

Human and Non-Human Telepathic Collaborations from Fluxus to

Now

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This paper explores telepathy as a tool and method of collaboration within international visual art practice since the 1960s. The words telepathy and telethesia were coined simultaneously when Frederic Myers founded the Society for Psychical Research in London in 1882. However, telepathy names an experience of distant (tele) feeling (pathos) or ideas (thesia) found in all cultures. Telepathy and collaboration are tools that a number of artists reach for simultaneously when attempting to share and/or transform subjectivity. This raises questions of the overlapping similarity between telepathy and collaboration, and of what it means to collaborate using telepathy. What is shared between telepathy and collaboration, and what is different?

Collaborative telepathy could be defined as working with imaginary, fictional or “non-human” artist friends and colleagues such as ghosts, animals and virtual avatars. Lucy Lippard describes Susan Hiller’s work with otherworldly entities that took over her artistic agency through automatic writing as somewhere between indirect and direct collaboration, set in relief to Hiller’s concretely direct collaboration with other real artists using the postal system to conduct telepathy experiments.

The broad grey area of these collaborations that are between direct and indirect collaboration can also be identified as participation, appropri-

ation, assistantship, employed labour, groups, collectives, crowds, large institutions and even shared subjectivities operating in national, revolutionary and global consciousness. All these grey areas of indirect-yet-direct collaboration, as well as arguably the most direct and classic form collaboration for artists in current contemporary art—the artist as a couple or nuclear family—can involve telepathy. This classic model of collaboration operating within small and intimate units is today thriving in current art practice, and is described by Charles Green as a phantom limb and telepathic “third hand”. This paper will compare and contrast telepathic collaborations involving artists and non-humans with direct artist-to-artist collaborations.

Since Fluxus and Conceptual Art there has been significant movement to incorporate telepathy as a collaborative tool. Green’s model of the phantom self or third hand works best to describe the collaborative telepathy of artist couples, and this model applies equally well to twins and some other dyads, especially when the physical and psychical artists’ selves are imagined as central to the work. Kristine Stiles has addressed telepathy and gender revolution in Fluxus and Jean Jacques Lebel discussed telepathy and violent social revolution in Happenings (third fist?). Then there are artists Joseph Beuys and Carolee Schneemann who collaborate with animals (third paw?) and the post-human collaborative telepathy of digital media collaborations, some of which have been referred to by Domenico Quaranta as “virtual fluxus” (phantom mouse grip?). There have also been problems with telepathy and collaboration in art, especially in political terms, where post-colonial discourse has come into play. Juan Davila and Gordon Bennett presented barriers, not insurmountable barriers, to telepathic collaborations of Johnson, Tillers and Abramović. Davila’s livid polemic was followed through by Bennett’s slightly more empathic, collaborative wall against Tillers’ telepathy. Alternatively, political elements of collaboration have proven to accelerate and drive telepathic collaboration, in work by Hiller, Ono, Motti and Lebel.

It remains the case, however, that couples/twins provide one of the most interesting, effective, clear and obvious models of collaborative work with telepathy, for example in the work of Abramović/Ulay, Gilbert & George, the Mattes and artist twins such as the Wilsons and the Manganos. These potent and stable forms of telepathic collaborations continue to challenge the boundaries of artistic practice through solid and sustainable structures of shared authorship and shared artist subjectivity. Many of these artists also make their telepathic collaboration the primary subject of their work, and invite the viewer to participate in a less direct way with this telepathic collaboration through the secondary transmission of shared emotions and ideas.

Telepathic collaborations with non-humans, non-artists and with greater numbers of artists/entities are generally less stable, less predictable and more subject to change or difficult to sustain over the long-term. In the case of telepathic communion with nature as a form of collaboration, the limits of what constitutes telepathy, art and collaboration surely suggest cosmic, earthly limits. Variable, less symmetrical, and non-dyadic telepathic collaborations require more nuances to be developed within established discourse and are certainly just as interesting, and perhaps even more challenging and confronting in some regards.

Fluxus and Beyond

Fluxus artist Larry Miller collaborated with his deceased mother via hypnosis in his work *Mom-me* (1973). In *Mom-Me*, Miller underwent hypnotic sessions with a psychotherapist in order to communicate with his mother; indeed, in the last session Miller appears to have psychically become his deceased mother. According to Stiles, Miller made psychic contact with his mother in his attempts “to inhabit his mother’s psyche.”¹ Telepathy is a hidden affect that accompanies hypnosis and invokes collaboration, and Miller’s work with his deceased mother involved both of these. Stiles explains that Miller drew portraits of himself and his mother while hypnotised, and while conscious as himself. Miller was both himself and his mother, and the two communicated and collaborated with each other. Stiles describes Miller as working with “psychic medium as a pun for artistic medium.”² Miller engages in “elective surgery” to the psyche, and makes “psychic contact with his internalized notions about his mother’s views of herself and him.”³ In this way, it can be argued that the artist established a kind of collaborative telepathic link with his dead mother. Under hypnosis Miller both animates and distances himself from his dead mother, and his collaboration involves richly distilled telepathies. By undertaking this “psychic” surgery and risk to self by entering into an altered state through hypnosis, Miller fused his creative agency to that of an animated yet non-living and non-human phantasmal memorial presence of his mother. As we shall see in the later examples of Jake and Dinos Chapman and Abramović/Ulay, the telepathy of collaborative artists, operating within a human-to-human framework, can also be seen to involve a flow between interior and exterior skins and a kind of surgery to self.

In two life-sized drawings, one human figure appears to be his mother in a dress and one appears to be Miller; neither figure has hands, a detail suggestive of the trauma suffered by both his mother and himself from Miller’s violent stepfather. Hands are also a key body-part that makes one

both an artist and human, and Miller is here neither collaborating with another artist nor another human. Collaboration generally involves at least two conscious living minds working together, but Miller's telepathic and paraesthetic collaboration provides an example of how telepathy produces a kind of collaboration that does not involve a living mind.

