In abnormal psychology there is a phenomenon known as *folie à deux*. The term, meaning ‘dual madness’, describes the contamination of an individual’s mind by an influential acquaintance who is experiencing psychosis (Franzini and Grossberg 139). *Folie à deux* has manifested itself in a variety of ways over the past few centuries, with the most publicised occurrences in the modern era relating to murderers who work in pairs. I speak of this disorder, because it illustrates—in the most unequivocal terms—the power that an individual can have upon another individual’s thought processes. Interaction with other human beings can have a profound effect upon the way we view the world. But even though it can drive us mad, there are positive possibilities that can be actualised by prolonged interaction. Bryan Reynolds argues that working with others can push our thinking in new and unexpected directions. In his development of transversal poetics, a methodology designed to investigate and promote expansive thinking, Reynolds champions collaboration between scholars as a way of dissolving mental impasses and encouraging innovation. In this paper, I will expand upon Reynolds’ brief discussions of collaboration, and develop a theoretical model that illustrates why collaboration is such an effective transversal tool. I will then use this model to suggest ways in which the work of transversal practitioners such as Reynolds can evolve to capitalise upon the power of collaboration further.

In his first book, *Becoming Criminal* (2002), Reynolds unveils the foundational aspects of his transversal theory. The term ‘transversal’ has traditionally been used to describe that which deviates from the norm (Reynolds *Becoming* 18). But Reynolds expands upon this definition, and uses the term to explain how individuals can move out of contained ‘conceptual and emotional’ spaces, and into realms of unfettered creativity (*Becoming* 18). Reynolds envisions this movement occurring between two key territories: subjective territory and transversal territory. The former refers to the range of thought and feeling that is made available to an individual by the society in which they operate. The latter is said to be ‘the non-subjectified region of one’s conceptual and emotional territory’ (Reynolds *Becoming* 18). When we enter transversal territory, we are able to operate our minds and bodies in ways that are not structured by processes of subjectivation. This freedom opens us up to any number of unprecedented experiences.

Transversality can find us when we encounter the catastrophic and the unimaginable. We can also go looking for it, when we pursue literature that moves us, and philosophy that infuriates us. However, Reynolds claims that people usually experience transversal movements on a daily basis, particularly when they empathise with someone during vigorous conversation. Reynolds writes that the listening
individual

may actually have no idea of what someone else is thinking or feeling, but they are nonetheless still thinking and feeling atypically in their attempt to empathize, ‘as if’ they are someone else, which pushes them transversally (Performing 4).

It is imagined that an intersubjective experience will shift us out of our subjective territory, across a moat of transversal territory, and into what we conceive to be the other person’s subjective territory. What a journey to make over a cup of coffee!

But Reynolds does not consider such intersubjectivity to be a mere extracurricular activity. He actively collaborates with other academics in his scholarly work, in a way that is almost unique in critical theory. Take his 2003 book, Performing Transversally: the text features ten chapters, seven of which have been written with co-authors. If you include the foreword and the afterword, then there are twelve writers identified as collaborators on this text. Similar collaborations have been featured in Reynolds’ two subsequent books: Transversal Enterprises (2006) and Transversal Subjects (2009). These works aspire to usher in a new era of critical praxis, and they identify collaboration as an essential critical tool for the twenty-first century scholar. For Reynolds, collaboration is a means of expanding epistemic horizons, because, like casual conversation, it allows the participating writers to ‘interact and merge with the subjective territories of others’ (Performing 22). I will return to this idea later, as it contributes to my understanding of the collaborative process. But first I would like to give a brief history of the concept of transversality. This journey into the recent past will suggest the vast range of situations in which collaboration can generate transversal power, and will also provide us with ways to understand scholarly collaboration better.

Gary Genosko claims that the concept of transversality has taken on three significant incarnations: the first appeared in the work of Felix Guattari, the second in the work of Michel Foucault, and the latest in the work of Reynolds (Genosko 262). Guattari employed the phrase to describe a practical means of reforming the process of treatment in psychiatric hospitals. He likens the ‘co-efficient of transversality’ to the ‘adjustment’ of ‘blinkers’ on horses: the more they are able to see, the better they will interact with each other and the world around them (Molecular 17). Similarly, through transversality, patients can be moved out of an ossifying isolation, and into a group environment, in which they can use dialogue and ‘reciprocal challenge’ to discover themselves as they are ‘beyond [their] imaginary and neurotic dilemmas’ (Guattari Molecular 20-1). In Guattari’s work, we see many parallels with Reynolds’ ideas regarding communication between individuals. Both theorists imagine collaboration as a means of glimpsing what was previously unimagined, and expressing what was previously inexpressible.

