Writing Together: An Arendtian Framework for Collaboration

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Abstract: This essay considers the long-standing challenges, in both practice and theory, to collaborative writing in the first-year classroom. I argue that Hannah Arendt's concepts of plurality and natality are useful frameworks for thinking constructively and practically about teaching argumentative writing through collaboration. I explore these concepts in terms of foundational scholarship on written collaboration, such as Candace Spigelman's work on writing groups and intellectual property, as well as recent considerations of evolving technological resources (Howard). Ultimately, thinking through Arendt, I offer examples from my own classroom practice, and also generate a series of questions designed to support instructors' incorporation of collaborative writing and thinking across their own diverse contexts. My goal here is not to suggest that there is a singular "best practice," but rather to demonstrate the ways in which Arendtian concepts can foster complex and scaffolded pedagogies of collaboration in the first-year classroom.

> [In-class conversations] may well produce, from time to time, consensually derived singular texts—but singular texts always animated by a self-conscious plurality, a polyphonic chorus of voices, whose difference—as well as sameness—speaks and is heard. Hannah Arendt has said that, 'For excellence, the presence of others is always required.' We agree. And so, in spite of our many unanswered questions, we believe that writing toward a pedagogy of collaboration is worth our efforts, for it holds the potential for allowing, finally and fully, for the presence of others. (Lunsford and Ede 125)

In their foundational effort to explore collaborative writing, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors*, Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede reference Hannah Arendt's notion of "plurality." Plurality, indispensable to Arendt's thinking, insists that our words and actions are given their greatest power by others. Action and plurality are inherently linked, for Arendt, because our "words and deeds" must occur in the presence of others to have any relevance to the human world. In fact, our contribution to the world as actors functions as a renewal, a regeneration, of the world. Accordingly, Arendt likens action to birth, which she terms "natality," because each time we "insert ourselves into the human world," the event is "like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original appearance" (Arendt 176). As I have argued in my book, *First Semester*, I believe Arendt has much conceptually to offer our field, particularly since her thinking is hinged so closely to lived, human realities; similarly, I see the need for theory in composition studies as inseparable from its usefulness to the classroom, to teaching, and to the generation of texts.{1} In this essay, I want to acknowledge long-standing concerns about the idea of collaboration and argue that, despite even her own wary resistance to the practice, Arendt's concepts offer a productive alternative framework for teaching the most effective kinds of collaborative thinking and writing in the first-year classroom.

Challenges on the Ground: The Benefits and Roadblocks of Collaboration

Our field has demonstrated sustained interest in collaborative writing and has produced a number of excellent scholarly accounts, including Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford's recent retrospective, *Writing Together*, but ongoing concerns—beginning with resistance to Bruffee's emphasis on consensus-building—continue to stall research on the uses of collaboration to teach written argument. {2} I am not interested in dismissing the validity of those concerns; my goal is, instead, to offer a way of thinking around them so that we can develop more informed and challenging pedagogies of collaboration, particularly at a moment when digital texts and our regularly networked lives have made collaboration an essential piece of our students' daily literacy practices. In their contribution to the newly updated *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Krista Kennedy and Rebecca Moore Howard write of

collaboration:

> Writing scholarship about individual-versus-collaborative writing has largely subsided. In its place has arisen a lively scholarly discussion about the ways in which digital media are challenging and changing how writers and instructors experience authorship, pedagogy, and literacy itself…When the first edition of this book was published in 2000, it was entirely plausible to write a chapter about collaboration that did not address collaborative writing in digital environments (Howard). Today that would be ridiculous. (38)

Ultimately, I want to pick up here, at a moment that acknowledges the very permanence of collaboration, and propose that our relative flood of opportunity calls for increased attention to an informed, theorized pedagogical approach in the first-year writing classroom. Arendtian thought, I will argue, offers key components that can shape assignment design, help us articulate goals and assess outcomes, and also share with students a wider justification and sense of need for the writing they—and we—do together.{3}

But we first must consider the disproportional difficulties many of us seem to have with collaborative writing if we are to establish a way of thinking more strategically about using it as part of our approach to instruction. At the 2007 Conference on College Composition and Communication, a distinguished panel featuring Lisa Ede, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Andrea Lunsford, Joyce Irene Middleton, Beverly Moss, and Jackie Jones-Royster, all long-practicing scholars of collaborative writing, described collaboration as "still the poor stepchild of humanities scholarship" (288). Still, over half a decade later, why are we, as scholars and teachers of writing, often only superficially committed to collaboration? Perhaps, as collaborative texts in humanities scholarship still struggle for full validation in tenure and promotion processes, we are understandably a bit detached. Further, if we collaborate little ourselves as scholars (and here I sit, writing alone), are we also less likely to use collaboration as a pedagogical tool for teaching writing?

