A new wave of community arts projects has opened up exciting areas of cross-cultural creativity in recent years. These collaborations of local people, arts facilitators, anthropologists and supporting organisations represent a flourishing new form of arts-based collaborative anthropology that aims to document the stories and cultures of local people using creative art forms. Often focusing on social and cultural agendas, from education and health promotion to advocacy and cultural heritage preservation, participants bring together methods historically linked to anthropology with those from the arts and community development.

Side by Side? Community Art and the Challenge of Co-Creativity investigates these creative projects as sites of significant cultural creation and potential social change. Through the exploration of a range of diverse collaborations, the common threads and historical contexts in this domain of cultural creativity are examined. The role that creative arts collaborations can have in disrupting existing hierarchies of social power and knowledge creation is analysed, as are the potential futures, historical and cultural implications of these co-creative practices.

Drawing on the experiences and reflections of over 30 facilitators from more than 7 countries, and written by an experienced collaborative arts practitioner and researcher, this exciting book will play a defining role in the emerging critical discourse on collaborative art and collaborative anthropology. It is essential reading for collaborative anthropologists, arts facilitators and others who aim to collaborate cross-culturally, as well as students of art, anthropology, and related subjects.

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Side by Side?
Community Art and the Challenge of Co-Creativity

Maya Haviland
3 Interview with Rachel Breunlin

The Neighborhood Story Project

I have known the co-founder and director of the Neighborhood Story Project (NSP), Rachel Breunlin, for over ten years. We share a passion for creative documentary work and have often reflected together on our respective practices, and collaborated on creative projects when opportunities have presented. The following text is an edited transcript of a conversation between Rachel and myself on 12 December, 2009 (updated for this book). It provides insight into the lived experience of one collaborative ethnography facilitator working with creative art forms, and the ways in which Rachel’s collaborative ethnographic practices have developed and formed into the organizational structure of the NSP. Given how much facilitator interests, experiences and agendas shape collaborative practices, understanding their roots and professional trajectories gives insight into their collaborative productions and the organizations that form around them.

Since 2004, the NSP has published over fourteen books, each produced using their model of collaborative ethnography and community book-making. They publish and sell books as a way to support their ongoing program and to generate income for community authors. The particulars of Rachel’s story are unique to her, the Neighborhood Story Project and the specificities of life and work in New Orleans. However the broader trajectories, partnerships, organizational and personal dynamics she describes resonate with the experiences of many other collaborative art and anthropology projects and practitioners. This interview frames two of the case studies discussed in Chapter 4, which were collaborations between Rachel and me.

We recorded this conversation as we sat with her then baby son Max in the living room in her house in the Seventh Ward of New Orleans and spoke about the work of the Neighborhood Story Project. A few days before our conversation, the NSP had launched their latest round of books written by young people from John McDonogh Senior High School. I began by asking Rachel to tell me about how she got involved with collaborative ethnography.

RB: One of the main ways that I came up in book-making was the DIY scene-making. In 1999, I was doing a callout. Brian Azcona and I put up a bunch of fliers around town saying we wanted to start an independent media project. One of the people who responded to that was Alec “Icky”
Dunn. He lived in a very awesome warehouse space with a bunch of other artists called Nowe Miasto (“New Town” in Polish). They had organized themselves, gotten a lease, and built out the space.

Icky runs a zine called Nosedive, and now is the co-editor of Signal. Both are very popular within the DIY network nationally. Through him I got to know people who make their own media, and I really liked that. The two of us worked on a lot of stories together that went up on a website we created called New Orleans Public Forum. We were interested in how cities had changed through urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. We’d take bike rides through backstreets or fucked up industrial zones, and then write stories about how spaces like these ended up in the middle of the city. I became really interested in a neighborhood called the Third Ward, which is where City Hall is now. It was where Buddy Bolden and Louis Armstrong first started to play music—one of the first stomping grounds of jazz. It also had this very integrated corridor called South Rampart Street, which was a business district created during segregation for anyone who wasn’t white enough to shop on Canal Street.

When Icky decided to leave New Orleans I made him a zine as a going away present. I’d never done one before and it was pretty rough—a series of snapshots, more like a photo album than a zine, without a real cover because it was just meant for him. Nice friend that he is, he wrote me this letter and told me things that I should do to make it better. He thought it could be distributed more widely.

My next door neighbor, Louis Henderson, used to work for a Jewish tailor on South Rampart Street, and he loved that I was working on a project on the Third Ward—this young, white lady not from New Orleans. When he was around his other friends, he’d be like, “Rachel’s working on this project,” and then he’d tell me about friends who lived there too and say, “Call up Frank Lazard. I’ll take you over, and you can talk to him about the Third Ward.”

The second round of the zine I built up around an interview between the two of them and me. I pulled my voice out. It’s just them dialoguing about the Third Ward. That was the backbone of it. Then I got introduced to “Papa” Joe Glasper, who ran a small jazz club in the Tremé called Joe’s Cozy Corner, through Mr. Henderson as well. He grew up in the Third Ward, and I wanted to do an interview with him. When I finished the zine, I gave Papa Joe a copy to look at. He liked it so much that he started asking for copies and put them in his bar. When other people from the Third Ward came in, he would give them out. He was also open to letting me do interviews with him. That’s how I got to do my master’s thesis of Joe’s Cozy Corner. It was my moment of learning about giving back and having projects that move back into the community’s hands.

MH: Can you tell me a bit about the beginnings of the Neighborhood Story Project?
RB: While I was in graduate school in 2001–2003, I had a graduate assistantship in Women’s Studies at the University of New Orleans (UNO). They got a grant to hire me to do some work in a public high school. I said, “Well, I’ll just work in the school closest to my house so that I can get to know the neighborhood kids.” A writing program called Students at the Center (SAC) was at John McDonogh Senior High, too, so I asked if I could partner with them. SAC was run by Jim Randels and Kalamu ya Salaam, They had gotten a large grant to buy out teachers’ time so that they could run writing workshops in the schools with only fifteen students or less—to really work with texts that the students were producing. In a classroom of over thirty, you couldn’t tackle that much work. SAC means students at the center of the learning experience (see Buras et al. 2010). I got mentored in teaching through them. I didn’t have any training as a teacher except what was built into the way SAC ran their organization. Teachers from schools all over the area got together once a month to share what they were doing. I liked it so much I asked if I could teach in the program while I finished graduate school.

SAC wanted its teachers to create publications that would inspire students to think of audiences outside of a classroom. They also ran a newspaper that gave the students opportunities to publish. With my own classes, I put together little books of the students’ writing. They were somewhere between a zine and a booklet. The students love to read each other’s writing. I remember that being one of the most exciting things. It was worth doing a little push to make these books because then I could use them as texts in the classroom. I didn’t realize that this was the beginning of a very long relationship with working with other people’s writing, and book-making in general, but, in retrospect, it was a good entrée for me, too—it built up my confidence that I could create publications that would have significance to the people working on the projects with me, as well as a broader audience.

One of the other teachers in the program was Abram Himelstein. I already knew him a little bit through a mutual friend. Sometimes we’d end up drinking together at Molly’s in the French Quarter. I didn’t really realize how much media work Abram had done. I didn’t realize he had published Tales of a Punk Rock Nothing (Himelstein and Schweser 1998). I knew him much more in his capacity as a teacher. We did some little collaborative projects together as teachers. I think when he saw that these little books were having an impact it made total sense to him. As I was finishing grad school, he told me that he had a project in mind. Ten students were going to make ten books about different blocks around the city, and then have block parties to celebrate. He was going to pay them and do it all in one semester. I remembered how hard it was to get the kids to do even one piece of finished writing, and was like, “Ha ha ha, good luck with that.” It sounded way, way out of control. But he was serious. For a while he partnered with Sarah DeBacher (who is now the director of the Greater New Orleans Writing Project) and got an AmeriCorps position to launch the project. AmeriCorps is similar to the Peace Corps but rather
than working overseas, the positions are within the United States. It was a step down in some ways in Abram’s career—money-wise and sort of prestige-wise—because he had been this radical book-maker, publisher, and had been a successful classroom teacher for a long time. It was definitely a professional gamble. He worked on developing the model for a semester, and when Sarah had other obligations that meant she couldn’t teach the class, he started recruiting me to do it with him instead.

I wasn’t sure I wanted to. Part of me wanted to move on from John Mac, but the students were what always kept me there. One of them closest to my heart, Ashley Nelson, wanted to do the program, and I thought that she would be really good at it. One of Abram’s best students from John Mac, Sam Wylie, did as well, and through Sam we got his sister Arlet. To recruit other participants, we decided to target students who had almost passed the LEAP, which is the standardized test that you have to pass to graduate. We asked the principal at the time to give us a list of students who fell into that category, because we thought a writing program would help push them forward enough to pass.

The first set of five books has students at different levels of writing. We had Ashley, who’s extremely verbal and had definitely passed that part of the LEAP and the same with Sam and Arlet, but then we had a number of other writers that really had no sense of storytelling when they first came to us and had to learn from us and the other students. That’s how we rolled the first year.

Although the books were meant to be made over a semester, we were making the curriculum up as we were going along. We didn’t really have a sense of what the books were going to look like. We hadn’t really thought through how the interviews were going to be. That’s where my background in ethnography came in. Abram was thinking that they would just jot down notes from the interviews, but I started to see what kind of amazing access we were getting to stories around the city that were hard to get to otherwise. I felt like the opportunity was too good to just let the kids jot some notes down.

We got handheld tape recorders with mini tapes and gave them to the kids to do the interviews. Even though I trained them in how to do it, when they came back, they were horrible, horrible interviews. I realized we needed to help facilitate them. Just being a presence in the room helped people talk about their lives without the casual shorthand that they had developed with family and close friends, but I also modelled how to do interviews for the students—scaffolding them.