In his 1982 essay ‘The Subject and Power’, Foucault expands the relevance of the concept of transversality exponentially, when he uses it to discuss global struggles against power. Like Guattari, Foucault is concerned with the isolation of the individual. He speaks of a ‘government of individualisation’, which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life,
forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way (211-212).

By individualising us, state power not only ensures that we are accountable for our actions, but also imprisons us in static identities. Everything from the naming process, to the positing of an essence, or an immortal soul, seeks to stabilise us in a way that denies the possibilities for transformation that transversal territory makes available. However, people can resist such subjectival binding, through what Foucault calls ‘“transversal” struggles’ (211). These struggles both champion heterogeneity amongst individuals, and reject individualisation as a means of oppression; they embody Guattari’s insistence that we become ‘more united and increasingly different’ (Ecologies 69).

Transversal struggles are collaborations for political purposes. In line with Foucault’s later interest in how the subject can resist power structures, I wish to establish how transversal struggles nurture individual transversal movements. It is certainly likely that the unification of people under the banner of a shared cause will allow them to access the transversal experience of empathy that Reynolds describes. But I believe that the true catalyst for the empowerment of the individual in these resistances is the achievement of transcendence, which I follow Owen Flanagan in defining as a state in which I become at once smaller and less significant than I am inclined to think, and more connected to and part of that which is large and great (199).

The bond between transcendence and political struggle is woven throughout the fabric of history: people can become so passionate about the larger movement that they are a part of that they move past their personal fears of persecution, dishonour, and even death. I believe that the concept of transcendence is also the key to understanding the transversal power of scholarly collaboration. Let me explain why. The two authors who intend to collaborate will enter the process at the ground floor with different perspectives, ideas, and bodies of knowledge; they will also most likely hold fixed views—both conscious and unconscious—on what is right for a project, and what they wish to achieve. Through interaction, the authors will surely experience the transversally empowering empathy that Reynolds describes. But what is more important is that through communication and deliberation, the collaborators will derive what is known as ‘shared understanding’ (Arias et al. 84): a conceptual space that is produced by the writers’ intellectual engagement.¹ This space should

¹ The idea that ‘shared understanding’ can be generated by collaboration is pragmatically employed in a range of different disciplines: for a discussion of collaboration in relation to computer supported collaborative learning (CSCL) see Jeremy Roschelle and Stephanie D. Teasley (1995); for a discussion
possess an unprecedented expansiveness, because it has been developed in an
environment that is conducive to the removal or relaxing of the Guattarian blinkers
put in place by fixed viewpoints. These blinkers can be shifted during collaboration
when an author borrows their co-authors’ approach to a problem; witnesses their co-
author throw new light on a line of argument; or gradually assembles a new approach
with their co-author through vigorous dialogue. The blinkers might even move
manually when an author takes advantage of the trust bond developed, and pitches a
persistent but seemingly preposterous idea, only to receive a response other than:
‘That’s crazy!’ Such is the revelatory nature of the collaborative experience, that it
develops a conceptual space that is irreducible to the subjective territories of either
party.

Imagine this vortex of shared understanding as a meeting point between the
two authors. They are both intimately connected to it: their cognitive processes have
written its molecular structure. Yet it is something new, unprecedented, and larger
than both of them. Its synergy is radiant: it has transcended their cognitive limits, and
been cleansed of their subjective constraints. If the authors embrace this strange and
familiar creation, then they can use their connection to it as a conduit to a hybrid
subjectivity. The authors can enter the new realm they have generated, and develop
and present their findings, not as themselves, but as the subjectivity that emerges
from their shared conceptual space. This transformation guarantees that the
irreducible power of the shared space is retained as the collaborative discovery is
transcribed onto the page. Alone with their pressures, the authors might be bullied by
demands to please those in their academic community, and adhere to fashionable
theoretical stances. But as part of the hybrid subjectivity, the authors can work
without these apprehensions, in service of a larger identity that was conceived in an
environment of possibility, encouragement, and perpetual interrogation.