Candace Spigelman's foundational work on writing groups and intellectual property remains indispensable to understanding the positioning of collaborative writing in our scholarship and our classrooms. In *Across Property Lines: Textual Ownership in Writing Groups*, Spigelman compares her observations of two writing groups: one, a group of college students participating in a required writing course and the other, a group of creative writers who choose to participate in a collective for the sake of valued peer review. She finds that student writers have a far more detailed, more constrictive set of rules regarding the treatment of a writer's ideas. Unspoken fears about "stealing" ideas infuse much of their collaboration with peers. The role of group members as critics of each other's writing becomes quite narrowly defined among students. In contrast, the participants in the optional creative writing group have far more flexible definitions of intellectual property and tend to embrace the insights of peer critique as inseparable from the formulation of the text, itself. With these notably distinctive differences, Spigelman highlights crucial difficulties for the use of collaborative writing in the required first-year writing course. Students' sense of themselves as writers comes into marked conflict with their sense of themselves as students, making ownership of the text complex and rooted in issues of authority. Accordingly, the real value of collaborative writing as a representation (or enactment) of the social nature of writing is perhaps undermined, or at least greatly challenged, by the negotiated spaces of textual ownership and intellectual property.

Spigelman explains that students' understanding of argument and writerly authority tends to define boundary lines about what aspects of writing a peer's insights may address. I quote her at some length to illustrate her point more fully:

> The student writers believed that the text's meaning had been placed 'in' the document by the primary writer and was complete at the time of reading. Textual meaning was stable; arguments were not negotiable. As a result, they were unwilling to press the arguments of fellow writers (even when these arguments were underdeveloped or unfocused). They assumed that the writer had a clear set of intentions (even when the writer confessed confusion) and that their role as readers was not to help to move the text in new or unanticipated directions but simply to 'say better' or more accurately what had already been written. (120)

To a certain extent, Bruffee anticipates such difficulty in his earlier work on the subject. He explains that, as writers, we attempt to "distinguish our own distinct, individual point of view from other people's points of view and demonstrate our individual authority" (55). As Spigelman notes, in students' steadfast commitment to the "stability" of a peer's text, there is some notion of the "individual" writer as having authority or some kind of personal claim to the text that another reader—or writer—must not disrupt.

While the boundaries drawn by Spigelman's novice writers might echo this personal quest for individuality, as well as a respect for this quest in others, there remains something dangerously noncommittal in students' reluctance to disrupt each other's texts and ideas. It is this very notion of individuality that seems to be, somewhat paradoxically,

at the heart of a kind of conformity that enacts students' disengagement with each other's ideas and plagues successful collaboration. James Crosswhite's description of this conformity speaks to the vague "allegiance" to individuality we see in Spigelman's subjects who "assumed that the writer had a clear set of intentions (even when the writer confessed confusion)." Crosswhite goes on to write of our "powerful drift towards conformity," one which is "so deep that we can be most social even while most isolated; in fact, conformity depends in part on a certain kind of isolation, an unwillingness to express our disagreements and test them by arguments in some public way" (952).{4} This aptly describes the "isolated" texts produced when students refuse to engage each other's writing in critical ways. Of course, for Arendt, the most dangerous kinds of collaboration stand to produce a level of conformity responsible for the crimes of Adolph Eichmann, the Nazi administrator and subject of Arendt's famous *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, who claimed to be merely following orders in facilitating, secondhand, the murders of millions of Jews (952). Though incomparable, students' mutual disengagement with each other's texts, also a kind of tacit conformity, does a certain kind of intellectual violence to the potential growth of their ideas in writing.

The most valuable collaborative texts are—at root—born of conflict, which, I will argue, underpins Arendtian thought in many respects. While more experienced writers may negotiate these kinds of written conflict all the time, it is this conflict that student writers most resist in their work with peers, as Spigelman's research indicates (and to which countless failed peer review sessions can attest). To think about a kind of writing pedagogy that sits squarely in this place of resistance is the core paradox of collaborative writing as an instructional tool. Lunsford and Ede have long-understood these complications in their earlier research on collaboration, noting "any attempt neatly to resolve the paradoxes and ambiguities that multiplied as our research progressed would radically oversimplify the phenomenon we were studying" (130).