Once I saw how successful this method was, I got very fixated on doing all the interviews this way and refused to budge. That meant that it was going to be a year-long project. Then came the question of how we were going to transcribe and edit all these interviews. Abram was raising bits and pieces of money, but there wasn’t much to go around. We had his AmeriCorps position that first semester, and then we paid me $5,000, because that’s how much a John Mac SAC class would pay. The second
semester, his year at AmeriCorps was over, and the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans took him on as a member of the staff where he had other obligations, but also could work on the Neighborhood Story Project. The Literacy Alliance is an organization that advocates and then creates programs to address the literacy issues in New Orleans.

I was teaching an adjunct class in the Department of Anthropology at the University of New Orleans. We asked Bob Cashner, the dean of the graduate school, to help create a position for me to run the NSP at the university. Bob pulled together funding from the graduate school, urban studies, education, and the college of liberal arts. The position paid $28,000, and I just thought that was the most money of all time! I was like, “Holy shit, $28,000.” That was a big difference from $5,000!

MH: What was the process of the Neighborhood Story Project becoming an entity in its own right?

RB: There’s always been a lot of different unwieldy components to the NSP. The first few years we were our own publishing house with different fiscal agents. After a few years, as we started creating more books and more money was coming through the organization, we began to transition to our own non-profit and developed a closer relationship with UNO.

Of course, it’s hard to know how the Neighborhood Story Project would have evolved if Hurricane Katrina had never happened. I think one of the tensions and good things in my relationship with Abram is that he had really seen the NSP as a youth program. I really liked doing the youth programming, but because of my background in ethnography—doing interviews and writing all over the city—I didn’t want it to only be youth focussed. But that’s hard on an organizational level for a lot of reasons. If you have a narrow thing that you do in the world, people attach to that and they can expect the same thing from you. You can develop a model for doing it, and are fundable with granting organizations. Working with young people is obviously always a sexy, fundable project on many levels.

Just thinking about organizational structure and grants—one of the reasons that Abram and I started the Neighborhood Story Project was because the Students at the Center program had to really scale back after a five-year Baptist Community Ministry grant ran out. Organizationally, you can really hit the jackpot with that grant. It’s very flexible money. It’s a lot of money, and it allowed them to create this amazing network of teachers. If you followed what everyone who worked in that program is doing now, it would be a pretty cool collection of stories. The same thing happened with the Literacy Alliance. They’d gotten a five-year grant from them, but when it ran out, they were in a fiscal crunch, and their board said that the NSP had grown too much and that they wouldn’t be able to support Abram’s position any longer. As all this is happening, my position settled in at UNO so we started doing organizational mapping within the university to try to get Abram a position
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over there. He eventually got a position at UNO in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, which is part of the College of Education.

After Abram came on board at UNO, we started to file our paperwork for a nonprofit so that we wouldn’t be in a limbo position with our money, but it was no fun to do that paperwork, and we were without any fiscal agent while the nonprofit status went through. But even if with that status, you have to be adaptable. Things continually change. After a few years, our non-profit partnered with UNO Press. Abram is now the editor-in-chief over that whole enterprise, and the NSP is an imprint. We raise the money for the books through the nonprofit and UNO Press publishes them.

MH: Why do you think it’s beneficial to have a relationship with UNO? Why is it better to be there as opposed to just being completely an independent nonprofit that doesn’t have those relationships?

RB: The main one is having salary relief. In the nonprofit world, it’s very difficult to generate salary money. What people say about the nonprofit industrial complex is that you start chasing specific grants to be able to cover your staff. For a long time, we didn’t have to do that because UNO gave us the flexibility to have that baseline. We chased money for specific projects we wanted to do, but we didn’t have to stop everything for months at an end to find money for me or for Abram. But when a grant that we used to fund the other staff positions ran out, we had a real strain on our organization to find other money. We often took on other contract work to cover their salaries—work we probably wouldn’t have done otherwise—and that became a slippery slope. We eventually decided to work with graduate students in the university rather than fund full-time staff positions so we could stay more focused on work that directly related to the mission of the organization.

In the world of anthropology and collaborative ethnography, there’s all this hand-wringing around the exploitative nature of ethnography, the politics of representation, and people building careers off of the stories of others. What can we do about this? Should we pay our informant? That doesn’t help them develop any capital except for a little petty cash. There’s a lot of questions around power shifting that are happening within the discipline. To use the Neighborhood Story Project as a model is to say,

‘Okay. Here’s two things that are happening: one, the university is creating space to facilitate collaborative ethnography, recognizing that it’s time-intensive; and two, that there’s going to be an organizational structure that redistributes some of the wealth and cultural capital that comes with these kinds of projects through supporting our writers to make money from their work.’

I believe in public education, and that’s why I like working at UNO. I like the diversity of kids at UNO. I like being with people who are fledgling
media-makers—how excited they get about the *Neighborhood Story Project* as a model for thinking about how they want to do their work in the world.

On a political level, UNO was the first racially integrated four-year university in the South. It wasn’t heroic in its execution, but it was still an important shift at the time. Politically, I believe in having public higher education. I believe in having that as a resource for our city. Sometimes I wish the campus were in the middle of the city and not out by the lake! But that’s also why I like how our workshop space in the Seventh Ward says “University of New Orleans” on the door, so that the kids going by are like, “In my neighborhood, I’ve got a place where people make books, and it’s part of the University of New Orleans.” I feel like that’s an important paradigm shift. We stayed at John Mac until it got taken over by an out-of-state charter, and now the school no longer exists. At the end, even though it wasn’t the same school as it had been, it was still hard to say goodbye. I always felt like the school was the best teacher I’ve ever had in New Orleans. The depth and complexity of what I’ve come to know about the city started there—I just had to be patient enough to learn it.

MH: Can you talk a little bit about how you see NSP as an educational project? You guys are really trying to model a kind of educational process that has many different aspects to it . . .

RB: There’s a whole model in this city around how to make it in the music industry. Obviously, people can get raised up in the jazz tradition (see Barnes and Breunlin 2014). But in the last twenty-five years, there’s a whole network of models around starting your own record label like Cash Money that have started in this city. It is a viable model that people can see, and you can actually make money off of. The cool thing about this city is the music’s not just generated here, and then produced out somewhere else, but has a homegrown means of production happening.

Perhaps on a different scale, we would like people to see book-making work like that here. You can have the means of production—that’s what DIY has always been, do-it-yourself. And in so many levels, that’s what the city is about. In terms of teaching young people, I like honoring what’s going on in their lives, I like introducing them to the sociological imagination—connecting their experiences to the larger social and cultural things that are going on and understanding their place in that and also the current contemporary cultural dynamics that are happening.

That’s the way I like to teach. It takes the kids a while to get a critical framework like that. I was just thinking, as these most recent books are getting finished, I probably could’ve told you after the first of the year what I thought were some of the best elements of the stories and things that needed to be explored and talked about, but you can’t push the kids until they’re ready to do those things. You can do a little bit at a time. And, you know, after two and a half years, they’re ready to take on the harder stuff. For
instance, for years, I would propose to Susan Henry, who wrote *From My Mother’s House of Beauty* (Henry 2009), “Let’s do some writing about your life in La Ceiba, Honduras.” And she’d always be like, “No.” In the end, that was a big part of her book and her story about immigration to New Orleans.

Or understanding this combination of close-knit community and isolation that happens sometimes when living in public housing in New Orleans. It was only, I think, even eight months ago that Kenneth started talking about how we were the closest white people in his life—he hadn’t had any kind of intimacy around that. And he didn’t have any kind of language to really talk about that before he started writing some pieces about not leaving the St. Bernard Public Housing Development and come to think about that differently.

It just takes a long time. I remember my mom saying, “You’re not ready to hear it until you can hear it.” And that’s the process—that’s the combination of teaching them how to write, but also teaching them to have this critical lens. Basically, doing some ethnography with them, asking the kind of questions you would ask as an ethnographer to get them to help them push their own experiences out into the world more. And then teaching them how to do the interviews.

I teach a collaborative ethnography class at UNO where I do the same thing with the college students, and the same cycles happen. It’s important to have people become familiar with the creative cycle, which is a very different model than you get taught in school, unless you’re in art school or architecture studio. A studio model of learning includes critique and workshop. Everyone has freak-outs that come from not being told exactly what to do. They have to learn what a creative crisis is, and how that is a natural part of the cycle. I was not raised up with that model of learning. I had to learn it all myself, and you get to know yourself in a very different way when that’s your cycle of learning and not, “Here’s your test, here’s your writing assignment” with a straight line to the goal. I don’t want people to have to recreate that wheel over and over again. I liked doing the book with Nine Times Social and Pleasure Club (2006) because they were familiar with a collective, creative cycle, and they understood the hunger that you end with—the fire that starts you off to do it again.

MH: Yeah. Are you seeing that coming off in people that you’ve worked with?

RB: Oh, yeah. Everyone talks about wanting to do another book.

MH: And you’re like, “No.”

(Laughter)

RB: Daron Crawford asked me, “When can I start on my next book?” I said, “Why don’t you enjoy the cycle of this book, because it’s just begun to enter the world.”
MH: So can you talk a little bit about the life that books have had after they’ve been released?

RB: In an academic press if you’re just getting a standard kind of publishing deal, they maybe print 1,000. And maybe, if you’re lucky, 500 of those are sold, mostly to libraries. You’re talking about very specialised audiences. Helen Regis, who is an anthropologist on our board, and I have talked a lot about the academic ghetto. You can do this great work, but until recently, when articles started moving into search engines like Google, they really didn’t get a wide distribution. Many of them still do not get redistributed in meaningful ways to the people that are the subjects of the research.

