Hanna Kuusela

Writing together

MAPPING THE TERRAIN OF CONTEMPORARY COLLABORATIVE WRITING

These days, collaboration seems to be almost ubiquitous. From hotel ratings to Wikipedia and installations, today's cultural goods and services are increasingly being created and designed collaboratively.

This trend, that at first seems to be deeply rooted in commercial culture, has been paralleled by a new wave of collaborations in the so-called high arts. Collective paintings, collaborative composing, and collaboratively written literature are all questioning the figure of the individual artist, and substituting it with a more collective creative subject.

Even if collaboration seems to be on the rise in all fields of art, its practices vary significantly between artistic genres. In the film industry or performance arts, for example, co-creation has a long tradition, whereas classical music or oil paintings are often considered to be individual creations. In order to receive a richer and more detailed image of a phenomenon that appears to be nearly everywhere, this article concentrates on one cultural form only, that of literature, which is often considered the epitome of indi-

viduality and solitary creation. The article maps the field of contemporary collaborative practices in writing and literature and offers a taxonomy-like introduction to contemporary collaborative writing. It approaches the different cases from the perspective of participation in the writing process.

WHAT COUNTS AS LITERARY COLLABORATION?

By collaborative literary practices, I refer to different forms of writing, the creation or production of which is highly dependent on more than one writer. Moreover, the term suggests a certain questioning or erosion of the individual, autonomous author. What does this mean more precisely? What counts as literary collaboration?

According to one increasingly popular view, all writing and creation is collective by nature. This view, advocated for example by Howard S. Becker (2008), suggests that creation and the production of art always requires several individuals. Authors need editors, as well as lumberjacks who cut the trees from which the paper for books is made. Movie directors are dependent not only on actors, but also on roughnecks who drill the oil from which the plastic for the DVDs is made, and so on and so forth. Similar ethos can be found in theories that highlight the multiplicity of creative input and the myriad of influences behind every text. For example, in his title *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius*, Jack Stillinger (1991) proposes that behind authorial intent or creative voice lies a history of mutual influences and collaborations which is often either invisible to the readers, or which tends to be seen as subordinate

to the individual voice. This view echoes many post-structuralist theories of text and intertextuality, according to which a text is always a meeting point of numerous voices, the origin of which cannot be traced as it echoes the voice of every speaker of a language (Barthes 1981). These ideas have also been in the background of the most rigorous theoretical deconstructions of authorship (Barthes 1978, Foucault 1991).

Even if it is difficult to disagree with these theories, and even if they offer an important argument in favour of a less proprietary and individualized regime of culture, the analytical usefulness of these theories for understanding collaborative cultural practices remains weak. As Sondra Bacharach and Deborah Tollefsen (2010, 25) note, at least intuitively, there "is a difference between *contributing* to (the making of) a work of art and authoring it", but these differences cannot be analysed any further, if all production is labelled collective.

Consequently, this article discusses literary practices that deliberately, or by nature, deconstruct or challenge the modern myth of the solitary genius. It does not try to reveal collaboration behind supposed individuality as, for example, Stillinger (1991, see also Crawford 2008) has done, but concentrates on texts that themselves reveal these dependencies or multiple subjectivities, make them visible, or play on them. Consequently, the article offers one possible classification for the various contemporary practices that argue against or implicitly deconstruct the image of the modern individual author.

Focusing on contemporary literary collaborations does not, however, mean that collaboration in literature is a

recent phenomenon. On the contrary, it is often noted that the individual author is a creation of the modern era, whereas in the early modern or pre-modern periods, collaboration, collectivity, and even anonymity, were central attributes of literary creation. Historians have investigated these literary collaborations in the pre-modern era, and problematized the myth of the author, reminding us that "the author in the modern sense is a relatively recent invention" (Woodmansee 1994, 15).

CATEGORIZING COLLABORATIONS

Despite their growing popularity, contemporary literary collaborations have received very little critical attention. The situation is unfortunate, not least because co-creation and artistic collaboration seem to receive media attention and are easily hyped. There is a minor boom around crowdsourcing, co-creation, and participation also in literature, but many commentators are not particularly aware of what constitutes the field and how different practices relate to each other. Thus, critical reflections are also rare. Most studies concentrate only on one genre of literary collaboration, such as digital literature (Rettberg 2013), poetry (Watten 2003), or non-fiction, such as academic writing (Ede & Lunsford 1992, Gale & Wyatt 2009), which is perhaps the most common and most studied area of collaborative writing. These studies offer valuable material, but in order to draw a more comprehensive picture, this article is cross-generic.