These "complexities," as Arendt might say, do not lessen in the face of enhanced technology designed to facilitate collaboration. In "Collaboration, Literacy, Authorship: Using Social Networking to Engage the Wisdom of Teachers," Joe Moxley and Ryan Meehan discuss their earliest efforts at the University of South Florida to use online forums in which faculty and students can share ideas and construct texts.{5} Still, Moxley and Meehan attest that even the best efforts at collaboration "too often recede in the face of dissenters who see it as a threat to authorship and copyright" (Moxley and Meehan). Accordingly, we must contend with a necessary set of questions: How do we legitimize the nontraditional, collaborative text in the first-year writing classroom? How can we encourage students to disrupt the solitary text and to understand this disruption as essential to their growth as thinkers, and especially relevant to the continually changing landscape of textual production? And most importantly, for my purposes here: how does Arendtian thought provide a sturdy theoretical foundation on which to build this kind of pedagogical work?

An Arendtian Foundation: Natality, Plurality, and Record

While scholars have long-challenged us to embrace a conflict of ideas and distrust easy consensus, in "Fighting Without Hatred: Hannah Arendt's Agonistic Rhetoric" Patricia Roberts-Miller admits the difficulties this call might pose to students, for whom this kind of thinking may seem unfamiliar and even elitist (597). In part, some of the challenge for Roberts-Miller rests in using Arendt to distinguish between the agon, which she describes as "'a world into which one enters and by which one can be changed,'" and wrangling, which—in his response to Roberts-Miller, James Crosswhite describes as "succeed-at-all-costs-and-never-give-in combat" (593). In his discussion of Roberts-Miller's work, Crosswhite insists on the value of Arendt's ideas to effective writing pedagogy, demanding, "What would it take not only to theorize a logical distinction between agonistic rhetoric and wrangling but also to make use of the distinction in our practice and teaching?" (952). I want to pick up here with Arendt, transferring Crosswhite's treatment of Roberts-Miller's Arendtian agon into a way of thinking about the creation of collaborative texts, while drawing on some additional concepts in Arendt's work that might help us to make this theoretical link to writing pedagogy and especially to the digital reality in which we find ourselves together. As Crosswhite asserts, "Agonistic rhetoric and Arendtian thought are themselves ideas of this sort, capable of lighting up a direction for educational efforts and providing a measure for the actual thinking and communication we are attempting to understand and evaluate" (955).

Three major concepts in Hannah Arendt's work—natality, plurality, and work (or "record," as I will refer to it)—suggest an ongoing concern with our connection to others, a kind of interdependence of human exchange upon which the health of the "world" or "web of human relationships" depends (Arendt 188). The failure to continually renew our relationships to each other, to "insert ourselves into the human world," is a refusal to interrupt a course towards ruin. Arendt terms such renewal "natality," which is "the miracle that saves the world" (247). She explains that natality is "the birth of the new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born" (247){6}. Our inherent potential for natality means that the health of the world rests in our hands and requires that we be active and interactive participants. Arendt's valuing of natality—or new beginnings—underscores our shared need for each other, as our actions are insignificant without the presence of others. This brings us to Arendt's

understanding of "plurality," where the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others and neither for nor against them—that is, in sheer human togetherness" (180). While the spirit of "sheer human togetherness" at first seems to suggest a non-confrontational space, in fact it is our participation in this space that, eventually, leads to crucial conflicts. We cannot know how others will perceive us, how they will understand what we say and do, nor can we necessarily control such perception. Arendt explains, "Although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed and word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure" (180). This willingness to risk depends on two factors: first, an understanding that the human world, our network of relationships, depends on our participation (natality); and second, a trust that plurality, or human togetherness, can absorb and respond productively to our efforts at self-disclosure.

While an audience is immediately necessary for our greatest moments of action and speech—and for our best efforts at composing—Arendt argues in *The Human Condition* that we also need some kind of record, or memory, which outlives the moment. Arendt's term "work" describes, in part, the task of recording and preserving speech and action. Thus, the courage to "begin a story of one's own" in word and deed necessitates that this story can be shared, told, passed on from one generation to the next. I'd like to call this component of Arendtian work "record."{7} The creation of a record is essential not only so that subsequent generations may access events of the past, but also so that we may, in our own lifetimes, review our stories as they spin. We need to look back, periodically, in order to think about what we've done and what we'll do next.{8} Arendt explains that, without this record, our greatest words and deeds "will leave no trace, no product that might endure after the moment" (173). It is "homo faber," for Arendt, represented by writers, artists, poets, historiographers, and sculptors, which creates a lasting record and thus prevents this loss. She describes actors' potential loss in the face of an absent homo faber: "without them this only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all" (173).