The text that emerges from such an experience stands as the manifestation of
the hybrid subjectivity that the collaborators generated through their synergy.
However, the new voice that I speak of must be distinguished from collaboratively
developed voices in disciplines such as science. Daniel C. Dennett explains that

of collaborative problem solving see N. Deshpande et al. (2005); for a discussion of the importance
of collaboration in design see Ernesto Arias et al. (2000). In a 2009 article, Judith C. Lapadat claims
that collaboration allows researchers to ‘learn from each other and coconstruct knowledge’ (976).
2 Lapadat claims that collaboration ‘engenders a process of empowerment’ which develops from the
’sense that we are all in it together’ (976).
3 In the conference at which this paper was given, the issue was raised that the similarities between
collaborators might affect the result of the collaborative process. I do think it is possible that
collaborating with those outside your discipline and with markedly different interests to you might
enhance the transversal power of the experience. But it is also important to note that even within a
single English faculty, there are researchers who are well-versed in a variety of fields (from politics, to
Continental philosophy, to cognitive science, to Classical rhetoric to give a few examples).
Furthermore, the collaborative experience will always be transversal in some way, because the
heterogeneity of experience that is possible within social structures ensures that no two people have
completely identical subjective territories. That is why communicating with another person over
coffee can always result in transversal movement.
intersubjectivity is an essential part of the scientific process, because it provides a valuable means of canceling out the idiosyncrasies of individual investigators so that all can participate together in a shared inquiry (28).

Science uses collaboration to synthesise a voice that is purified of any individual biases, so that what is discovered can be depended on as fact. But in critical theory, a practice fundamentally built upon opinion and narrative assembly, the hybrid subjectivity can bear the subjective nuances of both of its collaborators. In fact, it can also retain uncertainties and inconsistencies that were not able to be resolved. In this way, the co-authored critical subject is much like the standard human subject: a swirl of competing ideas and behaviours that still manages to form, however temporarily, a crystallised, but multi-faceted persona.4

I posit this theory of collaboration in order to illustrate why the practice is so effective in mitigating the oppressive effects of power. Reynolds’ description of our capacity to ‘interact and merge with the subjective territories of others’ (Performing 22) remains an important part of my theorisation. But I have sought to illustrate why collaboration allows us to transcend power structures, outside of the more personal issues of empathy and entering a hypothetical conception of what it would be like to be the other person. Thus my discussion necessarily entails the expansion and re-interpretation of concepts such as subjective interaction and merging. I suspect that my description of the collaborative process might come across a bit tidy, but I assure you that the streamlining of my formulation is purely a concession to clarity. There are always problems, pitfalls, false starts, collapses, and blueprint re-adjustments in the writing process. But if the collaborators have courage and conviction in the shared space that they conceive, then they will carry their transversal power all the way to the final draft.

With the collaborative process complete, the question must be raised: what happens to the hybrid subjectivity when it is loosed upon the world? Is the transversal power that collaborators generate through their synergy available in some way to those who read the texts, leaving aside the fact that the text itself is augmented by such power? My answer to this question is: yes. I believe that there is an inherent transversal quality in collaboratively-produced critical texts, in that they prevent us from constraining the significance of the work by reading it through our understanding of the author as a transcendental signifier. To outline this point, I will now turn to the work of Jacques Derrida.

Peter V. Zima claims that while philosophers of the metaphysical tradition...pretend to attain the final concept, the signed on the level of content (Zima 21), Derrida moves ‘the entire aesthetic and literary problematic to the level of expression’ (Zima 21). This paradigm shift manifests itself in Derrida’s ‘Restitutions’, a quasi-critique of Martin Heidegger’s ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, which operates on a

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4 For a transversal theory of the subject see Reynolds (2009). For a theory of the subject drawn from the findings of cognitive science see Francisco J. Varela (1999).
number of levels to problematise the notion that a representation can be linked to a material object. Derrida’s essay is principally concerned with the dispute that Heidegger unwittingly initiated regarding a pair of shoes in one of Vincent Van Gogh’s classic paintings. Heidegger attributes the shoes to a peasant woman, while Meyer Schapiro wants to return the shoes to Van Gogh himself. One of the voices in Derrida’s essay posits that by identifying Van Gogh as the owner of the shoes, Schapiro is arguing that the painter ‘rendered himself in his’ painting (380). This approach to art, the voice(s) argues, imagines that the picture puts us ‘in the presence of Van Gogh himself’; that the artist’s ‘whole presence’ is contained inside the frame of the art-work (369). Such an understanding of the connection between artist and art-work makes it almost obligatory to pull the shoes out of the painting and put ‘the right feet back in them’ (Derrida 273).

But needless to say, Derrida is dismayed by Schapiro’s intentions: he rejects the notion that a text can provide access to a stable and complete authorial entity. Consequently, his essay on the subject is constructed as a polylogue: a dialogue between different voices. We are not given an indication of who the voices belong to, or even of how many people are present at the debate. Furthermore, the voices often disagree and misunderstand one another. By employing this format, Derrida prevents us from comfortably situating ourselves on the backbone of a reliable speaker, with the comforting knowledge that we will be guided to a summit of revelation. Indeed, that is what we are used to: being spoon-fed syllogistic arguments, in singular voices, which exude certainty, and promise the congealment of meaning. Derrida’s very point, however, is that any sense of absolute confidence a text exudes is merely a product of rhetorical trickery. No matter how well you build your language palace, it will, alas, never be tangible or immortal.