The Neighborhood Story Project has been able to create another model because we have our own means of production. There have been some detriments. If we put out a book fast, we may miss the larger media machines, and the marketing industry. Other times we’ll hit it. We are good at creating events ourselves. But we can sell a lot of books, and we want people to sell them themselves, too, and see that as an income generator for them if that’s what they want. We have sold over 40,000 copies of our books.

One reason why we did the House of Dance and Feathers (Breunlin and Lewis 2009) was that I thought there would be a built-in audience to sell books. You know, people are always going to come to Ronald’s museum because of an interest in Mardi Gras Indian “suits” and second line parades—black performance traditions in the city that are rooted in the African diaspora—and break down a lot of the Western conceptions of who is the audience and who is the performer. When you go to the museum, you get a chance to experience some of that call and response, and you’re going to want to take something away besides a bumper sticker, although the bumper stickers are cool. A book can make money, and it can be an income generator for the Neighborhood Story Project, too. And with Nine Times, we always thought about how people sell stuff on the streets at parades all the time—soft drinks, beer, sweet potato pies—and were excited that they sold their own book.

Outside of relationships between facilitators of this project and our writers—which is an ongoing, intense bond—there’s also how the books move into the bookstores and then have these larger lives that live outside of what we can directly do. We think about it in terms of the kinds of conversations that books can open up in this city. People use them for classes—they often get chosen for an anthropology or a sociology class, and often we won’t even know about it. And then someone will see me and be like, “Oh, I read your book in so-and-so’s class.” In 2007 the Nine Times book was chosen for the “One Book One New Orleans” citywide reading campaign.

We want the books to be visually beautiful so that they’re compelling to read. In the Seventh Ward, there’s a more than a forty per cent functional illiteracy rate. If you looked at the statistics for the Ninth Ward, they’re probably just as bad or worse. You’re talking about doing projects with communities that are not intensely book-focussed. How
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Do you create books for those communities? One aspect is just the subject matter, but having beautiful images and design is a way to draw people in and then get them to read the stories. We want a beautiful object that honors the work and the stories. There’s lots of projects that generate great work, but they don’t have money for packaging in terms of the design and the printing. They might choose an oversized font that makes the book look like something for a child or undersized font that discourages people who don’t read very much to dive into the text.

Gareth (our designer) designed the covers of the first books after Blue Note Jazz Records. I feel like he’s designed with longevity in mind instead of the one particular style of the moment. None of our media’s about just one moment. Sometimes that means you’re unpopular, like one of the writers of these most recent books complained about his cover, but we worked it out in the end and he liked his cover.

MH: I was hoping you would talk a little bit about being an editor in this collaborative model. It seems like that’s a process you’ve really had to work at, and it’s a kind of unique way of working. There’s the difference between being a facilitator of people doing their writing and then being an editor in a collaborative book-making process . . .

RB: It begins with a free writing process. We use free writing as data—to look at the patterns that come up and where the power and strength of people’s experiences and ideas are located. What they keep coming back to forms the structure of the books. If you want to talk about it in the language of social science, it is like grounded theory.

Then we are looking at, “Okay, if this is some of the general structure, what do we need to write to build this up?” Here is where my role as ethnographer and as editor gets combined. I will be pushing details or information. Like I will say to Susan, “I don’t think that the reason why you are speaking English in La Ceiba is because you were going to be coming to the US, I think there is a larger story here to figure out. Let’s do this interview with someone, or talk to your friends and find out what your background is here.” It turns out that her family is West Indian and lived in a neighborhood in La Ceiba called English-town. That’s just one example of the editor/ethnographer process. The interviews help us branch out—get other voices in there—so that they become this kind of community project, but also, the writers use the interviews as secondary sources to learn more about themselves or to trigger other stories.

Once we have the stories and interviews, we do a deeper edit on each story to weave them together. I am doing a kind of ethnographic interview with them while I am doing those edits, saying, “Okay, where are the details we need to connect your experiences outward?” I am editing with prose in mind—to get the concrete details to make something last over a longer project that also has beautiful language. That’s my editorial project.
You will also have heard Troy, one of the guys from Nine Times, say “Rachel used to whip my ass during the writing workshops.” That used to kind of embarrass me when he would say that because I didn’t know how it would get interpreted outside of our own organization. But one of the dangers of doing collaborative ethnography is that anthropologists might defer too much to the person that we are collaborating with. The anthropologist is looking for local knowledge, thinking, “We need to honor this, we don’t want to be overbearing or push our own agenda.” The thing about the model of being an editor—not just an ethnographer—is that when people are the authors of their own stories, they don’t want to be patronized. If I can see a framework that others can’t see, and I don’t push them about it then I am doing them a disservice. I’m going to be true to the wider audience and say, “This needs one more round.” That’s what I do with the people we are writing with and at some point they might get really pissed off because they want to be done with it! They are not used to that last editorial push. But that’s also like when you get pushed in a sport and then you realize that you’ve done better because of that push. So I am okay with having those fights, and I am beginning to get comfortable with talking about those fights in public!

As Rachel and I were winding up our conversation, one of the young NSP writers, Kareem Kennedy, dropped by to see Rachel and pick up some more copies of his book Aunt Alice vs. Bob Marley. NSP authors can buy books at cost, which they can then sell for a profit in their community. He said that they had been “selling like hotcakes” following the book launch, which had included each of the writers doing a reading from their book.

RB: Hello, hello. Look what is on my desk, more copies of Aunt Alice vs. Bob Marley fresh off the press. Tell me your report on Thursday night, the book launch.

KK: It went better than I expected. When we practiced, we didn’t sound that good! But when we got up there everything just flowed. The crowd was well-receiving. Everybody keep saying they like my little greeting thing that I did. They like what I wrote.

RB: You read really, really well.

KK: I had to reread the book, and I was like, “I did this?” I couldn’t believe I did it.

RB: Now do you know what I had been saying about not having to worry about the quality of your writing?

KK: When I was reading the stories, like even though I wrote it, I still am like looking for what happened next.
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RB: That’s cool. You were worried that there was no point. Does it feel like it has a point?

KK: In the interviews, it reflects the stories. And in the stories, if you read the stories, it relates back to the interviews.

MH: When you went back to it after it was printed did you worry how it all hung together?

KK: I didn’t think it hung together. The whole book seemed a mess. But now, like everyone wants to throw me parties.

MH: What did you do after the book launch?

KK: My cousin had a party for me and everyone was smoking and whatever, and we were reading in the dark. It was good. It’s better reading it in the dark.

RB: Are people saying, “I had no idea this was what you were working on”?

KK: They think it’s something that just happens, but I’ve been saying for the last two years that I’ve been writing a book. Some people are like “But you never told me” and I’m like, “I told you like every day! You’d call me on the phone and I’d say, “I’m writing a book!” When I tell people, or my people tell people I guess the words sound new. Like, “My brother wrote a book.” And people are like “Huh?” “Yeah, my brother wrote a book.”

Kareem graduated from Southern University of New Orleans with a degree in social work and now works for the City of New Orleans as a counsellor. His book was chosen as the “freshman read” at the University of New Orleans for the fall of 2015.

References


How possible is it to achieve collaborations in which “involvement in the decision-making process must occur at all significant junctures” (Ruby 1995)? Luke Lassiter has spelt out what he sees as significant junctures in the context of collaborative ethnography: project conception; fieldwork; the writing (or production) process (Lassiter 2005, 17). But what are the significant junctures of different creative collaborations in reality? Can they be identified in advance? Is it realistic to ever expect involvement of all collaborators at all of the key decision-making junctures? The experiences of many collaborative art and anthropology practitioners suggests many factors influence the ways in which creative collaborations manifest in practice, often different from than those projected at the outset.

Interest in collaboration from the fields of business, health, international development, and computing (to name but a few) have all generated large bodies of literature attempting to pin down a language that describes collaboration and its stages. Collaboration has been mapped from “deep to shallow,” or “tokenistic to transformative.” Differences between “networking,” “cooperation” and “collaboration” have been articulated, and indicators have been generated to help identify which kinds of collaboration work best for specific constellations of collaborators, or to achieve specific outcomes (Rietbergen-McCracken and Narayan 1998). Across disciplines, however, there is recognition that collaboration can occur at differing levels of intensity, and that different forms of collaboration can be more or less useful for achieving particular relational and practical outcomes.

Collaboration is most commonly expressed as a continuum of intensity, running (in the context of research) “from simply informing . . . communities about the research process to a synergistic cooperation that yields results neither group could achieve independently.” (Ray 2009, 2, see also Haviland and Munt 2004, Colwell-Chanthaphonh and Ferguson 2008). As the politics of collaboration have shifted to the foreground, expectations of the intensity and scope of collaboration have increased (Lassiter 2005, 72). The very nature of collaborative practice, given its essence as uniquely configured at each iteration, means that collaborative practice is always experimental, perhaps necessarily contingent and often incomplete (Cook 2009, 109).
Collaborative processes in acts of creative representation are certainly shaped by the medium in which the work occurs—making a film is a different process than making a book, or a piece of theatre. The specifics of each collaboration depend on the form and disciplines on which one is drawing. However collaborative representational work is always embedded in a creative cycle, a cycle which will have common elements no matter what form you are working in, and finding a language with which to understand and negotiate these cycles can be challenging work (Breunlin 2011).

