

Collaborative writing by women poets: a tribute to Leslie Scalapino

One of the main reasons I became interested in writer-to-writer collaboration was a talk by Leslie Scalapino at the 'Assembling Alternatives' poetry conference in New Hampshire in 1996. She spoke about the rapid exchange, by fax, of single lines of poetry with another poet, [in this case Lyn Hejinian](#). This type of collaboration was a way of avoiding individual set pieces, in which each poem and poet is distinct from the other. It also made use of improvisatory procedures which were part of Scalapino's emphasis on 'writing now', and 'disjunction in the present time alone'. Listening to Leslie was one of those inspirational experiences where you immediately start making notes, not just of what someone is saying but of how you might take their ideas and put them into practice. Leslie had opened up for me the possibility of simultaneous collaboration, the rapid intersection of voices, in which one work does not take precedence over the other. I was also able to relate it to feminist theories about challenging author/ity and of creating a new liminal space of encounter and desire. When I began my collaboration with Elizabeth James, 'Neither the One nor the Other',* I had abandoned the idea of using fax, partly because I did not have a fax machine and partly because by then the use of email was ubiquitous and even more convenient. Single lines also seemed like too constricting a form, and our entries varied in length, increasing as the collaboration progressed and we became more confident in our correspondence.

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August 23, 2010

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From *Neither the One nor the Other*

a.m.

mirror and single
contact lens
tip o' my index
a reflex flinch
I put it in

mark lines
her eye eyes
poor authority
straight heir
clings to me

ma

man
maudite

this is my ditch
the love is warty

mo
mor
morwyn
(or

if you prefer

the breton morgan)

sea
rising
drift
ditch the index

love more than
se
a monster

oh frances

morgan is my
mother

I do not prefer

– scales aweigh!

It was those wide melodic leaps
she was scurrying rapidly
up and down the scales

eye-slash-lash scrape her swelled lid
nights after a taxing form filled dishabilly

datasurge

ventures lasting riotous finances
poetry day is worse than thought for the day

no upper-body strength
no upper-arm strength
no body-on-the-floor strength
no over-the-body strength
no under-the body strength

she says that he says it's a dance about falling

really needing that time for herself but had to blame it on
no permit without kermit
and he says Yes but still my point
still my point

Ulli Freer was at VI
reading a sequence called dense
which includes the line
'there is no ego in collaboration'
it seemed egoistic to ask him about it

I also liked the line
'can't see the wood yet feel for the tree'
can't see the word
my elliptical Os
you have to see the word
 I mean the wood

and so we could
fall for the trews
and creep to free

or prefer
singing together
of mount abora a a a