Derrida’s employment of the polylogue as a destabilising tactic is indicative of the fact that a plurality of voices immediately throws a handful of variables into the mix. Thus it can be said that in a co-authored critical text, it is inherently impossible to synthesise the work’s total meaning by anchoring it to the corporeal bodies of the authors. There may still be two tangible entities that we can pin our interpretations on, but the fact is that the transversal space that Reynolds claims we have to pass through in order to have an intersubjective experience follows the two writers into the text. For the most part, we cannot know whether to link a certain reading of a certain passage to author A or author B. I can make this point clearer by conceptualising the collaboratively-produced text using the model Mark Turner and Gilles Fauconnier designed to schematise thought processing.

According to Turner and Fauconnier, the generation of meaning is usually said to require the interaction of four ‘mental spaces’, which are activated by prompts from received data (40). This data defines and calls for the connection of two input spaces. ‘Cross-space mapping’ allows us to identify ‘counterparts in the input mental spaces’, and a ‘generic space’ records the ‘structure that inputs seem to share’ (Turner and Fauconnier 41; 47). The web that the links between the spaces form produces a blended space, which is essentially a selective fusion of the two inputs. As a hybrid of qualities transmitted from the inputs, the blend reveals meaning that is irreducible to
either of the data suppliers, meaning that is known as ‘emergent structure’ (Turner and Fauconnier 42).

The two authors of the collaboratively-produced text can be said to form the input spaces that Turner and Fauconnier describe. The generic space might be our knowledge of the two authors, and the research interests and methodologies they share. However, these factors interact in the blended space to generate a text that could not merely be packed up and returned to the contributing spaces. The text is a unique event, which unfolds purely on the ‘level of expression’ (Zima 21). Furthermore, while it forms a single picture, the nature of its genesis imbues it with an intangibility, which allows it to manifest itself in a variety of forms. Thus the co-authored text encourages infinite re-interpretation as it is reconstructed in the minds of different readers.

I would like to close this exploration of the transversal power of collaboration by raising a point of contention with the man whose work initiated it. While I subscribe whole-heartedly to Reynolds’ vision of a twenty-first century poetics that encourages more interaction among thinkers, I feel that Reynolds’ work—up to this point—does not fully maximise the potential for transversality that collaboration offers. As I mentioned earlier, the majority of the chapters in Reynolds’ last three books have been co-authored. Unfortunately, they still essentially read like single-authored texts. The arguments of each essay unfold a neat and intricate logic, culminating in a particular conclusion. My challenge to Reynolds is to take more advantage of the power that a plurality of voices can provide. Maybe I have been spoiled by the advent of DVD special features, but I would like to see more behind-the-scenes action: more exploration of the erratic, and often scattershot communicative process that led the collaborators to their shared understanding; more analysis of divergent opinions, even if they were abandoned for a later convergence; more discussion of the uncertain voices that still chime (however softly) when a certain point is raised; perhaps even the odd open skirmish here and there. It must be noted, however, that the presence of different voices in a collaboratively-produced work would not make it possible to isolate different perspectives in the text, and bind them to a particular throat. These voices emerge from a developing conceptual space, which is generated by interacting scholars who are themselves moving along a continuum of transformation. Thus the voices should be understood as components of some stratum of the text’s hybrid subjectivity. Collaboration produces a self that is born through expansive thinking and perpetual re-assessment. To only provide access to the surface of that self is to occlude the transmission of much of the power developed by the collaborative process.

A stereoscopic exploration of the variables introduced by collaboration would further liberate the reader, by neutralising any tendency they might have towards passivity. If we have an array of viewpoints to consider, and sufficient evidence for each, then we enter the reading process as another collaborator, working with the authors to develop a shared understanding that is exclusive to that particular interaction. Acknowledging the community that exists inside the textual subject would also give Reynolds’ work a transcendent quality, which would imbue the
political implications of his theory with more power. We would be less able to dismiss his call for a critical movement that encourages ‘compassion, and more egalitarian human rights’ (Subjects 253)\textsuperscript{5} as the ingenuous idealism of a Humanities scholar if a polylogue of voices manifested this goal beyond the constraints of individualism and materiality. Indeed, if academics are able to contribute to better human relations, then they will only do so with voices, blending with voices, blending with voices...\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5} The chapter in which this statement appears was co-written with Anna Klosowska.

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