In this chapter, following from calls to make clear the mechanics of collaborative production (see Chapter 1, Ruby 1995), I will describe three collaborative projects I have been involved in. Using these as examples I will discuss three key axes around which creative and collaborative representational practices are commonly configured. The first maps the agency of participants and their intensity of participation in different stages of a project. The second axis runs from practices that value high production values to those that prioritise deeper participation by community collaborators throughout production. The third axis maps those projects that prioritise object-based versus relational outcomes. These axes shape the ways in which collaboration between different people and organisations involved in any specific collaborative art project are configured. Where a specific project is located in relation to these axes is usually driven primarily by the intentions and goals of the project’s facilitators, the intended audiences for the works, and the social and political agendas motivating the project.

The Making of Singing Out

In 2008 Rachel Breunlin, co-director of the Neighborhood Story Project (NSP), and I undertook a collaborative book-making project in the town of Derby, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, in collaboration with Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation. Jalaris is a family-run organisation that provides support to Aboriginal families in Derby through their kinship network, with whom I had a well-established collaborative research relationship. Rachel had an interest in doing some work in Australia, and the University of New Orleans, where Rachel works, gave her a small travel grant to come to the Kimberley.

The project, designed in this three-way collaboration, resulted in the book Singing Out: Aboriginal Ladies’ Stories from the Northwest Kimberley (Breunlin and Haviland 2008). It emerged from Rachel and my desire to build on a collaborative practice we had established over several years and extend our ongoing dialogue about methods of community documentary practice. It also responded to an idea for collaborative research that people at Jalaris had put to me several years earlier. Chairwoman of Jalaris, Biddy Morris, and her cousin-sister Lorna Hudson had often reflected with me about the challenges of educating Aboriginal kids in Derby. They felt that people working in the education system in the Kimberley needed to better understand the complex and sometimes traumatic stories of Aboriginal families’ experiences with education over
a number of generations. Such understanding might enable more engaging learning environments for Aboriginal kids and their families. Perhaps knowing more of the personal histories of Aboriginal people might better prepare newly arrived teachers for life in Derby, helping with the problem of culture shock and its role in reinforcing racist stereotypes. This seemed like a great topic for a community research project, but for several years staff at Jalaris and I put it on the back burner, mulling over how to approach it, what methodology would work, and how we might resource such work. With the opportunity of Rachel coming to Australia, my PhD scholarship and some funds for community-based research that Jalaris had available, it seemed the time was right to take on this topic as a collaborative project between NSP, Jalaris and myself.

Figure 4.1 Cover of Singing Out: Aboriginal Ladies’ Stories from the Northwest Kimberley, 2009. Edited by Rachel Breunlin and Maya Haviland. Published by Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation, the Neighborhood Story Project and Side by Side Community Projects.
There were many different formats that the project could have taken. I initially suggested that we work towards making a series of digital stories or radio pieces. These seemed more appropriate formats for distribution in the Kimberley, where literacy rates are low and printed materials deteriorate rapidly in the domestic and environmental conditions of most households. But time was short—Rachel would have less than a month on the ground—and the idea of taking on an unfamiliar format, with all the ensuing technological challenges, seemed overwhelming. So, in consultation with Jalaris, we decided to follow the NSP model and work towards a book.

For most of the planning stage I was in Canberra, on the east coast of Australia, Rachel was in New Orleans in the US, and the staff at Jalaris were carrying on with their work in the Kimberley. The work of Jalaris focussed on women and children and they wanted to invite a group of Aboriginal women to participate in the project. Jalaris staff identified a group of seven women, aged in their early twenties to late seventies. Although they all knew each other in general terms—some were good friends, some were mother and daughter, or related through extended kin—they had not functioned as a group before. Jalaris invited women they thought would be interested in telling their stories and who had interesting stories to tell. They invited people they thought might benefit from the process in terms of increasing their literacy skills or confidence, and having something interesting to do for a few weeks.
As an incentive to support participation, Jalaris decided to offer a small payment to participants if they completed the full three weeks of the workshop. They also held a raffle for a hamper of fresh food at the end of each week of the project for those who had attended every day. Jalaris provided a van to pick up and drop off participants; access to a printer, scanner and telephone; lunch, tea and coffee each day; and paid for the notebooks, pens and pencils we used for writing. A quiet space at their centre on the old Aboriginal Reserve in Derby was designated as our workshop space.

Rachel brought most of the writing workshop methodology to the project, based on her practice in New Orleans. In her bags she carried examples of writing and books to share, her own laptop with transcription and layout software, a digital sound recorder and digital camera. I was largely responsible for the image component of the project, bringing my own laptop, photo editing and management software, hard drives, several cameras, tripods, a digital sound recorder, and methodologies developed from previous participatory photography projects. I shared the driving of the bus with one of the workshop participants who also worked for Jalaris. A friend of mine, who worked for Jalaris, gave Rachel, me and my partner a place to stay for the duration of the workshop, with Rachel living in a large canvas tent, decked out with a bed, lamp and table.

The seven women, Rachel and I, worked together for two and a half weeks in June and July 2008. The NSP model is based around a creative workshop, or studio. As Rachel wrote in the introduction to Singing Out,

The model consists of free-writing, sharing stories with the group, receiving feedback, writing again, and only then worrying about editing. On one of the first days, as we read our stories to each other, Freda asked “Am I doing it right, or what?” We told her if it felt right to her, and she was happy with the direction her stories were going in; she was on the right path.

(Breunlin and Haviland 2008, 10)

In addition to the usual approach of the NSP creative writing studio, in the Singing Out project we included image-making, with a focus on portrait photography and hand-drawn maps. We each selected another woman living in Derby to interview; the edited transcripts of these interviews, along with the women’s own stories, photographs and maps formed the content of the book.

From 9:00 a.m. to 12-ish, four days a week, we all worked together, sharing lunch. The first week we focussed on the women’s own writing and photography. In week two we started thinking about interviews, and the studio model came into its own, with different people working on different tasks at the same time. In the second week work continued in the afternoons, chasing up interviewees or conducting interviews at people’s homes. A whiteboard in our workroom mapped all the different elements everyone was working on,
and we’d check in at the beginning and end of the day as to who was doing what with whom, and who needed some extra help.

After the women were dropped home, Rachel and I continued to work on the project. Around cooking and eating at home, we would type up the women’s writing, transcribe interviews, talk over what had happened that day, plan our structure for the following day. Sometimes I’d drive around chasing people up, or go to the library to look for images. Rachel would edit the women’s writing late into the night and give it back to them to work on the next day. Although Rachel had allocated a bit of money from her travel grant for professional transcription of interviews, we knew that the heavy Aboriginal English of many of the interviewees would be a challenge to such a service, so we did the transcriptions ourselves.

By the end of the first week of the workshop we were working with drafts in a mock-up of the book layout, drawing on Rachel’s learning about collaborative book-making in a tight time frame. Working on their text in a draft layout helped the women to see what their work might look like in the book, and gave them a chance to have aesthetic input into how their story would look on the page. As images came in I would do an initial selection and we’d look back at them one on one and as a group in the workshop. When each woman and I settled on the images to include I’d work on them digitally, scanning old photos, cropping, adjusting and dropping them into the layout mock-ups.

By the end of the two-and-a-half-week workshop period each woman had written and worked on editing her own story. They had interviewed another woman, taken photographs and collected old ones to use in the book. Each had made maps, and worked closely with Rachel and me on the way all these elements would interact in the layout of the book. Rachel and I had another four or five days to tie it all together after the workshops ended. Rachel pushed hard to edit down all the interviews while she was still in Derby. In the end, after Rachel left the Kimberley, I undertook the task of returning texts to the interviewees and talking through any changes that needed to be made.

Over the following weeks I got approval for all the texts and images from the fifteen women whose stories appear in the book. Rachel and I had started drafting the introduction in Derby, but finished it via email several months later. Rachel collated the manuscript and the NSP fronted money for a professional copy editor to review it. Their regular graphic designer finalised the layout. It then came back to me in Australia via the internet. I worked with a printer in Canberra, using funds from Jalaris, to get 500 copies of the books printed. We shipped most of them up to the Kimberley, leaving some in Canberra, sending some to Rachel’s in-laws in Sydney to be carried to New Orleans when next someone travelled there, and posted a couple to Rachel in New Orleans to have a look. In November 2008 I returned to the Kimberley with the Singing Out books. We held a small book launch at Jalaris, sharing
morning tea with all the writers and most of the people interviewed in the book. We distributed copies to everyone involved. We gave some to the local library. The Derby radio station interviewed some of the writers and me, and recorded a couple of the writers reading excerpts from the book during the launch. Compared to the block party book launches the NSP throws in New Orleans it was a subdued affair, but very much in keeping with the culture of Jalaris and the women writers.

The NSP model was developed with an intention of creating books as a source of income for the community authors. They have developed a strong infrastructure for book publishing, sales and distribution. During the planning process, and further during the workshops, Rachel, Brett Morris (Jalaris CEO) and I had a number of conversations about how to manage distribution of the book. Brett was dead set against selling the book, seeing a world of potential complications in how to distribute funds among the seven authors and eight interviewees whose stories were included. He didn’t see it as an option for funds to go to Jalaris, even with permission of the writers, as he

Figure 4.3 Writers and interviewees at the launch of the Singing Out book, Derby, Western Australia, November 2008 (image by Maya Haviland)
was concerned that there would be later repercussions from the women and their families—people might feel that inappropriate people were financially benefiting from their stories and work. Jalaris, being a community support organisation, simply felt that it was beyond their purview to get involved in book distribution. Rachel was understanding but disappointed about this, as the distribution mechanisms of NSP relied on their ability to sell the books. In the end, it was agreed that the book would not be sold. Copies were given to the writers and interviewees, with additional copies available upon request from Jalaris. For a while Brett supplied copies to the Derby Newsagency to be taken for free by interested people in Derby. They flew off the shelf, and feedback from the Derby Library was that the two copies we had given them were well utilised, until the spines cracked and they had to be taken out of circulation. For about two years, whenever I was in Derby someone would ask for a copy of the book, usually a relative of one of the writers or interviewees. Rachel and I both had a few boxes to distribute in our communities as we saw fit.