Another form of telepathic collaboration occurs in Joseph Beuys' collaborations with animals, such as the iconic work *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), which suggests a form of telepathic performance dialogue with a dead rabbit. Without hands or voices, the telepathy model of the sharing psyche can include animals, nature and otherworlds. Telepathy as a mode of communication is not limited to artists or humans. The telepathic third hand of artist collaborations can change its shape and it can morph into non-anthropomorphic forces. Phil Rochstroh recently describes *I like America and America Likes Me* (1974) as a moment in which Beuys "symbolically merged his psyche with his coyote co-art conspirator and opened himself to the cunning, death-devouring spirit of the much scorned animal (the coyote is an animal that lives on carrion) to gain the creative wherewithal to renounce the death-drunk spirit of US Empire."⁴ A collaborator can be a conspirator and not always friendly, and Rochstroh relates Beuys' personal anxiety at collaborating with the coyote to his political anxiety over collaborating with the United States, then waging war on Vietnam. The telepathic collaboration between feral animal and Beuys resulted in an extraordinary bond between the two, demonstrated by Beuys hugging and accepting the coyote at the end of their shared cohabitation.

Artists such as Beuys who insist on relating the personal and the political choose to project telepathic small-scale collaboration into larger-scale social consciousness. The idea and the feeling of Beuys' collaborations are shared with the art world and with any other member of wider society receptive to his work, and the idea of being a collaborator/conspirator is part of what is shared. Telepathy, therefore, continues to haunt yet energise, facilitate and problematise other more conventional collaborations in which the collaborators are "proper" human artists.

More recently, Miller collaborated with anthropomorphic post-human and non-human Second Life avatar artists Bibbe Oh and Man Machiniga as well as their respective real life human "fleshtars," Bibbe Hansen and Patrick Lichty, who are part of the pioneering performance art group in Second Life (SL) called Second Front. With Miller, these members of Second Front consolidated Quaranta's use of the term "virtual fluxus" in an artwork event called "Virtual Fluxus". Second Front has included a younger generation of artists born after 1968 in their work with virtual telepathy, many of whom were the original founders, including Scott Kildall aka Great Escape and

Escape and Jeremy Owen Turner aka Wirxli Flimflam—friends who together collaborated to re-perform a work by Abramović/Ulay and other key examples of performance art. Outside of Second Front, collaborative real life and SL couple Eva and Franco Mattes also re-performed a number of similar conceptual and performance works including Abramović/Ulay's "Imponderabilia". In response to a challenge by Abramović herself, the Mattes created their own SL endurance performances such as *I know that it is all a state of mind* (2010). The Mattes' physical selves felt ill after many hours of moving their mouse as they made their avatars fall over and over again for hours. It was not meant to be participatory, but the avatar audience also started falling down in a mirror action of tele-empathy. An example of Second Front telepathy work is a group performance they undertook with the spirits of four dead performance artists in *Tower of Babelfish* (2007): Tristan Tzara, Ana Mendieta, Charlotte Moorman and Rudolf Schwarzkogler.⁵ Miller has re-performed a number of his own Fluxus artworks with Second Front, including one performed with Bibbe Oh/Bibbe Hansen called *See you in your dreams* (2010). It was originally written in 1977 with the instruction: "appear in another's dreams."⁶ Second Front works with virtual world collaborative techlepathy of digital avatars whilst nurturing indirect collaborations with Fluxus and art history, as well as direct collaboration with Fluxus artists Hansen and Miller. Also, outside of Second Front, in Australia Stelarc is collaborating with Daniel Mounsey aka Pyewacket Kazayenko to create performances in which an avatar can start to control the movement of the human body, pioneering a telekinetic art connection between avatar techlepathy and the older technologies of fleshtar telepathy.

Susan Hiller's *Sisters of Menon* (1972-1979) involved unexpected work with an invisible psychic force and powerful collective female solidarity in 1972.⁷ This was Hiller's first experience of automatic writing and it erupted spontaneously while she worked on her "Draw Together Project" (1972), a postal art event in which artists from around the world tried to transmit images to each other telepathically. The "sisters" took over Hiller's drawing and inscribed their own words including "no men" when Hiller's partner David Coxhead tried to join. These non-human collaborators appear to have shut out the possibility for Hiller to collaborate with another human, along lines of gender difference. Hiller observed that "automatism has always been evaluated according to gender: linked with madness and mediumship in women, and in men with science and art."⁸ *Sisters of Menon* is part of what is known as Hiller's "Dream Works," a body of work exploring different aspects of telepathy and collaboration, including a book on dreams with Coxhead. However, Lippard also accounts for the indirect collaboration that Hiller had with a number of people, including the late Sig-

mund Freud. According to Lippard:

... Hiller collaborated 'indirectly' with the writers of popular encyclopedias (*Enquiries/Inquiries*, 1973 and 1975) ... with the nameless dead (*Magic Lantern*, 1987), ... and with Sigmund Freud (*From the Freud Museum*, 1992-94). Somewhere between direct and indirect collaboration lies the work utilizing automatic writing.⁹

Lippard is saying that indirect collaboration may be something like influence, history, research or appropriation. A non-human entity, such as the Sisters of Menon, might be somewhere between a vivid automatised imagination, telepathy and collaboration, and, it could be argued, this makes the collaboration more direct than working with archives. Telepathy challenges the agency of the individual artist/author, as does collaboration. Miller's conceptual work with hypnosis and Hiller's conceptual art telepathy experiment both unleashed potentially unsettling, even dangerous, automatised agencies, other to the self, in the creative process.

Hiller highlights her continuing experimentation with telepathy as an investigation of shared subjectivity within her Dream Works. *Draw Together* "had to do very much with the kind of idea that's behind the dream pieces, namely that art is a question of sharing subjectivity."¹⁰ Hiller's exploration of sharing subjectivity reveals that art inherently involves telepathic and collaborative processes. Artist and psychoanalyst Bracha Lichtenberg-Ettinger also conceives of telepathy as part of the aesthetic collaborative process shared between artist, artwork and viewer. Since Fluxus, artists have been able to nurture and foreground artists' inner psychic work as artwork in itself, necessitating various different forms of collaboration.