Arendt argues, then, that great words and deeds need to be recorded, written down, for the sake of keeping their very greatness alive. Although in somewhat the opposite direction, I want to further this claim and argue that our not-so-great words and deeds deserve a record, too. Transgression and offense are facts of life in the acting and speaking world, sometimes despite even our best intentions. In a sense, plurality is to blame for our transgressions: if we weren't acting and speaking together, we'd be less likely to offend each other. However, plurality also allows life to go on despite the presence of human conflict and disagreement. Arendt explains that "trespassing," which is inevitable due to "the very nature of action's constant establishment of new relationships," needs "forgiving" so that the world's network of relationships may continue (197). Forgiveness is a "constant mutual release" from the mistakes we make unknowingly. Arendt writes that free agents need to be able to rethink and try again in order to "be trusted with so great a power as to begin something new" (197). Accordingly, we need each other, in the first place, to share in and absorb our revelatory moments of speech and action. But we also need each other, desperately, for the sake of forgiveness and release from those actions and words we wish we hadn't so boldly exerted. In other words, we need to be able to change our minds, to revise and remake the text. Only through sustained human relationships can we get the permission and the incentive to start over.{9} Of course, I see this idea of starting over as indispensible to writerly work.

Questions for Practice: Arendtian Concepts in the Writing Classroom

These three components of Arendtian thought—natality, plurality, and record—have much to offer a pedagogical approach to collaborative writing. Characteristic of Arendt's thought, her ideas often resist simple categorization and cannot be pulled apart without doing major damage to their complexity. Each concept is inherently dependent upon the others. When we think of the collaborative writing work we ask students to do, the question becomes how does it serve to create, as Roberts-Miller writes, "a world into which one enters and by which one can be changed"? The best kinds of collaborative writing assignments occasion a *space* where students learn through writing together that their ideas and their writing are expanded and actually made "better" by multiple voices. I want to argue that, pedagogically, a conscious effort to engage Arendt's concepts of natality, plurality, and record in students' experience of collaboration helps to facilitate Roberts-Miller's best hopes for the Arendtian agon in the writing class and, thus, foster students' development as writers of intellectual argument.

In an effort to determine the most valuable practical manifestation of Arendt's concepts, I have decided not to offer one model for collaborative writing, such as a single assignment that encompasses each component. Faculty interested in collaborative writing are at their best as teachers when they design their own assignments, those rooted in particular classrooms, readings, modalities, and cultural moments. Instead, my focus is on the inexplicable value of the question as a tool for translating theory into practice. I am struck by the well-known words of a dying Gertrude Stein who, when given no response to her first question, "'What is the answer?,'" refocused accordingly, "'In that case, what is the question?'" (Toklas 173). Ultimately, the roadblocks to effective collaborative writing assignments in first-year composition classrooms are very real on all sides of the pedagogical situation. However, if

we interrogate acts of collaboration—via assignments and classroom work—in terms of a series of questions informed by each of Arendt's concepts, we are better able to think beyond the ongoing challenges to collaboration long-acknowledged by scholars of written collaboration.

Natality

In a speech delivered to the Society of Christian Ethics close to the end of her life, Hannah Arendt likened her notion of natality to the writing experience. She noted that "all beginning, as every one of you know who ever wrote a paper, has an element of utter arbitrariness" (1). This arbitrariness, for Arendt, mirrors birth, or natality, as simultaneously meaningful, inevitable, and yet unpredictable. She explains, "This is an old notion of philosophy: that only that which cannot *not* be, is meaningful" (1). At least conceptually, collaborative writing assignments naturally respond to Arendt's ideas about natality. Writing together requires inserting our ideas into a kind of public forum where we at once need recognition and yet can't predict how others will respond. In fact, a collaborative text physically recreates this forum, where the words of one writer act upon the words of another, creating a record of the event. But when we think specifically about Arendt's criteria for natality, we need to question the terms upon which students enter into—or insert themselves into—the written exchange.