Entre Yanki Et Oké

Rachel and I collaborated again in the following year on another project, a poster-making project with an American Indian tribal group in Louisiana, this time led by the NSP. My involvement in this project was smaller and the form of collaboration was significantly different to our collaboration around Singing Out.

In November/December 2009 I spent a month in Louisiana. During this time Rachel and I worked together on a consultancy that NSP had been commissioned to do by the United Houma Nation (UHN). The Houma or UHN are an American Indian tribal group from the bayou country south of New Orleans, who were involved in a struggle to gain federal recognition for their tribe. At the time of my visit NSP was in the final stages of producing a second round of books authored by teenagers from John MacDonough High School. The night I arrived in New Orleans, Rachel and her NSP staff were pulling an all-nighter finishing the final changes to the books before they went to the printers. The book launch party was held at the end of our month-long stay, a huge affair held in a venue in City Park.

The UHN had approached the NSP to help them to use collaborative ethnography and media as part of an ongoing community organising and advocacy campaign. Their goal was to organise their community, which is spread across several parishes and several hundred miles. They wanted to collectively advocate for support to address land loss due to coastal erosion on the Gulf Coast, a problem that had already displaced large groups of Houma and is threatening to displace the majority of the population over the coming several years. The UHN were aware of the methodology of NSP, and had some experience of young people from the tribe making their own radio and video media. They wanted to use stories of Houma people to communicate internally to their own
tribal group to create some cohesion and common ground, as well as externally to advocate for political and economic support.

By the time I got involved in the project Rachel had already negotiated the basic parameters with the Houma: a consultancy agreement with rough timelines had been developed, a fee was set and they had decided on a poster project as the format for their collaboration. The poster model built on other projects that NSP had done, specifically a project called 7th Ward Speaks and another project NSP had done in collaboration with the New Orleans Food and Farm Network (Breunlin and Regis 2009). The aim was to make a set of posters that featured people from the Houma tribe, highlighting key issues to do with cultural heritage, relationships to land, and historical and contemporary sustainability of Houma communities and their connections to country.

For a number of reasons this project was a different kind of collaboration for both the NSP and for me. From the point of view of the NSP it was the first project they had done in Louisiana working with people who lived outside of the city of New Orleans—in communities between half an hour and two-and-a-half hours’ drive from the corner store home base of NSP in New Orleans’ Seventh Ward. This meant a whole different kind of logistics in the planning process and in gathering content for the project. Since the people with whom we were trying to collaborate were spread geographically around a big area—a theme that the tribe was trying to address through the project itself—the Neighborhood Story Project’s usual model of group workshops (as used in the Singing Out project) was not possible. There were neither the funds nor the time to work across such large distances. Instead the approach that was agreed centred on the interview methodology of the NSP model.

Rachel, with my assistance, worked in collaboration with the tribal council to develop the themes and potential stories for the project, identify potential interviewees, source historic images, decide on design and layout, and ensure historical accuracy of the posters. The tribal council provided contacts for potential interviewees, and Rachel got in touch with them. She (often with her baby son Max in tow) and I travelled to meet with each interviewee, recording a semi-structured interview and taking photographs. The usual NSP process of a number of rounds of editing and feedback from the interviewees followed, although this was reshaped by the distances involved. The less formal process of dropping in to discuss someone’s interview that was Rachel’s usual practice, was mediated by scheduled appointments, emails, phone calls and long car drives. The plan was that consultation with key people in the tribal council would continue as the content and design of the posters was developed, with final sign off on each poster from the individual represented, and the tribal council.

Initially it was hoped to include a skills development aspect to the project, training one of the young people from UHN, who had experience in radio and other media, in the NSP interview methodology. Constraints due to time frames, distance (the young woman lived outside of New Orleans) and commitments to
other projects meant the training aspect of the project was dropped relatively early in the project.

The collaboration between NSP and UHN was also differently structured than Singing Out (or the majority of NSP projects) because it was a commission. NSP had been approached by the UHN to do this project on a paid basis, using grant money UHN had obtained. Usually NSP funds their own collaborative ethnography projects with communities around New Orleans (or, like Singing Out, funded by all of us putting in some resources), with revenue raised from the sales of books or other funds raised for programming. In the previous eighteen months the NSP had employed two additional salaried staff members. Due to the financial pressure the two additional salaries put on the organisation (a significant portion of those salaries had to be funded with cash usually reserved for reprinting books, in turn reducing independent programming funds), taking on a paid commission seemed like a good idea. I wasn’t paid for my involvement, although permission was given for me to use my participation as part of my own research.

In the month I was in Louisiana Rachel and I did the bulk of the work collecting material for the project. We met several times with staff from the tribal council and discussed the themes for the project. While we sat with them they talked among themselves about potential interviewees and their stories, weighing up tribal politics and the need to be representative of different groups and regions with who had the best stories. We attended a big tribal gathering at which we were introduced to a number of potential interviewees. We spent many hours talking about the project while juggling the other projects going on around us: the production of the young people’s books and the upcoming book launch; Max learning to crawl; spending time with our loved ones; me doing additional research work; and arranging food and celebrations for my birthday and Thanksgiving. Rachel worked the phones, talked to people about their stories and arranged interviews. During the long drives to meetings with the tribe she and I brainstormed how to conceptualise the whole project. I did some rapid swotting on the history of the tribe and the region, a sort of miniature version of the immersive cultural orientation Rachel had done in the Kimberley during the making of Singing Out.

Over sweet potato pie at a truck stop on the road to one of the interviews, we mapped out a structure for the posters—a grid attaching people’s stories to the themes identified by the tribal council. We considered how the posters might be displayed, individually and as a set. We settled on a structure in which they could be displayed as a block and the imagery and design would flow between each poster; the themes would relate and build one on the other.

My job was to focus on the photography, taking portraits of the interviewees, landscape images and details to be used in the final design of the posters. The theme of land was central to the project and the Houma identity. Landscape images became the linking visual theme in the posters.

Rachel and I visited all but a couple of the interviewees while I was in Louisiana. We were almost always greeted with home-cooked food and pressed to
stay for a meal. I ate fried oysters, homemade biscuits with cane syrup, fresh-picked grapefruits and sun-dried shrimp. Interviews were mostly conducted in people’s homes. One time Miss Hope prepared fried bread while we interviewed her, her granddaughter playing around our feet. Another time we were taken out by Mr. Anesi on a boat to see the impact of coastal erosion first-hand, shivering in the chill of the bayou air as it opened out to the ocean and then drinking hot tea with his wife back in the house. Rachel would lead a conversational interview and I’d take pictures.

The poster project was different from the kind of collaboration we achieved in *Singing Out*. The challenge in the Houma project was to identify the goals and visions of the tribal council and then to find people who were interested in having their story told. We set about drawing these stories out through our different creative tools and processes. The onus was on us as artists/ethnographers to manifest these stories, albeit with close guidance of storytellers and tribal leaders, rather than to be facilitators supporting people to create their own representations.

By the end of a month we had most of the interviews and images for the posters. We had narrowed down the images to the best ones, leaving room for Rachel to work with the designer in the final selection, and for the interviewees and tribal council to have some choice should they not like our initial selection. I left Rachel with the bulk of the editing, design and production work still to do. This process involved many hours of editing, several more trips down various bayous to collect interviews and return edited versions, and then finally to show mock-ups of final layouts.

Rachel would copy me in on emails to the tribal council updating them on the process. Usually there was a long period of silence before she’d hear back, making her worry something was wrong, only to discover that her email, and the project overall, was literally and metaphorically buried under the many priorities for tribal staff. The completion of the project was significantly delayed by the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, which directly affected many of the people we had interviewed and underlined the issue of coastal degradation and its impacts on Houma communities that motivated the poster project. In the end, tribal historian Mike Dardar worked closely with Rachel in the final edits of the posters, helping to source archival images and negotiate the subtleties of the project wrap-up. This work was usually done via email.

Due to the timeline complications caused by the oil spill some of the other people at the NSP picked up the last of the work under Rachel’s guidance. The posters were printed while both Rachel and I were in Australia. Upon her return to New Orleans, in mid-2010, Rachel and the tribal council had a celebration in Houma to launch the posters. I got sent a few copies and NSP has kept some, but the bulk of the print run went to the UHN for use in their advocacy work. We were told that they were being displayed in libraries around Houma territory, but that the use of the posters got sidelined for a while when there was a change of leadership in the tribe.
My mother owned Annie’s Restaurant in 1955. It was just a drive-up. My father, Thomas Chau, was a fisherman and eventually became a net-mender. Tom’s Net Shop was right here. During May season, the fishermen would say, “We’re gonna be coming down. Could you get us some hamburgers ready?” We’d get in the Trucks and bring them their order.

We didn’t have a car.

My grandfather built the house next to the restaurant—he more to the truck and picked up the old cypress lumber. It’s the house where my mother was raised, and where she raised us. When she retired in 1979, I took over the restaurant, turned it into a sit-down place, and raised all my kids in the family house.

When people come into the restaurant, they say, “Oh, you’re American Indian.” That’s why I put all these photographs on the wall for them to see. I’m not doing my culture, or anything that my father fought for. And the people at Dulac, not the place like a community space—they like the old settlement. Some even come to listen to old Favre Domino songs like ‘Tim Groves be a Whorehouse.”