Stiles reveals that Carolee Schneemann, whose art is full of the paranormal, feared being considered "too crazy" and "nuts" if she acknowledged the paranormal in her art.¹¹ Schneemann's *Meat Joy* (1964) worked with group telepathy in the sense that the collaborators went into a trance-like state of body/mind and individual subjectivities fused into one big meat joy and spirit joy. Movements became synchronized with the chain of sausages and dead animals circulating in and around between the bodies like telepathic umbilical cords. The bodies of individuals were blurred into an ecstatic, erotic and occult-like bond with live and dead meat.

Like Schneemann, members of the activist terrorist group Weather Underground, in operation from the 1960s to the 1980s, also famously engaged in self-liberating and group bonding sexual orgies. The orgies of both Schneemann and the activist/terrorists worked to shatter individualism and monogamy, and to create a new group-based countercultural identity in which the boundaries of bodies and minds are violated, overlapped and

synchronised. Modern social theorists such as Gustave le Bon and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen associate group telepathy with galvanised groups, crowds, political collaborations and public demonstrations.¹² Borch-Jacobsen states, "... the mass bond may have to be thought of as a telepathic umbilical cord."¹³ Borch-Jacobsen posits that a group and crowd unconscious fuses and melts subjectivities: "Taken to the extreme, it is thought transmission, telepathy."¹⁴ Artists such as Gianni Motti and Jean-Jacques Lebel have placed telepathy at the centre of their work with participatory group collaboration and revolution work. Motti's artwork *Psy Room* (1997) was an insurrection that succeeded to telepathically threaten the president of Colombia, and Lebel's text *On the Necessity of Violation* (1968) situates telepathy as a crucial intensification force within both artistic Happenings and the Paris May 1968 riots.

Schneemann's more recent work from the 1990s titled *Vespers* involved collaboration with her telepathic cat. Her familiar, called Vesper, would ritualistically kiss her amorously in the morning and before sleep, and this is captured in the video *Vesper's Pool* and in 140 wall photos. Schneemann's occult-like body-based work engages with this problem of an artistic partnership, psychic contact and interspecies-communication. Schneemann loves her cat, Miller loves his deceased mother, Beuys cares for the environment—including dead and feral animals—and Miller is a friend with Second Life avatars/fleshtars. These artists grasp collaboration and telepathy simultaneously as they reach beyond their own known world for a special connection with another co-creator being.

There is something similar in the role-play of the real life (yet robotic-looking) performances of Gilbert and George and avatar performance art, and both are clearly influenced by Fluxus. Gilbert & George's *The Singing Sculpture* (1970) performances are semi-autonomous, like puppets, automata and mime artists. Green explains that elimination of personality is an important part of this process of roboticised tele-acting.¹⁵ In an interview with David Sylvester, Gilbert & George aspire to the nebulous weirdness of telepathy rather than identifying as collaborative artists:

George: Not that we do that, but we know what you mean.

Gilbert: We don't do that.

George: That's what we call a collaboration.

DS: And you don't do that. What do you do?

Gilbert: Nothing.

George: That's the weird thing. People say it must be so exciting,

two people working together. It must be so stimulating, this exchange. We don't seem to have had this exchange—it doesn't exist.

DS: It's totally telepathic?

George: It's partly telepathic, I'm sure. We just have a common ground of experience, of instinct. If we had to bounce ideas off each other there'd be battles! Appalling!

Gilbert: It is always based on a certain cloud in front of us that we are going towards, a certain cloud.¹⁶

Gilbert & George's sense of connectedness is openly declared, very human and yet still somehow ineffable. Like Miller, artists such as Hiller, Abramović and Gilbert & George came to Fluxus at its tail end. Stiles identifies this later part of Fluxus time when younger men finally started to make anomaly central to their work, as Carollee Schneemann and Yoko Ono had already done. Stiles writes that "Fluxus provided remarkable models for a 'science of the subjective' in visualising anomaly in works of art and artistic processes, even if in its early years Fluxus men often avoided acknowledging the very anomalous underpinnings of their own work."¹⁷ Men generally find it more difficult to work with hyper-feminine and/or "crazy" forms of creativity and identity that are not valued within a persistently patriarchal aesthetic value system. Women artists such as Yoko Ono who have worked with conscious femininity and/or feminism in collaborative art practice stemming from Fluxus have been quick to acknowledge the pitfalls of working with telepathy.

Yoko Ono saw that emotion, psychic vibrations and telepathy were initially criticised as being outside the dominant Cageian aesthetic of chance. She says: "In those days, in Fluxus, it was not 'cool' to use anything that had to do with the human psyche. I think I am the first one who used ... 'ke-hai' (music of pure vibration created by the human psyche)."¹⁸ According to Stiles, Ono was "criticised for being too emotional, dramatic and uncool".¹⁹

Ono's collaborative instruction-based performance artworks were followed by her work with John Lennon. Ono and Lennon honeymooned in a hotel bed and invited the world's press. Instead of having sex, as the press expected, they sat in bed like angels talking about peace and other related issues from their growing involvement with the civil rights movement. Ono and Lennon's "Bed-Ins" (1969) worked with the transmission of ideas and feelings such as peace, awe, empathy, love, amazement, generosity and even telepathy. The honeymoon became a performance art event as well as a protest against the Vietnam War. Ono and Lennon's "Bed-Ins" precipitated media events and contagious affective transmission via mainstream

technologies allied to the critical mass of countercultural anti-war and civil rights protest. At one 1969 Bed-In, Ono/Lennon collaborated with Hari Krishnas, Timothy Leary, Dick Gregory, Allen Ginsberg and many others to record “Give Peace a Chance”. The collaborative couple drew together religious figures, radical psychiatry, civil rights activism, countercultural community and the mainstream, coding their transmission on numerous broad and narrow wavelengths. The galvanising and central force of fusion for this short-term group collaboration was the dyadic artist couple.