Contemporary literary collaborations could be catego-

rized according to different logics. A taxonomy could be based, for example, on the number of participating writers, on the medium of the collaboration, or on the motives behind writing: Has the decision to use several contributors been a pragmatic one (more minds can create faster or imply more knowledge), or is the motive to experiment with the idea of writing itself, as many avant-garde projects do? Does the idea for collaboration arise from some anti-capitalist sentiments, as it often does, or does it rest on the prospect of exploiting the free labour of as many people as possible, as might be the case in many industry-led projects? All these approaches, and many others, would constitute an interesting starting point for a taxonomy-like introduction. The approach of this article is, however, based on the levels of participation in such projects. The question of participation deserves critical elaboration, because it is often seen as the positive outcome of, or the positive background behind, collaborative projects. A lot of optimism surrounds collaboration as a means to democratize (cultural) production. People formerly known as audiences, so the argument goes, have become producers of their own, which challenges the existing media system. For example, writings on fan fiction often include an assumption that such practices subvert existing and unequal consumer-producer relations. (Napoli 2010, Löwgren & Reimer 2013, Jenkins 2008.) Because of such rather uncritical optimism, the question of the distribution of power in collaborative projects needs more scrutiny and transparency.

Collaborations in literature range from projects in which the different authors are equally conscious participants, to those in which the contributors are not at all conscious

that their activity is resulting in artistic production. Because of this range, Scott Rettberg (2013) has categorized the forms of participation in collaborative literary production into three: 1) *conscious participation*, in which participators are fully conscious of the nature of the project, and how their contribution might be utilized; 2) *contributory participation*, in which contributors may not be aware of how their contribution fits into the overall architecture of the project, or even of the nature of the project, but they do take conscious steps to make their contribution available to the project; and 3) *unwitting participation*, in which texts utilized in the narrative are gathered [in the case of new media art] by the text-machine itself, and contributors have no conscious involvement in the process of gathering the material.

These three categories form the backbone of the categories below. As such, my introduction to contemporary collaborative practices can be described as a taxonomy that moves from the strongest form of collaboration to weaker forms. Unlike Rettberg, who specializes in electronic literature, I will also discuss print literature.

CONSCIOUS PARTICIPATION

Many writing projects promoted under the ideas of collectivity or collaboration give the impression that they are a result of conscious participation by several equally powerful individuals. They often implicitly suggest that the collaboration has happened between peers, or between equals, and consequently, managed to challenge the hier-

archies typical for cultural production. This does not, however, mean that such projects would constitute the majority of literary collaborations. Collaborations in which every participator is fully aware of the overall project and has – together with others – the power to influence the architecture of the project, constitute the most demanding and exceptional form of collaborative writing.

Such projects can be categorized in two: conscious participation can occur first, in permanent or semi-permanent writing collectives, and second, in collectives that have been formed or come together for a specific project.

The first form, *the permanent or semi-permanent writing collectives*, are rare because of the level of commitment they require. The core working method of such groups is to write literature together so that the roles of the individual members are not necessarily highlighted or identified. In such undertakings, the name of the collective may appear on the covers of the publications, its history may be explained in reviews, and it may be discussed as a collective subject in public. The collective may have its own promotional materials and narrate its own history. Consequently, the name of the collective may substitute for those of the authors and, eventually, fulfil similar functions.

One of the most internationally well-known and long lasting examples of such a collective is the Italian Wu Ming Foundation, which has published several novels and other texts since the 1990s. According to the story told by the members, the roots of Wu Ming are in the multiple name Luther Blisset, which was also the name under which the novel, *Q*, was published. Later, the group changed its name to the Wu Ming Foundation. In an interview, a member of

the collective explains their writing method in the following way:

> *It's like a jam session between jazz musicians. That's what we do and that's where we take our inspiration. And also it's comparable to role playing game. We improvise together. We create stories by throwing bits of plot on to the table. We sit around a table for weeks. (Wu Ming 2013)*

Consequently, Wu Ming is an example of a writing group in which all members are apparently participating fully in the process of writing. One member even defines their method as "a kind of telepathy" (Ibid.).

Wu Ming is particularly conscious of its role and goals in the field of artistic creation and its relationships to the politics and economies of writing. According to one member:

> *being a literary collective is a radical gesture itself, because you know literature is very backward, the publishing industry is still based upon the writer as an individual genius, [a] highly sensitive person, living in a higher level of reality. (Ibid.)*

In order to deconstruct or challenge this image, Wu Ming does not post pictures of itself, or appear on TV. Its books are freely available online for non-commercial purposes. This gesture challenges the conjuncture in which authorship equals full ownership or control over a cultural good. Wu Ming has managed to create a new artistic name, one that is strong enough to substitute almost entirely for the individual names.