Figure 4.4 Lois Salinas poster, from Entre Yanki Et Oké, 2010. Courtesy of the Neighborhood Story Project and the United Houma Nation.
W hen I was maybe six years old, I started following my dad on his boat. I got into his footsteps until I knew what to do in fishing, trawling, and relaying. We sold the seafood we had to buy some necessities—a chicken or fish for rice, coffee, and sugar. Then we started to have some buyers. It was the Bil- berts family related to us who lived in Matane. That old boy had a truck that came down and picked up the crabs. They were selling the crabs for 25¢ a bucket. Now, a box of manit (it's 50¢ a bucket), but we have a lot more regulation.

We knew people from the different families because we lived together. Over here, we're in Zone Two and the fishing season is closed in December, but they still got some shrimp due north of Cameron, Louisiana. We would move to the west, sleeping on a big boat with a cabin on it, and meeting up on the same deck.

A lot of the places that we go through now don't exist when I first started. The oil companies cut the pipeline canals to put some rigs. Many of the junctions where my family used to live are washed away. You can fish where they used to have some banks. The terrain is getting wider, but we can still pack the boat out in front of our house. I've gone way down here till I die. I don't have too many more years. I guess I can make it.

**Anesi Verdin**

**Painte-au-Chene, Terrebonne Parish**

Figure 4.5 Anesi Verdin poster, from *Entre Yanki Et Oké*, 2010. Courtesy of the Neighborhood Story Project and the United Houma Nation.
Earth Diver

In the beginning, everything was covered by water. Land was needed to build the earth. Different animals dove down into the water to find it, but no one was able to succeed. Finally, the crawfish dove down to the bottom and carried the mud back to the surface. Making it above the water, he created the land. For the Houma, the crawfish is our ancestor.

Under the colonial administration of the French, and then the Spanish, our sovereignty was respected. We maintained a principal village around Barataria Bay, supported by farming and seasonal fishing and hunting. In Article Six of the Louisiana Purchase Agreement, the United States agreed to recognize our autonomy. This provision, like so many others, wasn’t upheld. The descendants of the people of the crawfish were forced to abandon our village and rely on individual land grants as the lower bayou communities. Houma was formed between land and water.

Adapted from Jan R. Swain,@media loves and Takes of the Southernfears culture and the writings of T. Neugnamer Deaver.

Figure 4.6 Earth Diver story poster, from Entre Yanki Et Oké, 2010. Courtesy of the Neighborhood Story Project and the United Houma Nation.
Intensity of Collaboration—Agency of Participants

The *Singing Out* project and *Entre Yanki Et Oké* demonstrate different kinds of collaborative practice and potential roles that an artist/ethnographer/facilitator can have in such practice. *Singing Out* can be regarded as a deep collaboration where Rachel and my roles were to facilitate the creative practice of the group. *Entre Yanki Et Oké* was a more consultative process where Rachel and I were the primary creative artists/ethnographers (along with the designer who worked with us in the later stages) working under the direction of the tribal group and storytellers.

Charles Green identifies two different models of artistic collaboration, with which he points to pre-occupations with agency and ownership of knowledge and expertise (Green 2004). His first model is “collaboration as reconciliation”—where the collaborative encounter is trying to rebalance historically inequitable social relations. In this model differences are of foremost importance and collaboration is seeking to create balance across these differences. Green argues that collaboration as reconciliation leaves each individual as autonomous, bringing something that they can equally take away. In the context of the Houma project Rachel and I brought methodologies, skills and tools and the Houma brought stories, images, themes and social change agendas. The resulting posters draw on all of these elements, but the mechanics of production and the labour associated with the production remain distinct in terms of the elements that each collaborator brought to the encounter.

Green’s second model is “artistic collaboration as creating more than the sum of its parts.” I would call this model collaboration as synthesis. In this model “the parts are not removable or replaceable because they do not combine so much as change. The collaboration itself exists as a distinct and distinctive entity” (Green 2004). In his modelling Green draws upon George Head’s distinctions between “functional” and “effective” collaboration (Head 2003). “Functional” collaboration is that in which individuals behave in ways that benefit each participant differently—for example a teacher is teaching and a learner is learning. There may be an exchange, each may learn from and contribute to the other—but there is not a shared synthesis. “Effective” collaboration is collaboration in which a group of people behaves in ways that not only benefit individual participants but leads to some “degree of success belonging to the group and can only be achieved by group members working together” (Head 2003). It could be argued that the *Singing Out* project (and the majority of NSP books) fit within this model. The elements that different participants bring to the project merge together in the final product of the book in a way that cannot distinguish the expertise and labour of each contributor.

In the two projects I described above we were working to support the stories of marginalised people, although the nature of their marginalisation is distinctly different. In both projects we worked hard to maintain the specificity of language, turns of phrase, and aesthetic preferences of participants, and we incorporated mechanisms for feedback, repeatedly checking back with
people to be sure that they felt a sense of ownership over the materials we made together. At the same time Rachel and I were aware that our own creative input and agency deeply shaped the outcomes of both projects, although in different ways.

Pondering the impact of her own identity and agency on the outcomes of her participatory video work with young refugees living in Palestine (*Stars of Bethlehem*, see Chapter 2), Canadian Marie-Eve Leduc has reflected:

> Even though I tried to minimize it I definitively affected the field as a foreigner. I wonder what the films would have become if the project had been led by a Palestinian instructor? Would they have chosen to represent themselves in a completely different way, having in mind that the leader of the project is from the same culture and therefore knows about the history and the war situation? Would their focuses have shifted from presenting their “collective identity” to presenting a more “personal identity”?

(Leduc 2010)

The identity constructions of facilitators, as well as the extent to which a project creates some sense of collective identity in participants, does seem to shape the kinds of outcomes achieved in collaborative art and ethnography projects. However, unlike Leduc’s speculations, these factors seem to influence the long-term agency of participants more than shaping the content of the work created.

Project coordinators of the *Yiriman Project* in the Kimberley have observed a difference in engagement with representational work by young indigenous participants when they are facilitated by an indigenous rather than a non-indigenous person (M. Coles, personal communication, 23rd October 2011). Young indigenous *Yiriman* participants were more willing to be directed in their work by an indigenous facilitator; pushed to develop better technical skills. *Yiriman Project* coordinators have speculated that seeing someone closer to their cultural identity undertaking representational work may provide more sense of possibility for participating young people’s ideas about their own lives, an important outcome of collaborative media work in *Yiriman* (Palmer 2010).

Modelling the possibilities of being an author is an aspect to changing the politics of knowledge creation, identified as important to the practice of many art-based collaborative anthropology projects. As is evident from the experience of the NSP’s work in New Orleans this modelling of possibilities does not always rely on shared cultural identity between facilitators and other participants. Abram Himelstein has observed that the NSP’s work with people (especially young people) from working class backgrounds is aimed at changing expectations of the kinds of work they could do:

> A big part of (our motivation for paying people for their books) is (that) in America wealthy kids often have the chance to do internships as part of their education, and they get comfortable with doing intellectual work. And as part of that comfort they often end up doing intellectual work for
their lifetime. Whereas working class kids in high school usually work, and they become comfortable with that work and end up doing that over their lifetime. So I really wanted to pay working class kids to do intellectual work... We have created twenty-five or thirty authors in the process of doing this, and it’s not a small number even statistically. It’s like one out of every thousand people left in the city is an author because of the Neighborhood Story Project. You know each of those people probably knows a hundred or a hundred and fifty people, and when you know people who have figured that out and you consider them to be your equal then I think it becomes a much more manageable monster. I know that that is true in my own life, “Hey dude, he can be in a punk rock band and tour, I can be in a punk rock band and tour.” It can’t be that hard if they can do it. (Himelstein 2009)

In Derby, where Aboriginal people have experienced a long history of anthropologists, historians, filmmakers and others telling stories about them, actively supporting people to be authors themselves was important. Recognition of the process of production, and the women themselves as authors, changed the way the Singing Out book was received locally and beyond. The process of the women finding their own ability to author their stories—to write, read, speak for themselves, and to be researchers in the sense that they also gathered the stories of others—was a key element in the success of the project. Their position as authors became a social action that spoke as much to the politics of indigenous education in the Kimberley as the content of their stories did.

In Louisiana more people from the Houma tribe were already involved in representational work—as radio documentarists, historians, photographers and so forth. These individuals, and the tribal council as an organisation, were already skilled in using representational tools, and savvy about their implications. Members of the tribal council were actively involved in the conceptualisation of the poster project, and in some aspects of its implementation. Their brief to the NSP focussed on the importance of foregrounding the stories and experiences of Houma people, but the process of putting the stories together—who did the on-the-ground work—seemed to be less of an issue for them. Logistics and time constraints clearly played a part in this, but in the Houma project the nature of the representations—the end products—were perhaps more important to the goals that the project set out to achieve than the processes of creating the representations. Experiences of agency may not only come from being a creative maker oneself, but from the experience of being deeply listened to in the context of collaboration. In that way a community participant may still feel that they have actively participated in a creative and representation process without being an active maker of the creative product. In the Singing Out project, process and product were intimately linked. Without the agency of the women as authors of their stories and as interviewers of other women, the power of the stories in Singing Out would have been diminished.
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Much has been made about the potential benefits of marginalised people “finding a voice” through telling their own stories and making their own media, but it is important to exercise caution in idealising “authenticity” (Soep 2006, Rennie and Thomas 2008, Spurgeon et al. 2009). The politics of voice are as much related to listening as to speaking (or expressing). To paraphrase Gayatri Spivak, surely who should speak is less crucial than who should listen (in Couldry 2009, 579). Listening involves recognising that someone has something to say, and recognising what they have to say. Following this logic, processes of “finding a voice” have little value if they occur in isolation without reception by an audience (Couldry 2009, 579). Recent scholarship on indigenous filmmaking in Australia has recognised that indigenous communities choose to collaborate with non-indigenous media-makers for specific purposes, and to speak to particular audiences, and at other times choose to retain full control of creative production (Davis and Moreton 2011, Wright 2011). These choices reflect active agency on the part of indigenous people, strategically utilising available resources and opportunities rather than being diminished forms of agency (Sprague 2014).