Australia: Tim Johnson and Imants Tillers

Tim Johnson’s telepathic collaboration involved dream interpretation, improvisation, exploration of non-visual energies and sense extremes, and a concept of images as dreams that can access gods and reincarnated ancestors. These image-dreams could then be shared between artists. Johnson’s 1976 text, “ESP,” was subtitled “Examples of 5 spaces in one place,”²⁰ and it references the supernatural while collapsing spatial perception into temporal states of consciousness. ESP brought together “Awake space, Electrical Space, Asleep Space, Euclidean space and Everything space.”²¹ Musicians often refer to collaborative improvisation and jamming as telepathy, or like telepathy, as evidenced by numerous jazz records titled telepathy. Johnson developed a conceptual art band, and a love of collaboration as well as sampling and layering different levels of information based on the model of rock music.²² This informed his collaborative painting. In Johnson’s publication “Coincidence,” in 1973, Johnson relates the idea of causality to mental projection, stating that coincidences were only “the result of thought transference to people and objects.”²³

Johnson’s art and life is strongly shaped by dreams, and his decision to go to the Western Desert came to him in a dream. “Images are dreams and exist independently of time—so we can paint the future.”²⁴ Johnson’s paintings engage in various levels of collaboration, ranging between the direct collaboration of two people working on one canvas and the less direct processes of assisting and being influenced. He participates in cultural exchange of painterly language techniques with indigenous artists, with his access to dreaming knowledge and painting techniques regulated by observance of indigenous permission protocols. Johnson also cultivates an overtly cross-cultural spiritual aura with the appearance of Buddhas and UFOs. He often collaborates with a range of indigenous artists as well as numerous artists from other backgrounds.

In the early seventies he explored a range of sense extremes in collaborative conceptual art performances that invited people to take off their

clothes and effect erections.²⁵ Like a benign counterculture cult leader, Johnson convinced large groups of university students around Australia to allow him to partially undress them in a strangely ritualistic manner. In a related series of collaborations called “Fittings” (1971), two collaborators each placed limbs and heads within the stretchable conjoined membrane of a pair of pantyhose, as if testing out how they might best like to pose as Siamese twins and share body and mind. Johnson’s performance collaborations explored telepathy by way of facilitating a shared flow of erotic sense energy through large groups, and also with the idea of merging two selves into one.

Johnson’s status as an otherworldly visionary artist who can channel irrational and religious forces of possession, spirits and divinity owed much to hippie subculture. Johnson blurred distinctions between art and life, arguably using art as a tool of telepathy just as much as he used telepathy as a tool of art. Roger Benjamin points to Johnson’s core beliefs in communality and collaboration as part of crossing cultures, his strong investment in dreams and dream interpretation, his travel to and engagement with the East, and his drug taking.²⁶

Donna Leslie notes that Johnson’s painting is intuitive, not preconceived, combining meditative dots with calligraphic brush marks. Leslie argues that through Johnson’s work with Aboriginal artists and Tibetan Buddhism, Johnson came to understand that art can summon or invoke ancestors, dreaming and the Buddha: “It can act as both a receiver and transmitter of human experience, of dreams, thoughts and insights.”²⁷ In this way Johnson’s art is a kind of telepathic collaboration with non-humans. Johnson’s work with numerous different real artists from different cultures enables him to train something like “art telepathy” towards direct real-life collaborations.

Johnson’s direct collaborations also inform his indirect collaborations, amplifying and binding both telepathy and collaboration together. Johnson does not see his painting as inherently spiritual, but more as a journey towards the spiritual. His use of dots involves mindful concentration and meditation. After exploring conceptual art, Johnson experienced a dream that he interpreted as reinforcing his commitment to painting: “...I saw my hands with coloured light coming out the fingers and it was a strong experience because it meant to me that I could keep working....”²⁸ Another dream of a member of the band The Yardbirds pointing westward was interpreted as directing him to work at Papunya.²⁹

Johnson’s aesthetics of collaboration use “feedback mechanisms for correction and anticipation of the future” as well as a sense of communality.³⁰ His collaboration is based on valuing the sharedness of dreams,

premonitions, images, visions and looking to the future. Johnson reaches for telepathy and collaboration within the same creative impulse for dialogue with another artist. Like his close colleague Imants Tillers, Johnson's dialogue with other artists can occur within the realm of shared images, and this entwines telepathy and collaboration with appropriation.

In working with telepathy and collaboration, or perhaps tele-collaborative appropriation, Tillers generally prefers to work in isolation but has undertaken more conventional collaborations with a number of different artists.³¹ Tillers reflects upon Filliou's *Telepathic Music No. 5* (1978), noting that the late Filliou used music stands, much like Tillers' own work, "Conversations with the Bride" (1975).³² *Conversations with the Bride* intentionally referenced Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by her Bachelors, Even, or Large Glass* (1915-1923), a work full of references to telepathy according to Linda Dalrymple Henderson.³³ It is with a telepathic imagination that Tillers discovers Filliou and realises his connection and possible "collaboration" with the late Fluxus artist. This more indirect collaboration is similar to artists Miller and Hiller. Tillers reflects on the poetic flashes of light flickering on the music stands in his studio as transmission and reception of mysterious communication, and wonders if he might be touched at a distance by an uncanny collaborative hand:

At this moment could it have been Robert Filliou (who died on 2nd December 1987) shaking hands with me across the gulf of time and agreeing on the outcome of a strangely telepathic interaction?³⁴

Something of the phantom third hand model persists in this non-human collaboration, in contrast to Miller's four removed hands and Hiller's possessed automatic writing hands. In addition to "collaborating" with the telepathy of Duchamp, *Conversations* explores telepathy as a meditative surveillance derived from Fluxus artist Arakawa.

Tillers' artwork *The nine shots* (1985) was intended as an appropriation-based telepathy or distant indirect collaboration with the late Duchamp. Whilst also appropriating a painting by indigenous artist Michael Nelson Tjakamarra and German neo-expressionist painter George Baselitz, the title references a largely non-visible element of Duchamp's *Large Glass* called "The Nine Shots," in which nine holes were drilled into glass according to a chance composition determined by firing paint on matchsticks from a toy cannon. This artwork was central to a key scandal within Australian postcolonial discourse. However, a limited telepathic collaboration of sorts eventually erupted between Tillers and a young indigenous art star called Gordon Bennett who shot to fame with his appropriation of *The Nine Shots*. It could be argued that a kind of viral telepathy contagion transmitted from

both Duchamp and Filliou had infected Tillers, and was attempting to infect Bennett.