Another more recent example of a permanent literary collective that writes texts together is the poetry group G13 in Germany. G13 has published only one book-long poem, *das war absicht*, under the collective name, but they regularly perform together and organise text meetings. Most of the work done in the context of G13 is, however, still done and published under the name of the individual members. The website promotes works written and published by the different members, and most entries are written under the names of individuals. Thus, it is a much looser collective than Wu Ming. Still, the ethos of G13 leans towards collective production and artistic collaboration. According to their website, the group does not follow a specific plan in order to develop a uniform poetics, but they state, "whenever we can, we want to work against the tendency towards competition and isolation on the literary market, and are in the belief that collective forms of solidary-critical exchange have a positive impact on writing" (G13, 2014). Some members explicitly see their work being in tension with the classical figure of the author. In a radio interview, Friederike Scheffler, a member of the collective, states that G13 tries to break with the poetic tradition of the genius author (Deutschlandradio 2013). Another member characterizes the motives for the collective work by referring to a sense of liberation: "It is somehow liberating to have a space that you share with others and in which you can write and meet and discuss with others as opposed to being on your own and writing on your own" (Magyar & Schneider 2014).

A further example of a long-time writing collaboration are the 10 writers of *The Grand Piano*, "a collaborative au-

tobiography", consisting of 10 volumes and published between 2007 and 2010. This group of writers does not form a collective with a name, and all the chapters of the books are published under the individual names of the authors, but the writers share a common history in the so-called language poetry movement of 1970s San Francisco.

In an interview, one author of The Grand Piano, Barrett Watten, saw that the collaborative autobiography was a continuation of a longer interest in collaboration among the writers:

> *There is a spirit of collaboration among or in and out and around this group of people for a long time. So a collective practice is something that we have all engaged in, in quite many different ways. (Harryman & Watten 2014.)*

He also linked this interest to the critique of the single author, often found in the texts or practices of the language poets. Furthermore, Watten explained the motives by describing how collaboration can create:

> *. . . a situation or environment in which things can happen, can create forms that you cannot anticipate in advance. We can have a structure but what is the form, what are the consequences, of what occurs here? And so there is a kind of dialogic unknown that occurs. We create a different kind of construction for a critical space among writers, that doesn't reproduce the same kinds of systems that already are in place. (Ibid.)*

What keeps such initiatives together are often either political or social ideals or needs. Particularly, Wu Ming has a

strong anti-capitalist or anti-private property ethos, whereas G13 advocates their work as an answer to the competitive nature of today's literary culture. Similarly, the writer of *The Grand Piano* believes that collaboration creates a space in which something new is possible:

> *There's largely a view that the dialogue between writers creates an environment for making work that would not happen in isolation. There is a political dimension to that, a kind of open dialogic form, and this is where the part of the problem of utopia possibly comes in. (Ibid.)*

Such long-lasting collaborative initiatives are difficult to maintain, because of the commitment they necessitate. Regarding The Grand Piano, Watten (2013, 106) writes that during and after the writing of the series, "there occurred a substantial change in the groups self-understanding, something like a crisis of community and even belief in the project, which may not be resolved".

The category of permanent or semi-permanent collaborations also includes *writing couples or collaborations between a writer and an artist of some other field*. Such partnerships have interested both historians who have studied collaborations between or behind famous authors, and many feminist researchers, in particular, who have looked for the intimate relationships between women or the forgotten and hidden roles of women behind male writers (see e.g. Crawford 2008, Ehnenn 2008, London 1999, Stone & Thompson 2007).

The writing methods of such permanent or semi-permanent collaborations vary between groups. One conceptual

way to discuss the differences in the methods is to make a distinction between co-authors and multiple authors, as Bacharach and Tollefsen (2010) suggest. For Bacharach and Tollefsen (2010, 25), the first denotes work done together, whereas the latter refers to work done individually but for the common purpose: "For example, Wikipedia is certainly authored by multiple people, but it does not qualify as co-authored, because the authors are all working (for the most part) individually rather than working together."

The working method of Wu Ming belongs to the category of co-authorship, whereas the writers of *The Grand Piano* are multiple authors working for a common goal. G13 has experimented with both writing strategies. Differentiating between co-authors and multiple authors can be difficult, if not impossible, without empirical case-to-case research on the production process. The end product, the book, does not reveal the nature of the writing process. Often, for example, famous names are used to promote works, whereas less famous writers may be credited only in parentheses. The entire praxis of *ghost writing* rests on this kind of a division of labour. Everyone who has written together knows the risks of an unevenly distributed fame. The same applies equally to the second type of conscious collaborations, discussed next.

The second form of conscious participation or collaboration includes *collectives that have been formed or come together for a specific and temporary project*, or collectives that exist for some other purpose but create one collaborative text together as part of their more general collective work or friendship.