Arendt tells us that natality, revealing oneself before others, is about necessary risk-taking through which we establish our distinctiveness. While we may provide students with a public forum, today enhanced exponentially by digital tools, and even require that they post something there and respond to each other, Arendtian natality asks the following: Is the insertion, the risk the student takes in writing, not only a public one but also a necessary one? Beyond course requirements, are students given the opportunity to write on or about issues, and for actual causes, which strike them as inherently meaningful and necessary to how they understand themselves, what they need to learn, and why they are in school?{10} Why is sharing this issue with others, in writing, equally meaningful and necessary? This last question is particularly challenging to respond to honestly, especially when the collaborative writing assignment may be required for a course and is thus tied to a grade. Students must believe that writing collaboratively is necessary to achieving the goals that they have for their writing and ideas. Do our collaborative writing assignments reflect student-centered goals and facilitate the achievement of these goals? Secondly, does the collaborative writing effort maintain students' distinctiveness rather than blur their voices into a seemingly unified whole? Spigelman references Yancey and Spooner on this long-standing challenge: "'Writers want collaboration and they want separate identities, too'" (Spigelman 50). Ultimately this desire for uniqueness reinforces Arendt's argument that, in action, we appear before others as "distinctive" and exercise our inherent potential to "begin something new." Do our collaborative writing assignments effectively strike a balance where being distinctive also means being together? How? Kennedy and Howard remind us that these questions gain increased complexity as "commons-based peer production"—exemplified by massive collaborative writing projects like Wikipedia—is a readily accessible tool for finding and sharing information (46).

While posting responses to peers' blogs physically identifies one writer from another, we need to be strategic about asking students to explore and claim their own appearances in collaborative writing contexts, whatever their size and scope. Collaborative writing assignments not only ask students to write together or to each other, but also must ask students to analyze their exchanges, to chart the moments where their own arguments happen or shift. Collaborative texts invite us to analyze the moments where one writer's word choice or phrasing influences the very next thing another writer has to say.{11} If we intend to engage students in this inherent depth, we are inevitably forced to complicate the work we ask them to do with collaborative texts. In my own practice, I respond to these challenges, in part, by having students generate two texts: a conversational text with a peer where ideas are exchanged that then becomes a quotable secondary source material for use in a single-authored essay on the same subject. Ultimately, my goal here is to objectify the collaborative text as a source of argument support and analysis, asking students to draw on their collaborative texts to identify moments where their arguments are expanded and supported. By asking students to do this, I am simultaneously asking them to identify their own moments of "natality," distinction or assertion in the exchange. Such distinction could not happen without the collaborative text. I do not think there is simply one practical model for responding to Arendt's demands of natality in our collaborative writing assignments, but I do think if we pose these questions of our assignments, we inevitably must complicate what we do immensely.

Plurality

Arendt's definition of plurality requires us to think of being together as inherently necessary, just as natality is necessary to the continuation of the world by the introduction of new ideas and beginnings. Spigelman's analysis of voluntary creative writing groups (in contrast to the required group work of first-year writing classes) portrays this kind of valuing of togetherness central to Arendt's thinking. For the creative writing groups in Spigelman's research,

the presence of others, via spoken and written interaction on each piece of writing, is essential to the ultimate creation of any single-authored text. The most effective kinds of collaborative writing assignments challenge students to understand the written presence of peers and the act of casting their own writing into public view as ultimately essential to the viability of their ultimate textual product.

When Arendt explains the relationship between trespassing and forgiving, she speaks to this essential quality of plurality. She writes that trespassing "needs forgiving, dismissing, in order to make it possible for life to go on by constantly releasing men from what they have done unknowingly" (197). Plurality, or "sheer human togetherness," guarantees the potential for "constant mutual release" so that we might remain "free agents," able to continue in our inventions and contributions to the human world. Even avid bloggers rely on this kind of release, dependent upon the idea that readers will come back to the site to keep reading, despite or because of or throughout disagreements. Anything less would simply cast the blog into nonexistence.

When we create and evaluate collaborative writing assignments, we must assess the viability of plurality at their center. This means thinking beyond course requirements to get at what students, as writers, need each other *for*. What is the role of such mutual release in the first-year writing context? Perhaps our students need each other to acknowledge and then help each other to move beyond reading comprehension difficulties. Do our students need to "forgive each other," too, as Arendt's example seems to suggest? At first thought, students often have differing perspectives on crucial topics and these differences can cause strain in collaborative work. These differences ultimately need challenge, questioning, and also some kind of validation. Anything less—including complete disregard—casts such limited viewpoints out of the forum of public exchange, disqualifying their potential to be challenged and changed. While we might argue that students' more limited viewpoints don't deserve peers' attention, the fact remains that students stand to leave our classes, and their writing, with relatively unsophisticated viewpoints quite in place. Shouldn't writing in the first-year classroom be a vehicle for more complicated thinking?