Ian McLean says that Bennett's painting *The nine ricochettes (Fall down black fella, jump up white fella)* (1990) owes much to Juan Davila's deep and cutting criticism of Tillers' *The nine shots*. Davila's hostility towards three artists working with telepathy and indigenous collaboration and/or appropriation—Johnson, Tillers and Abramović/Ulay—reinforced any difficulty Bennett might have had in working with telepathic collaboration. Nevertheless, Tillers and Bennett's two paintings *The nine shots* and *The nine ricochettes* cannot avoid a telepathic dialogue of sorts as they "became identified with each other in people's minds."³⁵ Tillers eventually collaborated with the two most important indigenous artists embroiled in the furore—Bennett and Tjakamarra. Tim Johnson, who had worked with Tjakamarra, introduced Tillers and Tjakamarra at the 2006 Sydney Biennale.³⁶ Tjakamarra not only retrospectively approved of Tillers' borrowing, he also invited Johnson to collaborate on a painting and later went on to collaborate numerous times with Tillers. Tillers' indirect collaborative telepathy, mediated by art historical appropriation, led to retroactive permission to appropriate, followed by direct collaboration.

Political implications of telepathic collaboration have arisen for other artists, for example in the feminism of Hiller, Schneemann and Ono and feminist sympathy of Miller for his mother. As mentioned already, telepathy has also been used as part of the revolutionary participatory collaboration of Motti and Lebel. Telepathy is more aligned with dreams and imagination, whereas collaboration—a term aligned with conspiracy—threatens to double or multiply power and human representation for these dreams.

In both France and Australia telepathy discourse can be found embedded in political discourses, including within very the attempts for it to be quarantined and demonised as outside the realm of political, collaborative or aesthetic usefulness. Telepathic collaboration is ancient and complex enough to invite and survive fierce political debates. The promise of telepathic collaboration to transcend cultural difference is potentially dangerous and threatening for certain political situations, but this is what it offers and it can sometimes be what is necessary. Telepathic moments can coincide and collaborate with political moments to both heal and violate. In the time and place of Fluxus France, communist theorist Jean-Louis Houdebine argued fiercely against acknowledgment of the role of telepathy and hypnotic phenomena in art and social revolution, as part of the factionalised Tel Quel set. The 1968 text *Freud, Breton, Myers*, of another Tel Quel contributor, Jean Starobinsky, addressed the importance of hypnosis and telepathy. Houdebine invoked Jacques Lacan against the "inventor" of telepathy,

Frederic Myers, ignoring Lacan's early connection to surrealism. In opposition to Starobinsky's position, Houdebine pressed Jacques Derrida on the question of Marx. This backfired as it drove Derrida away from *Tel Quel* and later to work with a range of occult, hypnotic and paranormal phenomena in *Spectres of Marx* (1994) and *Telepathy* (1981). As mentioned, Lebel, a Frenchman, also promoted Fluxus' fusion of art, telepathy and radical politics, and countered communist repression of radical creativity at this time. Telepathic collaboration occurs in diverse creative intellectual communities and can be mediated with both direct and indirect collaboration with political agents and/or discourses.

Tillers engaged a telepathic collaboration with Gordon Bennett when the two were invited to collaborate by the Institute of Modern Art (IMA) in Brisbane. A long-distance fax communication began between Tillers and Bennett. Douglas Chisholm, who is critical of Tillers' telepathy, says the politics of Tillers' "innovative telepathic interpretation of appropriation"³⁷ was tested and complexified when he collaborated with Bennett for the IMA's *Commitments* exhibition in 1993.³⁸ Although Chisholm's comment about Tillers may have a sarcastic and skeptical undertone, it remains true that that collaboration, appropriation and telepathy resulted in a new and original artistic method for Tillers. Chisholm claims that towards the end of the collaboration, Tillers claimed they were collaborating via telepathy and invited Bennett to collaborate further via this medium.³⁹

Tillers created a painting based on de Chirico's *Greetings from a distant friend* (1916). Chisholm claims that Tillers believed this image came to him from Bennett via telepathy at 1.30pm on 27 July 1993.⁴⁰ Chisholm says that Bennett admitted he was driving through the desert at the time.⁴¹ In Chisholm's thesis we are informed that, for the collaborative installation, Tillers chose to contribute his painting based on the de Chirico work and Bennett chose to include the correspondence faxes.⁴² Tillers and Bennett succeeded in collaborating on an appropriation of de Chirico's *Greetings from a distant friend* using telepathy, and this was significantly mediated by gallery and fax machine correspondence. It is a bureaucratised telepathic collaboration, and not warm and fuzzy. It likely would not have occurred without radical institutional intervention. Both artists were already established as primarily individual artists who painted, a discipline less preferred by the Abramović and Fluxus artists who work more with the body.

Chisholm argues that Bennett was concerned that Tillers' suggestion of telepathic collaboration with Gordon Bennett perpetuated the trope of "Aboriginals as mystical or primitive."⁴³ In this regard it is possible to see how an invitation to participate via telepathy could be uncomfortable for some artists and art commentators. Chisholm continues: "Tillers moulded

his interest in coincidence into a belief in telepathy and ultimately this is something that cannot sit eas[ily] with either the aims of *Commitments* or the practices of Bennett.”⁴⁴ Chisholm clearly concurs with Bennett that Tillers’ suggestion that a telepathic transference can be a politically incorrect trespass.⁴⁵ Although Chisholm casts crucial light on the nature of Tillers’ and Bennett’s telepathic collaboration and appropriation, his obvious hostility towards telepathy makes it difficult for him to see it as a potentially potent aesthetic tool or method for psychic healing, reconciliation, truth sharing and empathy.

Bennett’s acceptance of Tiller’s injection of telepathy as an idea for their collaboration was also retroactive, as it was clearly an idea initiated by Tillers. A stronger telepathic collaboration would perhaps arise more spontaneously and symmetrically between the artists, but the risk for individual artists is that over the longer term their identities would merge. There is some obvious value in short term and less potent telepathic collaborations when artists wish to experiment with artistic exchange and smaller doses of telepathy whilst retaining their own identities.