One example is the punk novel, *Seaton Point*, published

in 1998 and written by seven people. In an interview, two of the writers stated that the project was an ad hoc project of fun. The initiator of the project, Robert Dellar, explained the reasons behind the project: "I thought it might be quite fun to write… or just to get a group of people together and try and write a book together, because I quite like working with other people in creative projects" (Curtis & Dellar 2013). This resonated more broadly with his ideas of social togetherness, which he explained in the following way:

> *I'm more motivated if I'm working with other people than if I'm working in isolation. And there's this thing about writers being people who sit down at a typewriter on their own and just work in isolation. I experience that as being quite alienating really. I think I'm quite aware of myself as a social being. (Ibid.)*

Having its roots in the London underground scene, the foreword to the novel promotes a strong political ethos reminiscent of the proclamations of the Wu Ming. According to the foreword:

> *…the modern novel of single authorship came into being only in the modern era…We [the authors of* Seaton Point*] are a corrective to such cultural imperialism. In this work, the process is transparent and we lay no exclusive claim to it. But we do lay claim to our culture. (Dellar et al. 1998, 5.)*

In the interview, the two writers affirmed that such motivations partly guided the writing, but not in a very serious way. According to Dellar:

> *…in the underground there was a lot of people dismissing the idea of things like copyright, authorial ownership and identity, and seeing it as some sort of bourgeois thing that developed with capitalism. And although we didn't take ourselves too seriously … I know I was looking at some way of undermining that, or at least taking the piss out of it. (Curtis & Dellar 2013)*

According to the interviewees, each author created one character and wrote a chapter. After that, a certain confusion entered the project, and when several writers left because of personal reasons or travels, the novel was finished by three writers. According to Dellar:

> *…the last half of the book – and maybe more than that – is written entirely by me, Ted [Curtis] and Martin [Cooper]. And actually it was a lot easier in some ways working with just the three of us, than trying to keep the seven of us going. (Ibid.)*

Seaton Point is an example of a project that started as a free-time amusement for a group of friends who shared some political motivations and a desire to do things together. In the end, however, it turned into a writing project for a few core members of the ad hoc group. It included the conscious participation of several people; however, most of them were not strongly devoted and, thus, left the project soon after the first round of writing.

Another recent example from the field of non-fiction is an unauthorized biography of a Nordic finance mogul, Björn Wahlroos, written by 25 Finnish journalism students and their professor. As the biography was written during a

university course, the division of labour was not equal but rather based on institutional requirements. The book was published under the authorship of "Tuomo Pietiläinen [the professor] and the investigative workgroup". It is an interesting case to mention, because the motivation behind the collaboration was purely pragmatic, not ideological, experimental or political. As the initiator of the project noted, the group was formed because it was an excellent opportunity to realize a project that would otherwise have been too expensive to conduct. Without the class, "it would have cost around 600 000 euros in the form of someone's salary expenses", the professor said in the interview (Pietiläinen 2013). The students gained course credits and valuable experience from the project, and made the laborious research possible.

The category of temporary collaborations also includes several *collaboratively written manifestos* or texts that have a particularly strong political goal. One example is the book, *A la Deriva: por los Circuitos de la Precariedad Femenina*, written by a militant research collective, Precarias a la Deriva. The book discusses the feminine work of precarious service workers, and travels between fiction and fact. Such manifesto-like writings follow more generally the tradition of manifestos, which are often written, or at least signed, by several individuals. A further example of temporary collaborations is *academic writing*, which has a long tradition of collaboration. This tradition, along with the tradition of *pedagogical writing in classrooms*, has also been studied more extensively than many other forms of collaborative writing (see e.g. Lunsford & Ede 1992, 2011, Gale & Wyatt 2009).

Thus, it is important to note that the motivations be-

hind such temporal projects vary significantly: some may have a purely pragmatic motivation, some are more political, while others are cultural. Some are organised around a specific goal, whereas in many instances, the process itself, with its social dimensions, may also be the actual motivation.

What differentiates these projects from the first category is their transitory nature or their nature as by-products of other projects, such as a university course, a conceptual art group, or friendship. What these first two categories share in common is their willingness to promote the idea of writing consciously in a collective, and they often subscribe, at least in public, to some ideals of dialogue and togetherness. However, these self-proclaimed commitments to the lofty ideals may also be primarily promotional acts that are not necessarily based in the real practice. Consequently, many of the projects described here can at times lean towards the third category, that of contributory participation, because many such projects end up being controlled or led by one or a few members. Sometimes this is a deliberate choice, sometimes a result of the chaotic process, and sometimes some people simply tend to dominate collective projects more than others.

Three further examples of collaborative writing linger on the border of conscious and contributory participation. The first, *PHILIP*, is a novel written by eight writers during workshops. However, the novel has been advertised as being based on the concept of the artist Heman Chong, thus suggesting that it was above all a project of one artist to which other writers participated. Chong has also been the main spokesperson for the novel. The novel was pub-

lished by the Project Arts Centre, Dublin and, as such, it is conceived perhaps more as conceptual art of Chong than as a collaborative novel with conscious participation of the entire group.

