authors*, 3 WRITTEN COMM. 382-408 (1986).

69 *Id.*

70 See Anthony Pare, *How It Works: A Group-Authorial Assignment*, 7 *Taskshed* 5-7 (1988).

71 See LEARNING IN GROUPS, NEW DIRECTIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING 14 (Clark Bouton & Russell Y. Garth eds., 1983).

72 See, e.g., MARY B. DEBS, *COLLABORATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE WRITER'S PROCESS: A LOOK AT ENGINEERING* (1983); Janis Forman, *Computer-Mediated Group Writing in the Workplace*, 5 *COMPUTERS AND COMPOSITION* 19 (Nov. 1987); Stephen Doherty-Fanna, *Writing in an Emerging Organization: An Ethnographic Study*, 3 WRITTEN COMM. 158 (1986); Faigley & Miller, *supra* note 36, at 557; Geoffrey Cross, *Editing in Context: An Ethnographic Exploration of Editor-Writer Revisions at a Midwestern Insurance Company* (1988) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University). Two publications have recently devoted special issues to the subject of collaborative writing. See 38 *TECHNICAL COMM.* (Nov. 1991); 53 *THE BULLETIN ASSOC. FOR BUSINESS COMMUNICATION* (1990).

73 See, e.g., Deborah Bosley, *A National Study of the Uses of Collaborative Writing in Business Communications Courses Among Members of the ABC* (1989) (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Illinois State University); Sharon Hamilton-Wielter, *How Does Writing Emerge From the Classroom Context? A Naturalistic Study of the Writing of Eighteen Year-Olds in Biology, English, Geography, History, History of Art, and Sociology* (available in ERIC, Retrieval No. ED 284 209); KAREN SPEAR, *SHARING WRITING: PEER RESPONSE GROUPS IN ENGLISH CLASSES* (1988); CHARLES R. COOPER, *RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING: THE WRITING PROCESS OF STUDENTS* (Walker Petty & Patrick Finn eds., Report of the First Annual Language Arts Conference, State Univ. of N.Y. at Buffalo, 1975).

74 See Hallie S. Lemon, *Collaborative Strategies for Teaching Composition: Theory*

sive research on this kind of "shared document" collaboration is being carried out by members of a research team⁷⁵ in an effort to define kinds of collaborative writing and to describe the processes involved in such group writing tasks. Among their studies is an important case study of collaborative writing groups.⁷⁶ Also at the college level, O'Donnell and his colleagues have conducted experiments which support the claim that group-produced documents are perceived as "better" than those individually produced.⁷⁷ In a study of writers in seven contexts,⁷⁸ Stephen P. Witte identified four forms of collaborative writing and concluded, among other things, that across these seven contexts "writing became increasingly more collaborative and collaborative in different ways."⁷⁹ Thomas L. Hilgers⁸⁰ and Dauter⁸¹ have explored the uses of collaborative writing with younger children.

Nevertheless, as Allen and her colleagues point out, because "very little detail is known about collaborative writing processes in general . . . there is a need for in-depth study of the features of collaborative writing [defined as] a situation in which decisions are made by consensus."⁸² We would add that much more careful attention needs to be given to just what is meant by "consensus" and to the ways consensus is or is not achieved. John Trimbur begins such an exploration in "Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning," in which he builds on the work of Habermas to argue that we must "distinguish between consensus as an acculturative practice that reproduces business as usual and consensus as an oppositional one that challenges the prevailing conditions of production" by providing a "critical instrument to open gaps in the conversation through which differences many emerge."⁸³ Joseph Harris extends this critique of consensus and

and Practice, Unpublished Paper Delivered at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (St. Louis, Mar. 1989).

⁷⁵ This research team began their work in a Purdue University Ph.D. program.

⁷⁶ See Meg Morgan et al., *Collaborative Writing in the Classroom*, 50 THE BULLETIN 20-26 (1987) (Assoc. for Business Communication).

⁷⁷ Angela M. O'Donnell et al., *Cooperative Writing*, 2 WRITEN COMM. 307 (1985).

⁷⁸ The seven contexts include: junior high school, high school, upper-division undergraduate, doctoral students, a chemist, a general manager, and a civil engineer.

⁷⁹ Stephen P. Witte, *Some Contexts for Understanding Written Literacy 2-3*, Unpublished Paper Delivered at the Right to Literacy Conference (Columbus, Sept. 1988).

⁸⁰ See Thomas L. Hilgers, *On Learning the Skill of Collaborative Writing*, Unpublished Paper Delivered at Conference on College Composition and Communication (New Orleans, Mar. 1986).

⁸¹ See Dauter, *supra* note 68.

⁸² Morgan et al., *supra* note 76.