Abramović, Abramović/Ulay and Australia

In the early 1970s Abramović and her closest art school friends were curious about the Duchamp-inspired collaborative art collective OHO.⁴⁶ OHO worked with telepathy in the seventies via group projects, in conjunction with esoteric traditions, counterculture movements, ecological concerns and strong group interaction.⁴⁷ Richard Blandford describes the OHO group as “a little strange, apparently communicating by telepathy before giving up art altogether to live on a commune on an abandoned farm.”⁴⁸ OHO’s bucolic “communion” activated telepathy as a collaborative artist group connected to nature. The dynamic of telepathic collaboration can be seen to leap from the model of the artist group to that of the artist couple through artist influences and lineages. Artist groups are more likely to start to defer to a leader. Telepathic collaboration within a group of artists will often bring out the charisma and/or mind control surveillance of a cult leader, with true collaboration more likely to be shorter-lived and the telepathic glue and psychic bond to be spread more thinly. Within contemporary art practice the artist couple appears to be more resilient, and this is the model of collaboration that is privileged by Green. Abramović/Ulay transmit their collaborative telepathy to viewers, referring to it as an energy dialogue. Telepathic collaboration can be a contagious force in itself and trigger viral chain reactions, leaping between all possible models and combinations of human and non-human, artist and non-artist. The combination of human

and non-human is likely to be harder to sustain for longer periods of time, due to tolerances that are biologically, socially and professionally determined. “Don’t work with animals,” it is said, and ghosts, avatars, crazies and aliens can here be included. Nevertheless, artists persistently work with telepathic entities from other worlds. OHO’s telepathic collaboration may have leapt and transformed into a new species in Abramović/Ulay, and Abramović/Ulay certainly have exposed many other artist/human agents to a potent energetic contagion whereby they may themselves become affectively, aesthetically or politically charged to work with telepathy and/or collaboration in some way.

Abramović and Ulay met on their shared birthday. They both shared a hatred of their own birthdays and when they met they showed each other their diaries with the page of their birthdates missing. This enabled them to recognise a shared bond from which they began to cultivate telepathy: “November 30 quickly became a cosmic guarantee of a shared destiny and symbiotic union.”⁴⁹ Abramović describes their cosmic union as creating a “third energy” or “that self.”⁵⁰ They actively cultivated collaborative telepathy via a third artistic identity, or phantasmic “third hand” as Charles Green has described. In developing his concept of the third hand, Green studied Freud’s description of doppelgänger, thought to be identical because they look alike:

This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to another—by what we should call telepathy—so that one possesses knowledge, feeling and experience in common with the other.⁵¹

Green writes that “Abramović and Ulay were moving beyond recognizable gender-based markers of identity ... [while] attempting to develop faculties such as telepathy through processes of sensitization”.⁵² They explored physical and mental extremes and saw themselves in each other to the point that they became one, in a shared self. Green further suggests that they worked with metaphoric and literal surgery to body image and self, involving pain, repetition and transgression of body/mind limits. Abramović/Ulay parody gender stereotypes to cultivate telepathy.⁵³ James Westcott informs us that prior to their meeting, Ulay had a fascination with the doubleness of Gilbert & George, and Abramović had made a dual film projection in London of two swans appearing to swim endlessly towards each other with their necks curved in each other’s direction to create a symmetrical heart shape.⁵⁴ Abramović/Ulay immediately recognised that they could not only use their strong twin-like identification and super-conductive synaptic transfer to collaborate, but they could present tele-

pathic collaboration in itself as artwork. They collaborated not just as physical bodies, but as psychical, emotional and transformatively energetic bodies, consciously choosing to develop extrasensory perception, aura awareness, hallucinations and telepathic communication.

Abramović/Ulay's seemingly fused and twinned self facilitated their exploration of telepathy. Their experiences of time, pain and exhaustion in endurance performance cultivated unusual flows of empathy and telepathy with audiences via energy transfers. *Talking About Similarity* (1976) was made on their birthday with Ulay's lips sewn together. Abramović attempted to answer audience questions as if she were Ulay, mindreading and channeling his thoughts. Westcott explains further the problem of communicating the pain of another:

It was both a test of surrender and empathy—could Abramović think and speak on Ulay's behalf, and could she do it accurately?—and of the telepathic understanding they felt they shared.⁵⁵

Westcott writes of their work *Expansion in Space* (1977) that they appeared to share a “telepathic prompt” through the twinned visual presentation and movement coordination of their bodies slamming into and pushing columns wedged between the floor and ceiling of a space, simultaneously or with energetic syncopation.⁵⁶ *Imponderabilia* (1977) appears to establish a telepathic umbilical cord between them with their hair tied together for seventeen hours. They began to call each other “Glue” and they could not or would not pinpoint who came up with particular ideas, because they created them via telepathy, having started making artwork together without even talking about “collaborating.”⁵⁷ In a prepared talk created for a vinyl record in 1980, Abramović describes this uncanny phenomena as a body-based thing called “that self”:

With our relation work we cause a third existence which carries vital energy. This third energy existence caused by us does not depend on us any longer but has the own quality, which we call “that self.” Three as a number means nothing else but “that self.” Immaterially transmitted energy causes energy as a dialogue, from us to the sensibility and mind of [an] eye witness who becomes an accomplice. We chose the body as the only material which can make such an energy dialogue possible.⁵⁸

Green observes that harsh, solitary retreats were used to generate psychic power and telepathy.⁵⁹ Westcott asserts that the artists were fascinated by Aboriginals' mystical, practical and ancient connection to land. Green describes their desert expectations as “melodramatic” coming from

“powerful desires for the supernatural ... projected onto Aboriginal actors.”⁶⁰ Lawyer for Pitjantjatjara landrights, Phillip Toyne, assisted Abramović and Ulay and observed an “incredible wavelength” between the two.⁶¹ Toyne questioned their spiritual quest at the time, but was nevertheless convinced enough to help. Abramović herself acknowledged the failure and success of their telepathy quest. She could only communicate very basically with the Pintubi and Pitjantjatjara Aborigines, and did not have what she describes as “their possibility of telepathic communication, ... very strong intuition and knowing nature.”⁶² Abramović did not bond as well as Ulay with her hosts and had difficulty forging strong relationships, “telepathic or otherwise.”⁶³ Eventually she found her telepathic epiphany in her own experience and in non-human telepathic communion with nature.⁶⁴ Abramović said “because of the incredible bonds of nature, you just function as a receiver, and as a sender, of certain energies and actually it’s the most important experience, we felt.”⁶⁵ Abramović explained they were “working on certain intuitions or instinct for an almost telepathic way of communication, but then coming to the city this just had to stop.”⁶⁶

