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Thoughts on Four-Hand Collaboration

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Thoughts on Four-Hand Collaboration

Among the reels we send each other, whose content ranges from memes to interesting information, there were two that resonated with the conversation we had while defining the focus of this text. Both, posted by @arthoax, showcased instances of »academic friendships«, a theme we consider fundamental to discussions on research-creation because it foregrounds the network of subjectivities that usually goes unremarked. In the first, the way Jonathan Schaffer cites David Lewis in his article »Is There a Fundamental Level?« is praised, since the author not only uses the standard protocol structure – »Lewis at times labels existence of fundamental properties and relations as necessary a priori« – but also includes an informal reference – »Lewis (personal communication)«.[1] In the second case, reference is made to a »ghost writer« who, 94 days after his death, appeared in a dream to insist that his friend return to a previously discarded approach: In his text »Higher Algebraic K-Theory of Schemes and of Derived Categories«, R. W. Thomason notes that he wishes he could have explained to Tom Trobaugh »why he must be listed as a coauthor«,[2] since without the insistence of his »simulacrum« he would not have been able to resolve the problem he had been working on for three years. After recounting this episode, he closes the acknowledgements section by writing, »For more mundane assistance and useful conversations, I would like to thank …«.

Behind the contributions, analyses, and reflections that shape academic collaborations, there is a creative process marked by subjectivity that, until quite recently, remained at the margins of research, as it had no place within the supposedly aseptic frameworks of evaluation through which credibility was secured. Nevertheless, it is increasingly common to find, alongside more traditional perspectives, approaches that stretch the boundaries of academic production – such as the book *Affective Dimensions of Fieldwork and Ethnography* (2019), edited by Thomas Stodulka, Samia Dinkelaker, and Ferdiansyah Thajib – which acknowledge the construction of thought from and through subjectivity.[3]

What stands out, however, is that these proposals still follow a »traditional« line of presentation in which there is no staging of the collective thinking process. To contribute to the exploration of these forms, it is necessary to rethink the evaluative mechanisms through which the rigour of information is measured, to integrate texts that bring together other kinds of material, including voices that do not belong to academia, and are sometimes conceived as models for scientific outreach. The consensus around recognising these materials, situated within the spectrum of research-creation, as vehicles for the construction of knowledge entails accepting that not everything will be amenable to evaluation, since they include multiple voices and experiences that cannot be fully inscribed within academia. The debate, then, shifts to the realm of legitimisation and to the question of the purpose of these pieces.

One of the arguments in favour of so-called creative proposals appeals to an apparent need to transcend the limits of specialisation. Yet, just as articles pile up – both virtually and digitally – in journal archives, content on social media accumulates at an even faster pace. In both cases, there is a struggle for attention and an interest in the power of an idea to open up further dialogues, measured either through a citation index or by means of view metrics. Since the same audience can access the volatile content of the internet and scientific materials alike, production does not necessarily have to compete for attention.

Knowledge that reaches an audience devoid of interest has the same impact as an unread article.

1 Jonathan Schaeffer, Is There a Fundamental Level?, unpublished manuscript (circulating draft, 1999); published version in: Noûs 37,3 (2003) 498–517.

2 Richard W. Thomason, Thomas Trobaugh, Higher Algebraic K-Theory of Schemes and of Derived Categories, in: Pierre Cartier, Luc Illusie, Nicholas M. Katz, Gerard Laumon, Yuri I. Manin, Kenneth A. Ribet (eds.), The Grothendieck Festschrift, Vol. III (Progress in Mathematics 88), Basel 1990, 247–435.

3 Thomas Stodulka, Stephan Dinkelaker, Farid Thajib (eds.), Affective Dimensions of Fieldwork and Ethnography, Cham 2019.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to continue opening spaces for the development of materials that enable access to thought with ease and freedom. Within the multiplicity of approaches – from which a new classification emerges – options may include the creation of documents focused on fostering learning or on the construction of archives, to name just a few examples.

Collaborative writing, in this regard, not only reveals part of the creative trajectory of intellectual production but also fosters dialogical dynamics in the making of products that, for example, avoid digression or excessive abstraction. Validating these research artefacts underscores the creative component inherent in intellectual work and shifts the foundations on which academic evaluation mechanisms have been established. Publications such as »Fitotopías: Lugares de agenciamiento político« (2023) by Adriana Gonzáles Navarro[4] or »Recuperando los recuerdos de Cristóbal: Un acercamiento crítico a la desaparición forzada desde la posmemoria« (2019) by Triana Cuevas seek to unravel the subjectivity at work in graduation theses.[5] In the former, the author presents a methodology she calls, in Spanish, »al tresbolillo«, which weaves together in the text the readings, conversations, work experiences, and emotions such as exhaustion that arose during the writing process, bringing together curatorial and autofictional essays. The latter recounts how, through the collection of photographs and testimonies, a family archive was constructed that, from a theoretical standpoint, reflects on the present and ongoing impacts of past violence. Both examples show how the structure of a research project is also shaped around affects.

In our case, co-written pieces such as the article »Algunas tendencias en la poesía colombiana contemporánea« or the review of the anthology *Si después de la guerra hay un día*, although traversed by these conversational dynamics, ultimately come together around a single linear voice that runs continuously through the paragraphs. Even though in those instances, as here, there were interactions that made their elaboration possible, the final result does not actually integrate them. For this essay, as on other occasions, we read the same texts, scrolled through the same reels, made jokes, and tried out both appreciations and criticisms with one another in order to reach a conclusion together; this time, however, the difference lay in the fact that, over the course of this process, we wove the seams into the text anecdotally and exposed the time we spent on the internet. This raises the question of whether, at some point, the conversations we sustain through letters, calls, and chats – in which we test and rehearse the issues we circle around again and again – might be presented in academic spaces as a kind of formal play. What follows, then, is to foster an opening toward polyphony in intellectual production, integrating the multiplicity of voices that hover around and make these processes possible.

■

4 Adriana González Navarro, Fitotopías. Lugares de agenciamiento político, in: Cuadernos de Literatura 27 (2023), https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.cl27.flda.

5 Tania Camila Triana Cuevas, Recuperando los recuerdos de Cristóbal Triana. Un acercamiento crítico a la desaparición forzada desde la posmemoria, in: Anuari de Filologia. Literatures Contemporànies 9 (2019) 75–85, https://doi.org/10.1344/AFLC2019.9.7.