I currently use collaborative writing as a tool for teaching expanded argument development and critical exploration. I have students generate a conversational text about a particular issue or topic, using a variety of technological tools and even a diverse approach to "text" itself, and then ask them to draw on this conversational text as a quotable, secondary source material when they write single-authored, argumentative essays. When I first began this kind of classroom work, I had students generate an email thread together about a particular topic; today the possibilities for digital, written collaboration are, of course, far more extensive, as Kennedy and Howard survey so well.{12} Further, I have encouraged students to find digital images, video, and audio recordings, or even to create their own, as a way of pushing ideas and challenging each other in the construction of single-authored arguments which, of course, need not occur in traditional print alone. Scholars of multimodal writing are expanding our sense of what's possible constantly, and I am merely nodding to some of these possibilities here.{13} For my purposes, these myriad pedagogical opportunities are a manifestation of both Arendtian natality and plurality via a kind of textual relationship between students. They can attempt any argument they want to make in single-authored texts, but they need to do so via substantive engagement with the written perspective of a peer. This means they could quote an exchange with a peer in order to advance their argument through disagreement or questioning of the peer's words; regardless, they must engage and substantiate their positions by linking thoughtfully into the collaborative text. Ultimately, my hope here is that such engagement illustrates for students, both practically and theoretically, that their strongest and most sophisticated arguments are those that are necessarily complicated by exchange. Arendtian plurality tells us that we can only argue our "side" successfully when we are intellectually present and responsive to each other. Convincing arguments, in other words, are not made in the privacy of our own minds. When we design writing assignments that ask for such substantiation, we insist that knowledge is not made in isolation and we disrupt limited ideas about impenetrable, singular texts. This disruption becomes all the more poignant as we engage students in "wide collaboration" tools, such as public wikis, which—for Kennedy and Howard—forces them to "move frequently between being writers and being readers" (49). This "blurring of…roles" may further challenge students' sense of their arguments as insulated or separate, while also illustrating their agency in shaping a text with their own contribution.

Record

The collaborative text is a product of *both* Arendtian plurality and natality, a record of an act of self-disclosure (at least, a kind of writerly self or persona), and becomes a lasting document for further exploration. Without textual "records" of students' acting together, created by friction and exchange with others, the significance of natality would be lost. According to Arendt, the work we do with our hands is a physical extension of "a blueprint in which the image has already found a tentative materialization through work" (140). She extends this notion to the written text, as well, as a kind of physical manifestation of a mental blueprint. Arendt understands the physical product as a force that relates us to each other, gives us a history over time, and prevents our existence from being simply swept away

by the progress of time and nature. She explains:

> Men…can retrieve their sameness, that is, their identity, by being related to the same chair and the same table. In other words, against the subjectivity of men stands the objectivity of the man-made world rather than the sublime indifference of an untouched nature. (Arendt 137)

By "sameness" Arendt points to what we all have in common, inherent in our "identity": the fact that we each possess something "new and revolutionary" by virtue of being born (Arendt 192). We are tied together by the historical presence of what we have made, the objects we have shared over time; however, we are also "subjective" creatures, diverse and distinctive throughout our history together. My pedagogical effort to have students first generate conversational texts and then draw on those texts in order to complicate, substantiate, and interrogate the arguments enacted in their single-authored texts depends upon each of Arendt's concepts working in concert.

The physical text becomes a place to explore this relationship between human beings and their creations. The rationale for portfolio review exemplifies this relationship well: the documents in a writing portfolio allow a writer to chart her development via textual artifacts that stretch across a period of time. A collaborative text takes this foundational concept and expands it in important ways. When our students write collaboratively, whether in dialogue or as co-writers of a singular text, we are left with an object produced by subjective, distinctive, individual writers. The pedagogical challenge here is, as Arendt's thinking seems to suggest, to objectify this text as a comparative backdrop, even a meeting place, for understanding our own subjectivity and distinction. The "fact" of this distinction is what we share—our potential for doing something new—and analysis of the collaborative text encourages the exploration of what at once binds and separates us from each other. This is true, I believe, for our work as teachers with students who need so desperately to trace and chart their own distinctions, but also for our work as scholars— writers, ourselves—who stand to learn tremendously from the veins of our own collaborations, even when the texts we ultimately produce are single-authored.

The collaborative text is a place to "retrieve," as Arendt writes, our writerly identity, however constructed, via mutual relation to the same object (the text) over time. It is at once a symbol of commonality, that writers have made something collaboratively, and also of difference, that there is more than one author. The importance Arendt places on the products of our work, what I am calling "record," invites important questions about what we do with our collaborative texts. What pedagogical use do we make of such a record? When we think about collaborative writing assignments, does the ensuing text stand to become part of the course material, an artifact of writers coming together, a record worthy of further inquiry? How might we use collaborative texts as a tool for writers' self-assessment? As a kind of map for students to follow in order to understand and design the arguments they will make in later single-authored essays, for example?