A slightly similar project of temporary collaboration that included conscious participation but also a leading person or a core group is *Reena Spaulings*, a novel written under the author name of Bernadette Corporation and published by Semiotext(e) in 2005. Bernadette Corporation is a US-born group or project that has worked in and around the fashion business and conceptual art since the 1990s. The group has continuously played on questions of identity in their works, and the same blurring of identities continued in *Reena Spaulings*. In one article, the novel was defined as being "the product of over 150 anonymous contributors" (Farago 2013), whereas in another it was said to be created by "fusing up to 50 unnamed authors' subjectivities and linguistic styles" (Artists Space 2012). All in all, the group conceals this information, thus blurring the boundaries of what we might conceive as participation, collaboration or collectivity. However, as many art collectives, Bernadette Corporation also has some spokespersons; when in public, the group is often promoted by two individuals, John Kelsey and Bernadette Van-Hu.

The third example of temporary collaboration that lingers on the border of conscious and contributory participation is a collaborative novel currently being written, in 2015, by Finnish novelists, poets, and literary scholars gathered around a group called *Mahdollisen kirjallisuuden seura* (in English, The Society of Possible Literature). Allegedly a project of 14 writers, the initiative has received attention in

the media, the participants have given some performances, and the project includes self-conscious theorization of literary collaboration. However, it remains to be seen whether a publication will eventually come out and whether the different levels of participation and contribution come to view. The writing is said to be strictly procedural, so that the forms of participation are determined in advance by the rules. Even if all the members participate consciously, the overall architecture is partly determined by those members who have written the procedure for the collaboration.

The cases discussed above are projects that have received relatively much attention (perhaps with the exception of *Seaton Point*). They are often presented as challenging experiments, which intervene or disturb the individualistic traditions of literary production. However, similar projects have also occurred in literary genres that are closer to popular culture. These projects may be written by amateur enthusiasts, or lesser known authors, and they can have a strong fan base, or local visibility, but national and international critics tend to ignore them. Such projects include, for example: *Thin Slice of Life* (2012), a thriller written by Miles Arceneaux, the storytelling alter ego of Texas-based writers Brent Douglass, John T. Davis and James R. Dennis; *At the Edge* (2013), a novel written by 16 writers and initiated by Marjorie Anderson and Deborah Schnitzer; and *Keeping Mum* (2014), a crowd-funded novel written by a collective of 15 people called Dark Angels.

Some of these last examples lean towards the next category, that of contributory participation.

CONTRIBUTORY PARTICIPATION

Contributory participation is perhaps the most common form of contemporary literary collaboration, and it has been on the rise ever since digital technology and Web 2.0 made textual collaboration easier. Such writing projects can be divided roughly into three: projects initiated by commercial or other institutional actors, projects initiated by individual artists or activists, and projects that do not have (or that work against) any forms of centralized control.

In such projects, a number of people participate, but they are unaware of what happens to the fragments of texts they write, or they do not have a say in the overall project. Often such projects include editors with limited or limitless power, or an artist who reserves the right to use the texts in any way she or he desires.

Corporate-led initiatives of contributory participation are writing projects in which a corporation invites people to join. These projects are often discussed under the phenomenon of crowdsourcing.

One early and often referenced example is *A Million Penguins*, a wikinovel project initiated in 2007 by the publisher, Penguin Books, and De Montfort University. The story could be contributed to by any site visitor, but a team of students moderated the contributions. The project was discussed to some degree afterwards. Amy Spencer (2011) characterized the experiment as chaotic: "As anyone could edit or delete anyone else's words, many of its collaborating authors appeared to embrace a sense of chaos and radically edited and deleted sections of text." Later, the Institute of Creative Technologies of De Montfort

University published A Million Penguins Research Report, which highlighted the importance of the process as a performance against, or in addition to, the textual outcome. According to the report:

> *…it would be appropriate to depict of 'A Million Penguins' as somewhat like a carnival where the audience reacts to various performances while the performers react to each other and the audience. It is possible that members of the audience may briefly become performers as they interact and performers themselves may join the audience in a fluid interchange of roles. (Mason & Thomas 2008, 16)*

A Million Penguins almost demonstrated the impossibility of open crowdsourced novels, which might be one reason why later examples of company-led crowdsourced novels have rested more heavily on editing. In 2012, *The Sydney Morning Herald* invited its readers to write what it called "a new art form", a "crowdsourced" novel, *The Necklace*. As the story was unveiled online, readers could submit the next chapter, and the newspaper editors chose which chapters were used. The final book contained nine chapters written by 10 authors.

Similarly, in 2014, a company called Grammarly published a novel, *The Lonely Wish-giver*, that, according to its own information, had been written by 300 writers from 27 countries. For each chapter, the company assigned 25 or 26 writers who would receive a Google Document and were asked to write on the day. To share comments, writers participated in chapter-specific Facebook groups or commented in the Google Document.

Such methods have also found their way to other genres of fiction. In 2010, the Savonlinna Opera Festival launched a crowdsourced project for writing an opera.

It was marketed as the "world's first online community opera project", and the online community was said to have been open for everyone (Savonlinnan oopperajuhlat 2012). According to the initiators, the project proceeded gradually and each part of it included communal brainstorming online. In 2012, the opera *Free Will* was performed.