Nightsea Crossing (1981-1986) involved three kinds of trance-like energy transfer: hermetic non-verbal communication with alchemical symbols, paranormal experience and meditation, and empathy with the audience.⁶⁷ This created “vibratory awareness,”⁶⁸ physical emphasis on the now, and altered perceptions of time and space. Abramović said: “In contemporary art ... [this] is the *conditio sine qua non* of emotional transfer.”⁶⁹ Abramović visualises art in the future, and explains: “You could tune your body so well, and use your inside powers, to transmit your image, your mental image, to the observer or the person you want to give the message to. This person could receive the thing.”⁷⁰ Green writes that Abramović/Ulay’s collaborative fusion confronted viewers with iconic silence and inaccessibility, transferring dissociated pain into telepathy.⁷¹ Westcott details that they hallucinated auras, grotesque distortions and empty space around and in place of each other as they locked eyes day after day.⁷² Whilst enduring this horror, Westcott observes that their pain would eventually transcend into 360-degree vision, ecstasy and extreme lightness.⁷³ The endurance of their collaborative mind/bodies within the work unleashed new experience-based knowledge about the role of telepathic phenomena in performance art as well as collaboration. The telepathy of the third hand releases its hold onto an anthropomorphic presence to expand into an all-encompassing, non-anthropomorphic and radiant shared energy within the gallery space.

Green has negotiated a third way through the charges of political incorrectness levelled at Abramović/Ulay’s *Nightsea Crossing* by Davila.⁷⁴ He finds that *Conjunction* (1983), the version of *Nightsea Crossing* involv-

ing Abramović/Ulay's collaboration with a Tibetan monk and an Aboriginal elder/shaman/painter, ethically "invited empathic projection into an alternative space by telepathic senses."⁷⁵ The collaborative force shifted beyond the boundaries of the individuals and into a nebulous shared cloud space, networked with ever-changing visitors from the gallery. Abramović/Ulay had already recognised how others became involved with their collaborative telepathy as viewers, and in this work empathy is facilitated by telepathy. Green argues that the telepathic communion of group soul obliterates difference and emphatically does not attempt to share difference between black and white, east and west, male and female, modern and primitive. Telepathic collaboration adapted seamlessly to the reserve and politeness required to include the company of the two invited spiritual leaders. The gold they found for their large round table where their meditation took place was like a superconductive halo that sought to upload from couple, to group, and to world consciousness. Green concludes that "art theory's conventional psychoanalytic frameworks for such extrapersonal and psychic collaborative experiences, though neither inappropriate nor incorrect, are just inadequate and limited."⁷⁶ Psychoanalysis has always been troubled by the idea of telepathy, despite its being founded on the concept of telepathy and transference. As Lisa Blackman shows, telepathy and psychical research is recently shown to have important relevance for contemporary affect study,⁷⁷ but within most respected disciplines telepathy remains a very difficult thing to discuss. By inviting spiritual leaders to collaborate with them, Abramović/Ulay were able to relate their work with telepathy to existing spiritual practices outside of gallery walls. Green's analysis can find no evidence of exploitation in Abramović or Abramović/Ulay's practice. Davila's charge of orientalism is debatable, but Green argues that it is overshadowed by the artists' Buddhist ethic of "compassionate, panoramic vision."⁷⁸ Green rightly takes the big picture position in this regard, and reiterates compassionate ethics as central and successful within this work.

Abramović/Ulay embody the most extreme and disciplined collaboration, where the collaborative relationship became central to the artwork. Telepathy may just be an extreme and unusual form of empathy (perhaps also combined with awe, wonder, excitement, sympathy). However, Abramović/Ulay's collaborative exploration of physical and mental extremes has resulted in numerous witness reports and extensive art historical commentary on the artists' heightened telepathic powers.

New Couples, Dyads, Siblings and Twins

Gilbert & George's former assistants Jake and Dinos Chapman are siblings

who collaborate. Any uncanny suggestion of telepathy they generate in their art has a haunting and dark resonance more aligned to occult horror. This is also the case with the other UK artist siblings who collaborate, the twins Jane and Louise Wilson. Dark, paranoid and horror-genre themes emerge, and these siblings work without the romance of the artist couple and instead focus their shared psyche on the wider world. In discussion with Maia Damianovic, it is suggested that Jake and Dinos Chapman generate telepathic consciousness through the merging of interiority and exteriority, and through a Deleuzian understanding that the cutaneous and subcutaneous borders of body and self flows, like a Möbius strip independent of the brain.⁷⁹ Both sets of artist siblings refuse to be drawn out too directly on this question of telepathy within their collaboration, with the Wilsons only admitting that they play with the idea of twin telepathy as part of their work with doubles, splits and mirrors.⁸⁰ Both sets of siblings usually point their telepathy away from stories about their relationship, and their nonchalant collaborative strength must be anchored in shared, intimate and mundane family life from before they chose to go to art school. Siblings, as well as couples, present one of the most natural, direct and symmetrically stable forms of artist collaborations. Jane and Louise Wilson's early performance work with the narcissistic telepathy of performance for video, highly reminiscent of Rosalind Krauss' observation of rampant telepathy in early video art of the 1970s,⁸¹ and augmented with hypnosis and LSD, presented the twins as one artist rather than collaborators. It is as if the ideas of collaboration and telepathy are both too obvious to mention for these UK twins. Greg Hilty said of the Wilson twins working together that "[i]ts effect is more akin to that of single artists who have consciously split from collaborations."⁸² The UK siblings confront the world with artist identities that are so sure of the necessity of their shared creative connection that they almost deny the need to collaborate. Visual telepathy wanes in the Wilsons' more recent work in which documentation of their twin artist bodies no longer exists.