The most effective collaborative writing assignments utilize the emerging text as a significant pedagogical tool. The collaborative text must be a resource for writers, as it signifies a meeting place where they can find and trace where viewpoints touch and diverge. Collaborative writing assignments present not only a "paper trail," but a record of our students' dialogue with others, their attempts to share ideas and make sense to one another. In a dialogic text, where students are writing to each other about a particular idea or topic, we see Arendt's mental blueprint take physical form in the words used in peer exchange. Students must make careful choices about how to represent their ideas if they want a peer to understand, to be interested, to be willing to keep reading. The collaborative text should be objectified for students as a text for further study: Why did they make certain choices about language in explaining their observations or ideas? How did a peer's word choices impact their own reading or receptivity to an idea? Can they explain this relationship between delivery—the physical manifestation of the mental blueprint or idea —and reception? When student collaboration informs either multiple or single-authored texts, the work of tracing this influence is a pedagogical opportunity. When I ask students to draw on a dialogic text with peers in order to build and substantiate arguments in later single-authored texts, we first work together in class to identify moments where the written exchange with peers informed, complicated, or expanded their own thinking processes.

From Questions to Answers: A Call for Further Conversation

Collaborative writing assignments engage students—through the creation of physical texts—with the ideas and diverse vantage points of their peers. Without this kind of engagement, students never learn to think beyond their own walls. They show up to class with ideas long-nurtured before their arrival at college, and they leave with those notions unchallenged, unquestioned, unexplored. Writing to and with someone else helps students experience writing as a medium for thinking, for the growth and exchange of ideas. Arendt's ultimate request in *The Human Condition* is precisely that we resist the complacent failure to think. She describes her fears about this common, but dangerous, phenomenon, "the heedless recklessness or hopeless confusion or complacent repetition of 'truths'

which have become trivial or empty," and asks simply that we "think what we are doing" (5). Inherent in Arendt's public sphere is the belief that we have to share our ideas with each other; this requirement occasions the kind of complexity that saves us from the "complacent repetitions of 'truths.'" We need others to challenge us with the "whys" and the "so whats," and we need to figure out how to explain ourselves together, in the context of thinking outside of our own knowledge, experiences, and vantage points.

Arendt's model is useful and notably complex because each theoretical component must be accounted for simultaneously for the system to work. When we take these concepts and use them as a theoretical marker for shaping our collaborative writing assignments, we feel this complex balance and tension at work. My hope is that writing teachers will wrestle with these concepts, apply them to efforts at collaborative writing assignment design, and explore the results. The reality of digital tools and environments today makes this work only more pressing. How do our collaborative writing assignments change when we attempt to account for the kinds of theoretical questions that Arendt's concepts raise? As we revise our assignments, what happens to our students' writing? Is it significantly different? In what ways?

While I value Arendt's work deeply and contend that thinking through her ideas has informed and deepened my pedagogical practice, I want to close on a realistic note. Students may be resistant to the fullest kinds of critical engagement with peers, may not see the potential in collaboration or, even if they do believe collaboration may improve their writing, may not possess the motivation for further improvement. To a certain extent, I believe students have a right to set their own boundaries. However, I do demonstrate, through assessment-based incentives, the level of intellectual collaboration I expect and value, and I reward student work accordingly. I establish assessment criteria that ask them to value the voices of peers, to cite and quote their peers in the development of their own arguments. I also invite routine, open reflection in class about the effectiveness of our attempts at collaboration and encourage students' critical suggestions for improvement in our collaborative work together. This is, of course, merely one approach and others have carved out exciting and elaborate assessment models for collaborative writing.{14}

That our students may not see the first-year writing classroom and academic argument, in particular, as a medium for thinking and writing together is important. Students who have been reticent in class have assured me that, in fact, they often passionately discussed the issues the class raised in the privacy of their friendships; the danger here is that, instead of reaching outwards towards difference, our students may talk to those they perceive to hold the same opinions. While this response is significant on a social level, it is especially relevant to the extent that we teach writing as thinking, as argument development, and as a form of communication. In disrupting the notion that writing, like intimate friendship, is private and closed off, we invite students to understand writing as learning, rather than a means of communicating single-minded answers. This notion is inherently Arendtian: in relying on others to see and hear, we ultimately discover our own distinctions.

Notes

1. Restaino, J. *First Semester: Graduate Students, Teaching Writing, and the Challenge of Middle Ground.* Studies in Writing and Rhetoric. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press. 2012. (Return to text.)