Overall, the past decade has seen a wave of so-called crowdsourced literature. In addition to the projects run by companies, *individual artists or (want)-to-be-artists have also initiated a large number of crowdsourced texts* in which the participants do not have control over the overall architecture of the project, or only have a very limited ability to control the direction of the text (for example in the form of online voting). One example of an attempt to write a crowdsourced novel is *The Collabowriters*, launched in 2012 and created by artist, Willy Chyr. Another is the crowdsourced project by Natalie Linden, who called herself the Unreliable Novelist, who needed help writing her "feminist fairytale spy novel".

Also belonging to this category of individual-led initiatives of contributory participation are many conceptual works that rely on a specific idea, to which people are invited to participate. One such project is Barbara Campbell's *1001 Nights Cast*, discussed by Rettberg (2013). In her project, Campbell read and webcasted for 1,001 consecutive nights a short text written by a participant during that day. Although Campbell gave writing prompts, she did

not write any of the texts that she read. A similar artist-led conceptual project with a collaborative twist was Kenneth Goldsmith's *Printing out the Internet*. The project's website defines it as "a crowdsourced project to literally print out the entire internet". Concretely, Goldsmith distributed an open call for people to print a page from the Internet and send it to him. According to Goldsmith (2014), "Over 20,000 people from around the world contributed tens of thousands of pieces of printed internet, which was displayed in a six meter high pile in a gallery in Mexico City during the summer of 2013". All of the power remained in the hands of the artist, even if the call was open.

It is easy to claim that in most such projects the distribution of power and fame is unequal. The copyrights often stay in the hands of the initiator, or the initiator may reserve the full right to modify the material contributed by the participants. If nothing else, the initiator is often the only one who accumulates cultural capital through such projects. Furthermore, the power to define the rules as well as to choose, distribute, and edit the texts usually remains solely with the initiator. Or, when there is some distribution of power, it is the initiator who decides how it is distributed. Consequently, such projects easily tend towards economic or cultural exploitation. It is, however, important to remember that in such projects the participants "do take conscious steps to make their contribution available to the project", as Rettberg (2013, 190) has noted. The exploitation is so to speak voluntary, and participators may feel that, instead of monetary compensation or fame, they gain something else. This applies for most crowdsourced projects, which can be criticized from the perspective of

political economy, but which nevertheless are immensely popular.

The last category of writing that necessitates contributory participation, worth mentioning, is *multiple author names* (or nom de plume). The most famous example is Anonymous and another often cited name is Luther Blisset (the history of which is intertwined with the Wu Ming). These projects are entirely uncontrollable in a sense that no one has power over them. Consequently, the participants are contributing voluntarily, but they do not control the overall architecture of the project, but neither does anyone else.

UNWITTING PARTICIPATION

Projects characterized by unwitting participation constitute the last main category of literary collaborations discussed in this article. This category includes a wide range of writing practices from fan fiction and parody novels to erasure poetry and other appropriative procedures. The common denominator between these practices is their reliance and dependence on already existing texts that have been written by someone other than the person named as the author. In most cases, the writers of these source texts are unaware that their texts are being used, or they have not written these texts with such a future use in mind. In other words, these practices are not collaborative in the sense that the texts are written together or with a common goal in mind, but they have a more implicit connection to the ideas of collaboration. Many appropriators would not themselves call their works collaborative, nor would those

whose texts have been appropriated, but nevertheless, such practices end up deconstructing the ideologies of individual creation and the stable author figure.

For example, Kenneth Goldsmith (2011) and Marjorie Perloff (2010) have written about literary strategies that are based on the re-use of existing textual material. Goldsmith calls such practices uncreative writing, whereas Perloff has named the writing figure that emerges out of such strategies the unoriginal genius. Both concepts describe practices that rely on existing texts, and both writers highlight the role of choice in these procedures, in contrast to creation.

In order to further the analysis of unwitting collaborations, one can distinguish between cases in which *texts or fragments of texts are appropriated* (as in collages and cut-ups) *and cases in which the context or the fictional environment is appropriated* (as in fan fiction and parody novels). Both categories can also lean towards literary pastiche, a term used to describe works that imitate one characteristic style, or alternatively draw elements and styles from various other works (Nyqvist 2010).

To start with the first category, following Annette Gilbert's (2014, 17) conceptualisation, one can further distinguish between literary *appropriations in which a piece of text is appropriated and transferred into a new larger context, and acts in which a whole text is appropriated and published under a new author*. In her title, *Re-Print*, Gilbert (2014, 51) develops the concept of appropriation literature and reserves it for appropriations of entire works in their full materiality, instead of selective transfers in which pieces of pre-existing texts are "embedded into a larger context in a manner that is either assimilating or contrasting". In this article, the ex-

amples represent acts of selective transfers, whereas an excellent account of the appropriations of entire works can be found in Gilbert's book. Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish between a*ppropriations in which the material used is not modified or rewritten in any sense and appropriations in which the source material is modified*.