Participatory Values versus Production Values

A lively debate is evident in the field of collaborative community art centred on the relationship between collaboration with community participants in all stages of the production, and high production values in the final products. This is the second axis around which collaboration gets constellated in the context of collaborative arts and arts-based collaborative anthropology. The nature of collaborative encounters is more often than not invisible in the presentation of final works, sometimes intentionally obscured to serve marketing and other political goals, at other times just hidden by the form of the art. However the level of production values of the final works is often believed to give some indication of the intensity of collaboration in the final stages of production. Audiences sometimes receive slicker products that have higher production values with suspicion, concerned that the high production values mean the representations and “voice” in the work is inauthentic. Perceived “cultural authenticity” is often a key factor in market uptake of works made in these projects. On the flip side community and collaborative art is often dismissed as being inferior art, accused of attending to social and relational concerns at the expense of aesthetics. Claire Bishop for example, in her now famous Artforum article critiquing art criticism of collaborative practices (Bishop 2006), made a strong argument that the grounds for evaluating collaborative practices needed to include aesthetic criteria. Works from these projects needed to be evaluated on aesthetic terms, she argued, rather than be purely based on their successes as regards the achievement of social goals.

Faye Ginsburg has used the phrase “embedded aesthetic” to refer to the way that media-makers from marginalised communities (her focus is primarily, though not exclusively, on indigenous-made media) tend to evaluate their work
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in a way that “stresses the activities of the producers and the circulation of such work in specific communities as the basis for judging it’s value” (Ginsburg 1994, 367; original emphasis). This way of evaluating work is very closely aligned to the critical understandings of relational or dialogical aesthetics in the context of contemporary art (Bourriaud 2002, Kester 2004), the practices that Claire Bishop has critiqued for being deemed as successful for their social rather than “artistic” outcomes. “Parting from the traditions of object making,” writes Grant Kester, relational artists “have adopted a performative, processed based approach. They are ‘context providers’ rather than ‘content providers’” (Kester 2004, 1). It is the understanding and highlighting of context of production that Ginsburg’s notion of an “embedded aesthetic” points to, both in the process of production and in the way that works circulate and are received. She argues that a focus on the social action surrounding production means that rather than looking for “aesthetic innovation in the texts themselves,” as Bishop calls for, critical engagement with such work should look for aesthetic innovation as it manifests in the “social relations of production and reception” (Ginsburg 1994, 377).

James Weiner made critiques of indigenous media production similar to those Bishop made of relational art practices, attacking Ginsburg’s concept of “embedded aesthetics” as obscuring the broader aesthetic qualities of indigenous media (Weiner 1997). Although both Weiner and Bishop have been strongly rebutted by advocates of social relations in production of art and indigenous media, their critiques raise themes that are of relevance to current practices of collaborative community art and art-based collaborative anthropology:

- What is the role of formal aesthetics in these projects? Can works made in deep collaborative processes “fail” due to poor production values or aesthetic rigour?
- How do the goals of collaboration, what Bishop refers to as the “ethics of authorial renunciation” by the artists/ethnographers/facilitators of projects, relate to the resulting works’ “success” as art?
- Is success in this context primarily to do with reaching and resonating with an intended audience or should it be understood through the experience of the makers?
- How might culture shape perceptions of aesthetic success or failure? By whose cultural criteria should we be making such judgements?

These are questions that are very much alive for the collaborative art and anthropology practitioners I interviewed. The dynamics around aesthetics in collaborative community art and art-based collaborative anthropology practices can be framed in a continuum of production values versus participatory values, with notions of authenticity and affective engagement of intended audiences at play. At one extreme is a belief that high level production values are crucial to the work being taken seriously by audiences, especially those beyond the community in which the works are made. High production values
are also considered by many to be a marker of respect to the makers and the knowledge represented by the works. At the other extreme is an argument that high production values necessitate a less participative process, leading to less “authenticity” in the works and potentially a return to hierarchies of authorial (or editorial) power in the collaborative relationships. Another argument at this end of this axis is that dominant ideas of what constitute high production values and beauty can cut across cultural specificity and shut down cross-cultural and/or inter-generational exchange by normalising ideas of beauty and meaning embedded in aesthetics (Michaels 1994, Morphy 2008).

This is one critical aspect of collaborative creative production that the lens of collaborative and visual anthropology can shed meaningful light upon. Critiques such as Bishop’s about the need to include aesthetic criteria in assessments of the success or failure of collaborative community art run the risk of applying universalising aesthetic values to projects which weave together multiple cultural perspectives on form, beauty and meaning. Visual anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers have long recognised that form and aesthetics are culturally laden. Meaning is often embedded in ways well understood by those from particular cultures yet invisible to others (MacDougall 1997, Morphy 2008). An example is in the ways which mainstream filmmaker Rolf De Heer, when working with Yolgnu people from the Arnhem Land in Northern Australia on the film Ten Canoes, had to carefully balance the multiple readings of the film, considering both Yolgnu “taste and cultural requirements” as well as the aesthetic and formal conventions and preferences of Western cinema audiences (Wright 2011).

How do cultural and relational dynamics influence aesthetic choices and meanings in collaborative creative processes? How might these factors get lost, or suppressed in the goal of reaching audiences from multiple cultural contexts, or when the practical necessities of generating income for a project overtake the subtleties of cultural perspectives on beauty, form or aesthetics? How can we look at ideas of beauty, aesthetics and the meaning of form through a cultural lens rather than more simplified analyses of high and low production values? These are questions that warrant more attention by practitioners and scholars alike.

Like many similar collaborative media organisations David Vadiveloo and his organisation Community Prophets argues for the importance of high production values in attracting a mainstream audience for their work and developing respect for the stories and voices of marginalised people (see for example Change Media 2011, Rankin 2014). Vadiveloo believes that by producing works with high production values Community Prophets can better change mainstream understanding of, and engagement with, issues from marginalised communities, a primary aim of their project.

Young people from marginalised and indigenous communities are increasingly accustomed to seeing their community stories depicted in documentary and occasionally through drama. But sadly for the most part these
stories are delivered with low production values attached to whatever film is made. Often the reason for this is that broadcasters don’t attach the same market value to the stories of marginalised or indigenous peoples. And the increasingly media-literate young community interpret this as meaning these stories have less “significance” than mainstream stories and voices.

What we are trying to encourage the kids we work with to feel validated about is that their stories are well worth being delivered at the high end of the production scale. We want them to know that their stories are not only compelling but should look beautiful as well. We want them to raise the expectations of themselves to ensure that when they tell a story it is being heard by whoever it is that they want to hear it, instead of assuming, from their diet in the media, that anything that is indigenous or anything that is marginalised will have low production values and generally look poorly produced and will only be viewed by people looking for a dose of worthiness for their evening viewing.

(Vadiveloo 2009)

Vadiveloo recognises that this commitment to high-level production values can, when factoring in resource constraints on the ground, limit the depth of participation by community members in the end stages of production, such as editing. In some situations Community Prophets has decided to complete final editing of a project outside of the community where filming was done. The reason for that is usually logistical and based on limited resources. In an ideal situation, says Vadiveloo, there is always a long-term engagement with a community and a large measure of post-production control by community people. However he qualifies this by pointing out that community involvement in post-production can’t happen until there are people capable of producing content locally, and the skills of editing are not suited to everyone. However as digital technology develops and more young people even in remote communities are growing up as digital natives it is easier for community members to take control of production processes and create and distribute works with high production values.

The importance of an aesthetically pleasing product that has been created to speak to a specific audience is one of the strongest motivators for artists and facilitators to retain editorial control over the final products created in collaborative contexts. Katerina Cizek, an anthropologist and filmmaker who undertook the first filmmaker-in-residence program with the Canadian Film Board (a program based on their much earlier Challenge for Change program; see Chapter 1), says that in her roles as curator and director of collaborative media projects she maintains strong oversight of the final product—be it exhibition, website or film. Such aesthetic and editorial control is important, according to Cizek, to achieve the activist aims of their project, reaching specific audiences who may be able to effect change on the issues about which the media is made (Miller 2008, 432).
At the other end of the production values spectrum are projects such as the *Youth Gaze* project (Norway) or the first round of digital stories from the *Pacific Black Box* project, both described in Chapter 2. These two projects decided that supporting the authentic voices and involvement of participants in all aspects of the production was more important than presenting works with high production values. In these contexts, given the resources available to the project, facilitators felt that the need to bring in people with the technical skills necessary to achieve higher aesthetic value in the works would impede the participatory process in ways that could compromise the core values of the projects (Hope 2008b, Havini 2009). This is a concern that many digital story facilitators in particular have expressed, observing that high quality voice-overs, for example, can be very time-consuming to achieve, and require technical and professional resources beyond the reach of projects operating outside of professional media-making environments (Spurgeon et al. 2009, 280–281). Siren Hope from the Norwegian project *Youth Gaze* said:

>We are not after having beautiful films or something that is technically very good . . . I think at the beginning we were very concerned with teaching them technical aspects of filmmaking too. But we somehow just left that more and more, because it wasn’t really the point. Maybe it would be more interesting if they decided to film in a way that was breaking these aesthetic rules of filmmaking. But of course you are what you are in a way. I think, consciously or unconsciously, I sometimes gave advice based on how I had been trained.  