Silvana Mangano and Gabriella Mangano are also identical twins based in Australia who draw and make videos that, like the early work of the Wilsons and early video performance from the 1970s, also work with video performance telepathy. *Drawing 1* (2001) is a video that shows the artists captivated by their own mirror image as they face each other and simultaneously draw with one hand on a wall to the side of them, creating symmetry in their drawing and symmetry in performance for video. With their collaboration represented as central to their work, the Manganos are gentle and affectionate towards each other, without the horror aesthetics of the UK siblings.

Collaborative art practice is now established in mainstream art practice internationally, especially so in Australia. Telepathic collaborative couples even feature on the covers of mainstream newspapers in Australia, notably Ms&Mr in Sydney⁸³ and Veronica Kent and Sean Peoples in Melbourne.⁸⁴ Kent and Peoples started collaborating when the Victorian College of the Arts, where they studied, submitted them to a compulsory Collaborative Contract program. They approached each other with a mutual mix of resentment and curiosity given the forced collaboration, and together decided to “take the piss” out of collaborations. They decided the most potent subversion would be to fake being in love and to fake telepathic communication. For some time many pundits were convinced and excited that Kent and Peoples were an eccentric, romantically involved collaborative artist couple, arguably the next Abramović/Ulay, and this ruse was part of their plan. However, the prankster artists themselves quickly became fascinated by the result and realised some further fantastic artwork. Their initial work raised issues about the institutionalisation of collaboration in contemporary art schools, and their continued work with telepathy enables them to explore issues of romantic fantasy and alienation. *The Telepathy Project* (2008) involved their pretense as a couple, showing them inhabiting separate rooms in which they tried to read each other’s thoughts. Kent and Peoples drew and wrote about whatever it was that was sent and received via telepathy on yellow sticky labels, which they installed for the viewing public to witness over the duration of the telepathy experiment.⁸⁵ Kent and Peoples played with the potent psychic glue of love and telepathy, albeit through fakery, and it has stuck them together with such success that Kent has had to go through university ethics before signing Peoples up for continued telepathic collaboration for at least the duration of her PhD. This telepathic collaboration is more institutionalised than the IMA nurtured collaboration of Tillers and Bennett, and it contrasts as an example of an ongoing and sustainable long-term project that still leaves Kent and Peoples’ individual practices intact and different. The influence of Charles Green’s model of the third hand is allowing artists, media and institutions to recognise the creative potential of telepathic collaboration. Kent and Peoples deconstruct and experiment with the notion of the romantic heterosexual couple as iconic of telepathic collaboration. A fake or real couple is only trumped by a magic set of twins, such as the Wilsons and the Manganos, where telepathic collaboration has been symmetrically hardwired from their earliest same-like existence.

Shape-shifting Forces in Collaborative Art

In conclusion, human and non-human telepathic collaborations since Fluxus share subjectivities in varied and dynamic ways. Telepathy is an active force that can take the shape of a third hand that Green associates with classic twin-like couple collaboration. Telepathy also has shape-shifting collaborative qualities and can manifest as removed hands or possessed automatised hands, as is the case when Miller works with phantasmal memory and Hiller works with spirit forces. Telepathy is not confined to anthropomorphic collaboration, and it can be activated as an animated matrixial “glue” or force within and between ghosts, animals, aliens and all the cyborg and spiritual bodies of avatars, gods and ancestors. Telepathy also takes the form of abstract connective cords, especially in relation to groups and crowds, embodied by chains of sausages in Schneemann and invisible umbilical cords that bind the crowds of riotous Happenings and revolutions.

When Abramović/Ulay collaborated with a Tibetan and an Aboriginal in *Night Sea Crossing*, the gold table deflected, broadened and amplified the telepathy of Abramović/Ulay’s established and two-way doppelgänger telepathy into an ambient, dazzling gold glow. Any electromagnetic phenomena associated with the artist and human psychic activity was made hugely radiant through the reflective properties of gold. Like an occult satellite dish, this artwork carried the idea of transmitting a meditation on compassionate telepathy to the four corners of the earth. Telepathy, a secret and hidden affect, accompanies a wide rainbow range of affects that arise within or are channeled into the collaboration and/or the artwork. Like the Ono/Lennon *Bed-Ins* that led to group collaborations and the widely played song “Give Peace a Chance,” Abramović/Ulay’s couple-based telepathic collaboration had moments of radical expansion, global transmission and numerous re-transmissions.

Telepathy is more aligned to the realm of dreams, imagination, perception and spiritual enlightenment (and even psychosis); whereas collaboration is more aligned to professional exchange, bureaucratic tasks, factional empowerment, strategic coordination (and even conspiracy). Telepathic collaborations as political collaborations certainly exist, as do moments of resistance and political moments opposed to certain forms of collaboration, telepathy and various other factors and issues. Like the old combination of politics, sex and religion, telepathic collaborations are capable of creating some dangerous fireworks.

Telepathic collaboration occurs in unlimited media, but manifests as a particularly strong fusion within a dyad/twin/couple and performance, or a

work that features and documents the energy and/or symmetry of the two artists' bodies. Artistic telepathic collaborations are contagious, and since Fluxus they have mutated like a virus and gained virulence and the ability to enter diverse representation within art and art history. Telepathy and collaboration share the ability to multiply and share subjectivities. Artists, media, and contemporary art institutions are recognising the power of telepathic collaboration more quickly, in part due to the ongoing mythic memory of Abramović/Ulay's enduring recuperation of telepathic collaboration within international and Australian art scenes as well as the art-historical work of Green. Younger generations of artists such as the Manganos, Kildall/Turner and the Mattes are quick to build on Abramović/Ulay's legendary practice-based evidence that powerful telepathies and collaborations build their fusion through the energy generated between dyadic and twinned bodies; and they are doing this through new digital and social media. The technological mediation of all human telepathies is further apparent through the connective contrast between Fluxus and current art. Instead of it being unusual for artist twins and couples to collaborate and work with telepathy, such work is now quickly supported and not viewed as just a passing curiosity or celebrity fashion. Telepathic collaborations are recognised as having important cultural value and providing crucial insight into how art works as a knowledge discipline of shared subjectivity.

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NOTES

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- ¹⁹ Ibid, 84.
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