Examples that require selecting but still rely entirely on texts written by others than the recorded author include, for example, Cory Arcangel's book, *Working On My Novel* (2014) and Karri Kokko's book-long poem, *Varjofinlandia* (2005). *Working On My Novel* is a collection of tweets, all of which contain the phrase "working on my novel". It is a compilation of different approaches to, and manifestations of, the act of writing or the desire of becoming an author. In Arcangel's book, each tweet has its own page; thus, they do not create together another text, unlike *Varjofinlandia*. *Varjofinlandia* is a collage of sentences or textual passages that have been appropriated from web discussions and blogs that concern depression. Nearly 60 pages in length, the poem does not have paragraphs but is rather a mass of text in which it is impossible to distinguish between different voices.

Also different forms of flarf poetry, search engine poetry, found poetry, erasure poetry and poetic palimpsests oscillate between documenting the real and presenting artistic making or choosing, while still being examples of collaboration with unwitting participation. Flarf is a poetic movement or style, a central method of which is to mine the Internet with odd search terms and distil the results into often funny or disturbing poems. In its early stages, the collaborative character of flarf could be seen not only

in its treatment of the pre-existing material, but also in the nature of the movement itself; it started inside a "group of loosely connected friends" whose sociality has been described by Maria Damon (2013). However, today it can be defined more as a style than a movement. Flarf can be conceived as a type of found poetry, which is more generally a type of poetry that is created by taking words, phrases, or passages from other sources and reframing them as poetry. This is often done by making changes in spacing and lines or simply by calling it poetry and by publishing it under an author's name. Consequently, through the act of appropriation, texts that have not been produced for artistic purposes may turn into poetry. This does, however, not necessitate any lexical modification from the part of the appropriator. For example, Virpi Alanen's (on-going) blog, *Löytöretkue*, presents in the style of poetic readymades, fragments of texts found in old and sometimes strange books, whereas Annie Dillards' collection, *Mornings Like This* (1995), includes poems that rearrange sentences and bits of broken texts from old books. In erasure poetry, a similar transfer from everyday discourse to poetry is executed, but the poetic act requires at least some modification. Erasure poetry is created by erasing words from an existing text and framing the result on the page as a poem. A popular form of erasure poetry is newspaper poetry in which poems are made by redacting newspapers with a marker. Furthermore, different kinds of lists and transcriptions, in which existing texts are ordered anew or presented in a new material form, can be defined as collaborations with unwitting participation. Goldsmith himself has, for example, transcribed a day's issue of the *New York Times*, turning it into a 900-page

book, titled *Day* (2003).

Most of the above examples transfer everyday objects into literature, but appropriations can also take place inside the literary system. One famous example of the latter is Jonathan Safran Foer's erasure book, *Tree of Codes* (2010), in which Foer has cut Bruno Schulz's collection of short stories, *The Street of Crocodiles* (1934), into ribbons, making holes in the pages. Another is Tom Phillips' *A Humument* (1971/1973), in which Phillips has painted over W. H. Mallock's novel, *A Human Document* (1892), leaving part of the original text to show through. Hence, it is possible to make yet another distinction inside the category of unwitting participations, one between *transfers of everyday objects into literature and appropriations in which the appropriated material originates from the same discursive system, that of art* (Gilbert 2014).

A good and detailed list of the most used procedures in literary appropriations can be found in Gilbert's (2014, 66–71) book, in which she makes distinctions, for example, between different types of selections, reductions, compilations, variations, rearrangements, rewritings, transpositions and reframings.

If the examples presented above refer mainly to acts of appropriation in which the source texts are transferred without modifications or only with minor modifications or erasures, *the popular genres of fan fiction and parody novels* represent the other end of the spectrum of unwitting participation. These genres consciously build on existing texts or series without the original author's consent. Furthermore, they may appropriate large pieces of already existing texts, but are nevertheless entirely new texts. As such, they

come close to literary pastiche. The reason for discussing these genres in the context of unwitting participation is that these texts would not have come into being without the prior existence of the other texts. They necessitate the existence of several writing subjects and also challenge the original author's sole authority over the story. Examples include, for example, the fan literature built on *Harry Potter* or *The Lord of the Rings*, but also parody novels such as *Android Karenina*, published under the names of Leo Tolstoy and Ben Winters, or The Meowmorphosis (2011) by Franz Kafka and Coleridge Cook.

Some projects mentioned here include the unattributed use of existing texts. Many flarf poets, search engine poets, and collagists do not name the sources of their texts. In such cases, the collaboration is not only unwitting but also unattributed. When an unattributed use of one source is extensive, such practices are prone to create accusations of plagiarism. For example, Helene Hegemann's *Aksolotl Roadkill* (2010) was a celebrated novel published solely under the author name of Helene Hegemann. Only after being praised by the critics, did the public find out that Hegemann had appropriated vast amounts of texts from a blog written under the pseudonym Strobo. Such controversies are likely to increase in number in the future, as the abundance of texts and the pressures of the attention economy push writers towards inventing new ways to deal with the literary market.