(Hope 2008b)

Carlota Duarte, Director of the *Chiapas Photography Project* (CPP) and *Archivo Fotográfico Indígena* (AFI) has repeatedly stated her intention and desire not to influence the aesthetic decisions of the indigenous photographers involved in their decades long project. She has resisted efforts of art critics and others to seek a “Mayan aesthetic” in the works emerging from the CPP (Spurgeon et al. 2009). Yet the specific histories of production within the CPP and the images which have been included in the AFI collection over time reveal that intended or not, the aesthetic judgements of Duarte, the indigenous staff working at archive and curators and critics associated with the project have played a part in shaping the aesthetic and formal qualities of CPP books, exhibitions and the AFI collection. Even simple criteria of what counted as a “good” photograph to be included in the collection, such as framing, focus and lighting, can be argued to have shaped the overall aesthetic of the collection in subtle but significant ways.

Whether to meet criteria set by those funding projects, or to engage broader audiences and create viable markets for works produced, aesthetic and stylistic decisions about the forms in which products created in collaborative community art are packaged and presented are often made based on criteria separate
from those informing the collaborative aspects of the project (Duarte 2009, Torres 2010). As Alex Halkin of the Chiapas Media Project/Promedios wrote:

We entered the project knowing that neither goodwill nor passion would buy us a video camera or a Final Cut Pro editing system. Self-sustainability also requires a media product that can be shown, distributed, and sold. Unfortunately, selling indigenous-made videos does not often generate enough revenue to support the project on its own . . . The costs involved in equipment maintenance alone necessitated some creative strategies for self-generating funds. In addition to foundation/corporate funding and personal altruism, we also created a system of self-generating income: video sales and university presentations. It is this element of structural financial solvency—a sustainable infrastructure—where outsiders can provide the clearest support. But it (generating an income from the work) is also one of the most complicated aspects of indigenous media-making. (Halkin 2008, 69)

Usually the question of selling the material made in such a project comes up after it is produced; however the Neighborhood Story Project is an exception, founded with the goal of generating income for writers from the sale of books. To this end, aesthetics decisions about the NSP books and their ability to appeal and reach a broad audience have been well-considered. Abram Himelstein of NSP speaks of this aspect of their work as a key part of the translation of stories from lived experience into a marketable and long-lasting form.

I see that this (working on the aesthetics of books) is part of what our job is. I see this project as returning stories to the community in ways that give people money but I also see it as training people in the work of translation, and in order to do the work of translation you have to be approachable by a larger audience. Rachel and I really hold that in mind as we are creating the covers (of the books) with Gareth (the graphic designer) or as we are creating the posters or whatever. It’s like, you want it to be something that is very precise aesthetically but also that allows many people to approach it. (Himelstein 2009)

Relational versus Object-Based Outcomes

The nature and intensity of collaboration is often opaque, if not invisible, in the works produced in collaborative community art projects—sometimes even obscured by packaging and promotion of the works. Some projects have been hailed for the beauty and artistic virtuosity of their creative works, others perceived as presenting authentic community voices and simultaneously being critiqued for devaluing community stories with low production values. However, not all collaborative art and anthropology practices seek to produce
products—texts or objects—as their primary outcome. There are many social and relational goals that collaborative art and documentary practices set out to achieve. The political advocacy we hoped to effect with both the *Singing Out* and *Entre Yanki Et Oké* is one example. The literacy skills and confidence we hoped to develop in *Singing Out* participants is another. The contrast between the Houma project’s focus on the products we made and their functions, and *Singing Out*’s multiple valuing of both process of production and outcome, describes another axis of collaboration. Through this axis we can understand practices as focussed on relational through to object-based outcomes. At one end of this continuum are projects whose main interest is in the collaborative process (social relations, dialogical processes), with little focus on textual or object-based outcomes. At the other end of the continuum are projects whose goals prioritise the use of collaborative labour but with a focus on the creation of an object or text.

**Goanna Hunting Story**

In 2007 I coordinated an indigenous youth diversion and education program through the Kimberley TAFE in the Mowanjum Aboriginal community in Western Australia, in which we focussed on engaging young people in learning through digital media. It was the second year of the program, following a successful pilot that culminated in a travelling exhibition (described in the introduction to this book). The new program was different in many ways. For one, my co-facilitator was another non-indigenous woman like myself. The local indigenous co-founder of the program who worked with me previously had gotten a different job. The earlier group was a mix of male and female participants, but now the group was almost exclusively male. Within a few weeks of starting the program the boys declared that photography and video were boring. They didn’t want to write, record, photograph; they wanted to go fishing and hunting. As the whole design and resourcing of the program had to do with representational work, this posed a challenge.

So we went fishing, dragging the cameras in tow. The few girls in the group did all the filming and photography. We went hunting, looking for goanna at the river, but this time I refused to let the boys go without a camera. “This could be a good story about you boys,” I said, “you might want to look at it later.” They agreed, but still wouldn’t record. To their great irritation, I followed along, videoing. No goanna.

The next week we were back at the river and two goannas wandered through our camp. The boys pounced, and, while they caught and gutted their game, various people grabbed still cameras to document the triumphant moments: boys with a goanna hanging around their necks; various tools being pulled out to clean them; two boys sitting next to each other in a race to see who gutted their animal first.

Back in the studio my co-facilitator was furious with the group for just messing about with goannas all day. She felt they weren’t working together
as a group, that they weren’t willing to try anything, learn anything new. She worried that the whole point of them experiencing some sense of achievement from the program was being missed. The only thing they wanted to achieve was to show their families they were good hunters. It seemed that digital media couldn’t serve any purpose in these kinds of goals.

The boys were keen to look at the photos of themselves with the goannas, so I suggested we make a digital story about hunting goanna. Everyone clambered to see the printouts, grabbing them from each other’s hands and arranging them on the table to show me their part in the process, talking over each other about who did what. “You didn’t swim for it,” someone said. “I did too, the pictures just don’t show it” he replied. Seven different voices argued about how the story went, whose version was accurate, which photos showed them in a better light. Over several hours, each boy got a chance to tell his story. We agreed on a basic script, a negotiated version of what happened. It turned out that one of the goannas got thrown away in the bush before we came home, as it had not been gutted properly and the boys were ashamed to show their grandmother. Blame was attributed and we came to a standstill as to how the story would end.

The boy who had made the mistake gutting the goanna sulked for a while. Eventually one of the older boys, who knew how to gut properly, pointed out that he wouldn’t make that same mistake again, showing him with photos how he had done it, what was the right way. The mood in the room shifted. The shame and annoyance of throwing away a perfectly good animal started to thin. “Let’s go back to the river and look for more,” someone said. “We can take more pictures to fill in the story, Miss,” someone else chimed in, knowing that was the only way I’d agree. Back to the river a few days later, no more goanna, but much hilarity posing for the pictures needed to complete the narrative.

To make a digital story someone was going to have to record a voice-over, providing a narration for the images. The debate raged about how to do it. Shamed at hearing their own voices, teasing each other, mucking around, no one volunteered. Finally the boy who had gutted the abandoned goanna stepped up, showing his courage; saying he had learned something and wasn’t shamed. He would do the voice-over. It was recorded, some pictures were drawn about the whole thing, and I edited it together following our agreed script and order of images.

There was a hush when we watched the Goanna Hunting digital story for the first time. Then the noise grew to the usual clamour of people talking over each other, arguing about who should and shouldn’t be allowed to see it. “Aw, we can’t show people Miss, its shame.” Agreeing not to distribute it, I showed them how to burn a few copies on DVD just in case, and we left it at that. Months later I noticed those extra copies were gone, and when I asked about them, someone said they liked to watch it, just the boys as a group. They didn’t show people but it was a good story, a good memory, something they did together that gave them a laugh.
There are few collaborative art or anthropology projects that completely reject the goal of creating some kind of object, even if the objects are simply the documentation of an ephemeral installation or relational experience. Achieving relational goals, such as “empowerment” or engagement between collaborators may be the primary goal of a project, however the pragmatic concerns of both art as an industry and practices of ethnography—always interested in creating
stories and documentation that endures even if only for a very small audience—mean that some kind of object or textual outcome usually results. The process of making the *Goanna Hunting* story was only ever focussed on the completion of the story as a way to draw the boys through a shared creative cycle, to give them a sense of achievement. Had they been interested in presenting this work to a wider audience our focus would still have been on the presentation as a relational process, rather than with the digital story as a particularly meaningful text. The circulation of the DVD among the boys, however, suggests that the sense of collective experience and achievement from making the digital story, as much as the story of hunting itself, was embedded in the digital story we made. The collaborative production became an “embedded aesthetic” in the *Goanna Hunting Story*, to use Faye Ginsburg’s phrase (Ginsburg 1994). The story then circulated privately among them as a kind of reminder of these layers of experience, which, without the shared experience of making the work, would have remained a somewhat shameful memory of a failed hunting trip.

My research with collaborative community art and art-based collaborative anthropology projects has identified three key axis of collaboration around which these practices are commonly constellated. These are:

1. The intensity of participation and the sense of agency of participants;
2. Production values versus deep participation throughout creative production;
3. Object versus relational outcomes.

The next two chapters shift to look at the organisational and relational implications of collaborative community arts practices, with a detailed case study of the *Chiapas Photography Project* and *Archivo Fotográfico Indígena* in Chapter 5 and a discussion of co-creativity as an organisational principle in Chapter 6.

Notes

1 See Haviland (2014) for more on decisions and dynamics of distribution.
2 Except, of course, the *Singing Out* project. All of the previous NSP books had been made with communities in the city of New Orleans, within a relatively short drive, or even a walk, of the NSP headquarters.
3 Weiner’s critique went beyond a criticism of the idea of embedded aesthetics and took issue with many of Ginsburg’s and others’ ideas about the social context of indigenous media production and its relevance to the generation of anthropological knowledge.
4 See for example the extended responses to Weiner’s critiques published as comments following his paper in Weiner (1997).

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