⁸³ John Trimbur, *Consensus and Difference in Collaborative Learning*, 51 COLLEGE ENGLISH 602 (1989).

offers an argument for "community without consensus" in his *Idea of Community in the Study of Writing*.⁸⁴

Our own work has attempted to explore the varying and sometimes conflicting definitions of collaborative writing⁸⁵ and to identify the characteristics of effective collaborative writing as well as its varying modes.⁸⁶ In our study of collaborative writers in seven professional organizations, for instance, we identified the following factors that serve to affect the degree of satisfaction experienced by collaborative writers in their jobs:

1. the degree to which goals are clearly articulated and shared,
2. the degree of openness and mutual respect characteristic of group members,
3. the degree of control writers have over the text,
4. the degree to which writers can respond to others who may modify the text,
5. the way credit (direct or indirect) is realized,
6. an agreed upon procedure for resolving disputes among group members,
7. the number and kind of bureaucratic constraints (deadlines, technical or legal requirements, etc.) imposed on the writers, and
8. the status of the project within the organization.

Further questioning of our research subjects led to an emerging profile of effective collaborative writers. They are flexible and respectful of others; attentive, analytical listeners; able to speak and write clearly; dependable and able to meet deadlines; able to dispute and share authority, to lead and to follow; open to criticism but confident in their own abilities, and ready to engage in creative conflict. As we sketched in this profile, however, we gradually became aware that collaborative writing on the job occurs in varying modes. The dominant mode our research revealed emerged as highly structured and hierarchical, with power and authority distributed vertically in the hierarchy, and with productivity and efficiency as primary goals. A much less frequent mode of collaboration also emerged, however, one that we refer to as "dialogic." This alternate mode of collaboration is loosely structured, participants' roles are fluid, and the problem

⁸⁴ See Joseph Harris, *The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing*, 40 COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION 11 (1989).

⁸⁵ LUNSFORD & EDE, *supra* note 2, at 14-16.

⁸⁶ *Id.*

of articulating or reaching goals is of great importance.⁸⁷ Identifying these varying modes helped us to see how dramatically collaborative writing on the job offers theoretical challenges to traditional notions of originary authorship and radically individual intellectual property rights. Yet, in practice, such collaborative writing often gives the authority and intellectual ownership to "the boss" or the leader, without question, particularly in a rigidly hierarchical mode. In a number of cases, however, and particularly in those involving dialogic modes of collaboration, the writers involved were aware of at least a working sense of shared authorship, shared authority, and shared intellectual property, one far different from the traditional definition of a solitary, originary *author* holding individual intellectual property rights.

This review of research on collaborative writing suggests, first of all, that we need more and better studies of the processes and varieties of collaborative writing. It also points up, however, some directions that seem increasingly clear. First, collaborative writing offers a strong potential challenge to the hegemony of single, originary authorship and intellectual property and thus presents a series of challenges to higher education in general and to the teaching of writing in particular.

IV. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM

Closest to home is the challenge to traditional classroom format and to the teacher's role. Our classrooms most often continue to vest power and authority in the teacher. At best, students are in apprenticeship to authority; they do not help constitute it.⁸⁸ Richard Ohmann acknowledges this challenge when he probes the issue of student "powerlessness" in our classes: "The writer's situation is heavy with contradictions. She is . . . invited both to assume responsibility for her education and to trust the college's plan for it; to build her competence and to follow a myriad of rules and instructions; to see herself as an autonomous individual and to be incessantly judged."⁸⁹ As one concrete way of contesting such alienating tensions, Ohmann uses collaborative group interviews, including one of himself. Ohmann notes:

This underlies their ownership of the writing task in two ways. First, it demystifies my role in the class, opening up my goals and values as a subject for inquiry on the students' terms, taking them off the secret agenda. Second, it changes the relationship of their writing to what I have said in class, turning the latter into material for analysis and criticism rather than the graven words of authority.⁹⁰

But even in the most collaborative of our classrooms, the authority to organize and evaluate rests with the teacher. As John Trimbur notes,

Even when I'm not in the room, my authority remains behind, embedded in the very tasks I've asked students to work on . . . If anything, I have never felt more powerful than in the collaborative classroom precisely because I know much more about what's going on, how students are thinking about the issues of the course, what language they are generating to talk about these issues and so on.⁹¹

As Foucault's work suggests, collaborative writing itself constitutes a technology of power, one we are only beginning to explore.⁹² As we carry out such exploration, as we investigate the ethics of collaboration and the ways in which collaborative writing challenges traditional power relationships, we need to bring students into these discussions, asking them to work with us to examine how authority is negotiated, shared, distributed. At least potentially, we could argue, collaborative writing holds out the promise for a plurality of power and authority among teacher and students, what Ohmann calls an "opening up" of the classroom.⁹³

The hierarchical bases of power in our classrooms, of course, reflect the larger structure of our educational institutions. Most university calendars, divided neatly into semesters or quarters, reflect a positivistic approach to learning: knowledge is "packaged" into discrete segments and dispensed to passive recipients, fast-food style, through four years. Such a system represents students as isolated units, all of whom learn in similar ways and at similar speeds. The time necessary for group cohesion to occur, for the examination of group dynamics involving consensus and dissensus to take place, much less for a consideration of

⁸⁷ For a more complete description of these modes, see LUNSFORD & EDE, *supra* note 2, at 133-36.

⁸⁸ See Jane Tompkins, *Pedagogy of the Distressed*, 52 COLLEGE ENGLISH 653 (1990).

⁸⁹ See OHMANN, *supra* note 59, at 252.