WHAT NEXT?

All the practices discussed in this article are becoming more popular, and many of them have been inspired by the technological opportunities brought about by digitalization. They can be seen as culturally emergent practices, to use Raymond Williams' (1978) term. In order to map this emergent terrain, and help the work of future commentators, this article has offered a taxonomy-like introduction to contemporary literary collaborations from the perspective of participation. Such an attempt to create analytical tools for approaching an emergent phenomenon, however, leaves many large and important questions unanswered, most notably those that concern the role of collaborations in today's literary field, or in society, more generally. What are the possible wider implications of such practices? Do they change something essential in the literary field? And finally, do they manage to produce good literature? Are they worth celebrating? These are just some of the questions open for future research.

Hanna Kuusela is a post doctoral researcher funded by the Academy of Finland and working at the Tampere Research Centre for Journalism, Media and Communication (University of Tampere). She specializes in Cultural Studies and focuses both on contemporary literature and contemporary politics.

Her specific interests in literature include collective writing practices and literary appropriations; the materiality of literature and book studies in contemporary context; and Muslim figures in contemporary Western literature.

She received her PhD at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2011.
She is also a frequent contributor to different newspapers and magazines, writing both on politics and literature, and a proud owner of a second hand bookstore in Helsinki.

REFERENCES

Artists Space (2012). ”Bernadette Corporation: 2000 Wasted Years September 9 – December 16, 2012.” http://artistsspace.org/exhibitions/bernadette-corporation

Bacharach, Sondra & Deborah Tollefsen (2010). “We Did It: From Mere Contributors to Coauthors.” Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 68, 1: 23–32.

Barthes, Roland (1978). “Death of the Author.” In Image-Music-Text, 142–48. Hill and Wang.

––– (1981). “Theory of the Text.” In Robert Young (ed) Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader, 31–47. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Becker, Howard (2008). Art Worlds. University of California Press.

Crawford, Holly (2008). Artistic Bedfellows: Histories, Theories and Conversations in Collaborative Art Practices. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Curtis, Ted & Robert Dellar (2013). Personal interview. London 14.11.2013.

Deutschlandradio (2013) “Lyriksommer: junge Lyriker dichten im Kollektiv.” Radio interview with Friederike Scheffler. 23.8.2013.

Dewey, Anne, and Libbie Rifkin (2013). Among Friends: Engendering the Social Site of Poetry. University Of Iowa Press.

Ede, Professor Lisa, and Andrea Lunsford (1992). Singular Texts/ Plural Authors: Perspectives on Collaborative Writing. Southern Illinois University Press.

Ehnenn, Jill R. (2008) Women’s Literary Collaboration, Queerness, and Late-Victorian Culture. Ashgate.

Farago, Jason (2013) ”Bernadette Corporation: ’Don’t have sex with each other’” The Guardian, 24.3.2013.

Gale, Ken, and Jonathan Wyatt (2009). Between the Two: A Nomadic Inquiry into Collaborative Writing and Subjectivity. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.

Gilbert, Annette (2014). Re-Print. Appropriation (&) Literature:

Eine Anthologie. Translated by Uljana Wolf. Wiesbaden: Luxbooks.

Goldsmith, Kenneth (2014). ”Papers from philosophical transactions of the royal society.” http://printingtheinternet.tumblr.com/post/81475510510/papers-from-philosophical-transactions-of-the-royal

———. (2011). Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age. Columbia University Press.

G13 (2014). Webpage of G13. http://gdreizehn.com/uber-g13/

Harryman, Carla & Barrett Watten (2014). Personal interview. Helsinki 31.8.2014.

Jenkins, Henry (2008). Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide. NYU Press.

London, Bette (1999). Writing Double: Women’s Literary Partnerships. Cornell University Press.

Löwgren, Jonas, and Bo Reimer (2013). Collaborative Media: Production, Consumption, and Design Interventions. The MIT Press.

Lunsford, Andrea A. (2011) Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin’s.

Mader, Rachel (2012). Kollektive Autorschaft in der Kunst: Alternatives Handeln und Denkmodell. Bern etc.: Peter Lang.

Magyar, Tabea & Lea Schneider (2014). Personal interview. Berlin 30.9.2014.

Mason, Bruce and Sue Thomas (2008) “Million Penguins Research Report.” Institute of Creative Technologies, De Montfort University, UK. https://www.google.com/search?q=million+penguins+researcg+report&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:fi:official&client=firefox-a&channel=sb.

Napoli, Philip M. (2010) Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences. Columbia University Press.

Nyqvist, Sanna (2010). “Double-Edged Imitation: Theories and Practices of Pastiche in Literature”, PhD thesis, University of Helsinki.

Perloff, Marjorie (2010). Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means