2. See Moore Howard, Rebecca. "Collaborative Pedagogy." *Composition Pedagogies.* Ed. Tate, Rupiper, and Schick. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. 54-70.
   Tips from Howard's piece can be found at http://wrt-howard.syr.edu/Handouts/Tchg.Collab.html
   It is worth noting, too, that only seven references listed among Howard's works cited are dated after 1995; the remaining fifty-nine sources occur 1995 or earlier (mostly much earlier).
   See also Sheryl Fontaine and Susan Hunter's *Collaborative Writing in Composition Studies* (2006), which introduces undergraduate and graduate students of advanced composition to collaborative writing as a source of scholarly interest.
   For a useful discussion of critiques of collaborative writing, see Darin Payne's essay, "Collaborative Learning and Cultural Reproduction in Cyberspace: Publishing Students in Electronic Environments." *Journal of Electronic Publishing.* 6:1 (2000). http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx? c=jep;view=text;rgn=main;idno=3336451.0006.109. 8 January 2010. (Return to text.)

3. In her 2002 essay, "Fighting Without Hatred: Hannah Arendt's Agonistic Rhetoric," Patricia Roberts-Miller lays important groundwork for the use of Arendt to theorize pedagogies of collaboration, drawing on Arendt in an effort to highlight the at once overlapping and contradictory goals of collaborative and agonistic rhetoric and argue for the value of a kind of public "agon" in the writing classroom. In his review of Roberts-Miller's essay, James Crosswhite hails Roberts-Miller's thinking while lamenting her admitted reservations about the viability of Arendt's agon. (Return to text.)

4. See Patricia Roberts-Miller's "Fighting Without Hatred: Hannah Arendt's Agonistic Rhetoric" (2002); see also Crosswhite's response, "Conflict in Concert: Fighting Hannah Arendt's Good Fight" (2002), both published in *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory.* ([Return to text.](#))

5. Moxley and Meehan's online essay (http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/12.1/index.html) links readers to useful social networks where students and faculty at USF are collaborating. Please visit the site for examples of collaborative writing efforts that use current technology. ([Return to text.](#))

6. While Arendt's language is admittedly limiting in its exclusive use of masculine referents and, while much of her work seems on the surface dismissive of issues of gender, scholars have made important strides in understanding the significance of Arendt's analyses to feminist concerns. See especially Bonnie Honig's edited collection, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt.* State College: Penn State University Press, 1995. ([Return to text.](#))

7. My use of the term "record" is an adaptation of one piece of Arendt's concept of "work"; in my use of this term, I am representing the end product of the toils of Arendt's homo faber, or "worker." ([Return to text.](#))

8. Our need to reflect, assess, and make decisions speaks to Arendt's ideas about judging. These can be traced throughout her work, but largely come together in her unfinished, posthumous text, *The Life of the Mind* (1978). For a thoughtful discussion of Arendtian judging and how education has a responsibility to teach students this skill, see Stacey Smith's "Education for Judgment: An Arendtian Oxymoron?" in Mordechai Gordon, Ed. *Hannah Arendt and Education: Renewing Our Common World* (2001). ([Return to text.](#))

9. Similar to forgiving in its dependency on plurality, Arendt also discusses "promising" in *The Human Condition* as an extension of our actions together. I have not included promising in my discussion here, but it does play a prominent role in Arendt's thinking about the capacity of human togetherness. ([Return to text.](#))

10. See especially Russel Durst's book, *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition.* Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1999. Durst offers a thoughtful exploration of student attitudes about their educational goals and in the composition classroom context. ([Return to text.](#))

11. Flower, Fleming, and Long's work on "rivaling" seems relevant here, though she applies the practice to students' community-based writing and asks that they isolate and attempt to write from alternate perspectives (those of other authors, community partners) in their own writing. See especially the collection by Long, Fleming, and Flowers (Eds), *Learning to Rival: A Literate Practice for Intercultural Inquiry* (Routledge, 2000) for useful discussion of this practice. ([Return to text.](#))

12. Again, see Kennedy and Howard, "Collaborative Writing: Print to Digital." ([Return to text.](#))

13. See especially Claire Lutkewitte, *Multimodal Composition: A Critical Sourcebook.* (Bedford/St. Martin, 2013). ([Return to text.](#))

14. See especially Holdstein, Deborah H. "The Institutional Agenda, Collaboration, and Writing Assessment." *Writing With: New Directions in Collaborative Teaching, Learning, and Research.* Ed. Sally Barr Reagan, Thomas Fox, and David Bleich. Albany, NY: SUNY P, 1994. 77-88. ([Return to text.](#))

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