⁹⁰ *Id.* at 256.

⁹¹ See Trimbur, *supra* note 83, at 602.

⁹² See Foucault, *supra* note 38, at 141.

⁹³ OHMANN, *supra* note 59.

the issues at stake in seemingly simple questions such as "Who is the author of this essay?" or "Who is responsible for these words?" is not easily found in such a system. The research and scholarship reviewed here strongly suggests that just as we must rethink our roles as teachers in a collaborative writing classroom, so also must we rethink our use of time in the college curriculum. At the very least, we must become aware of how such things as the use of time reflect assumptions and traditions that no longer fit with our educational goals.

We could of course point out other institutional constraints that militate against a pedagogy of collaboration. Most notable is no doubt traditional classroom design. Large, cavernous lecture halls in which students see only the backs of other students' heads and classrooms whose bolted down desks face dutifully toward the slightly raised lectern in front present major stumbling blocks to collaborative learning and writing. Institutional practices, bound as they are in ideology, may prove even more intractable to change than will classroom settings. Among these, the examination system seems particularly problematic. This system, barely a hundred years old, is rooted solidly in positivistic assumptions: knowledge is objectively knowable and can be measured and counted. Such a tradition, of course, goes hand in hand with the conception of a solitary, sovereign—and usually male—writer with individually "owned" property rights. This view of knowledge calls for a "controlled" testing situation and valorizes the hard data such situations yield as "proof" of success or failure. Testing as we know it is by definition a-contextual and anti-social, anti-communal, as far from a collaborative activity as could be imagined. In such a system, students must do "original" work, and they are individually judged on individual "quality of mind." Unfortunately, the dependence on and infatuation with mass testing at all levels of the educational system seems only to be growing, as evidenced most recently by a call from The National Council of Education Standards and Testing for yet another and more rigorous round of national exams for America's students.⁹⁴ Yet the movements discussed here all question the very foundations on which such testing and grading practices rest.

The institutional reliance on testing "norms" and the ideology it reflects can be found replicated, not surprisingly, in the writing classroom, where concerns over individual perform-

ance—and especially over plagiarism—can become near obsessive concerns. Certainly collaborative writing calls such obsessive concerns into question and reveals the formalist, positivist, and individualist ideological assumptions on which common notions of plagiarism rest. But do such questions obviate the very notion of plagiarism? If not, how can we help students construct a more sophisticated and enabling understanding of this concept? Teachers of writing may best begin, it seems to us, by taking a rhetorically situated view of plagiarism, one that acknowledges that all writing is in an important sense collaborative and that "common knowledge" varies from community to community and is collaboratively shared. From this perspective, attribution of sources becomes not a means of avoiding the heinous sin of plagiarism, but of building credibility or writerly *ethos*, of indicating to readers that the writer is a full collaborative participant in the scholarly conversation surrounding whatever topic is at hand. Clearly, teachers wishing to implement a pedagogy of collaboration will need new ways of evaluating the process of collaborative writing and the products produced thereby.

Our current sense is that a thorough re-examination of the grounds of testing and grading practices in higher education in general and composition classes in particular will have to follow rather than precede curricular reform. And in this area, the research on collaborative writing reviewed here may have a more immediate impact. In spite of the reform efforts of Heath, Emig, and others, the current curriculum is still based on a model of content coverage: classes must clip along, "covering" a certain number of units in a certain number of days. But this model is under increasing attack on a number of fronts and for a number of reasons. Most obviously, it is simply no longer possible for any one person to "cover" all the material in any field, even a fairly narrow one. Less obvious but equally important is the growing realization that what we "teach" in this inexorable drive to cover a content area is not necessarily or even probably what is learned. Here the research in collaborative learning theory is clear and unequivocal: real learning occurs in *interaction* as students actively use concepts and ideas or strategies in order to assimilate them. The pedagogical implications are equally clear: less may well yield *more* in terms of learning. What follows from this line of reasoning is the need to reconsider course structure in terms of assignments that will engage students in interaction and in collaboration with their teachers and other students. What is much less clear is whether teachers are willing or able to

⁹⁴ Dennis Kelly, *National Standards*, USA Today, Jan. 24, 1992, at D1.

make the next logical and necessary step—to move from such collaboration to collaborative *writing*. Doing so challenges, as we have shown, very deep-seated beliefs in radically individual ways of knowing and in the writing pedagogies accompanying such beliefs.

Yet the time seems particularly ripe for teachers of writing to accept this challenge and to explore further the questions raised in the opening section of this essay. The work summarized here as well as the research we have conducted barely scratches the surface in terms of understanding the full range of collaboration, of exploring its dangers as well as its potentialities, of establishing an ethics of collaboration. For teachers of writing, however, the most immediate need is for a pedagogy of collaboration, one that would view writing as always shared and social; writers as constantly building and negotiating meaning with and among others; and evaluation as based at least in part on a “range of selves” and on communal efforts. Articulating such a pedagogy of collaboration, we believe, would advance efforts on a number of fronts to reconceive intellectual property and selfhood and to value these reconceived notions in a way that is commensurate with the idea of a postmodern democracy.