Respect, care, and labor in collaborative scholarly projects

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As members of *Somatosphere*'s Editorial Collaborative, we have been following the unfolding crisis surrounding *Hau* with profound concern (Agro 2018, Flaherty 2018). As others have noted, this crisis has revealed multiple structural issues that deserve intense engagement beyond the specifics of the individual case: open-access (OA), digital scholarship and publication, yes, but also academic power, precarity, and vulnerability; disciplinarity and the decolonization of anthropology; and technology and institutional structure. In this reflection, we reaffirm our commitment to making *Somatosphere* a collaborative forum that values mutual respect, equity, intellectual generosity, difference, and care. This is a crucial moment for being collectively self-critical about how well we realize this commitment: What kind of community is actually sustained through our platform? What voices are prominent within it? What processes do we have for holding one another to account? How can we can make what we do even more responsive to the multiple structural issues revealed in this crisis?

While *Somatosphere*'s relationship with *Hau* has been relatively minor, as individuals we have had a range of involvements and experiences with this publishing project. Some of us authored pieces for the journal (Yates-Doerr 2018); others have served as peer-reviewers; yet others have colleagues, friends, and students who have worked as staff or have served as board members; others studied in the anthropology departments where the project took shape; while many of us have been more or less outsiders to *Hau* altogether. It is nonetheless clear to us all that the multiple accounts of bullying, abuse of power, verbal harassment, and wage theft at *Hau* must be taken very seriously, thoroughly and *independently* investigated, and acted upon (HAU Staff 7 2018, HAU staff 4 2018). Some actions will need to await the outcome of investigations, of course, but there are many that can and should be taken

immediately. At the time of writing, the *Hau* Board of Trustees has suspended its editor-in-chief (HAU Board of Trustees 2018). We affirm the ongoing urgency of answering and addressing the very specific and as yet unresolved questions regarding *Hau*. But we also recognize that this crisis raises broader issues for us as scholars, researchers, instructors, mentors, students, colleagues, and collaborators in an online forum. It is those broader issues that we focus on here.

Many discussions of the crisis surrounding *Hau* have turned on the general prospects of OA in anthropology and the social sciences. We want to emphasize at the outset: there are *many* successful OA publishing platforms in anthropology and Science and Technology Studies (STS). These range from peer-reviewed journals to book publishers to hybrid publications and represent a variety of different institutional models (LaFlamme et al. 2018). Yet what makes some of these publishing ventures vital is not simply their adherence to OA in its narrowest sense, as a set of contractual agreements on the format of publication. Indeed, the model embraced by most elite commercially-published journals, and favoured by research managers, in which authors and institutions who can afford it pay steep fees for the privilege of allowing "free" access to individual articles, is emblematic of the way that, as Emily Yates-Doerr and Jenna Grant put it, "open access – much like democracy itself – can become a foil for exclusionary practices" (Kowal et al. 2015). One of the lessons of the *Hau* debacle might be that when OA becomes an end in itself, the means of achieving it can undercut much of what was valued to begin with. What *we* find vital in the most significant OA publishing projects is a dedication to fostering respect and care for divergent communities of scholars, as well as an attention to the engrained and often unremarked-upon inequalities that are fundamental to our disciplinary lineages, the material conditions under which we and our colleagues presently labor, and the economies of citation, prestige, and affiliation that continue to make anthropology and its kindred fields hierarchical and exclusionary places.

If the wider discussion that has now gathered around the hashtag #hautalk reminds us of how forms of openness can also legitimate closure, it also brings into sharp relief how exploitative relations, unseen and unsaid, can become the price of inclusion or an outcome of the seeming naturalness of exclusion. Issues related to structures of academic power and vulnerability (and their particular amplitude within anthropology) lie at the very center of this ongoing controversy: at stake are questions about the implicit norms governing relations between senior and junior scholars, and about the inadequacy of the governance mechanisms supposed to deal with inappropriate behavior, making the act of bringing these facts to light feel too risky to current and future livelihoods and careers. If this, as Nayanika Mathur and many others have suggested, is "anthropology's #metoo

moment," then it is one in which much wider attention must be drawn both to gendered forms of harassment, bullying, and abuse within anthropology and its kindred disciplines and to the ways that exclusion and exploitation along the lines of race, class, national origin and language, sexuality, disability, and other forms of difference are reproduced through the academy's own power differentials (Dunn 2018, Mathur 2018). It is equally important to highlight that abusive relationships in the academy take diverse and geographically variable forms, including that valorized category of "mentorship," (Backe 2018). While there is nothing new about these kinds of relations in academia, the growing labor precarity confronting anthropologists and other scholars raises the stakes and consequences of such practices for marginalized, under-employed, and junior scholars (Cultural Anthropology 2018, Murphy 2018, Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares 2018).

Many of these issues are highlighted in the discussion of unpaid or volunteer scholarly work. This conversation is especially important to us because, like many collaborative projects, *Somatosphere* relies largely on the labor of volunteers. We worry about a broad-brush painting of all scholarly work that doesn't have a wage-relation as inherently exploitative, just as we worry about the proliferation of unpaid "internships" geared toward junior scholars in the social sciences (Perlin 2012). There is a wider discussion to be had on the figure of the volunteer in the contemporary academy, and how the emergence of that figure is intertwined with other attempts to re-shape academic life, as well as the promises of relative security it once carried. In a "career" where personal commitments and work obligations are not always neatly separable (if they are for anyone), can we remain vigilant about the separation of academic work from the paying of a wage, without making such payment the sole criterion for valuing the kind of work that we do? And, in addressing that question, can we foreground the issue of who is living at the sharp edges of these questions, and who is not? There is clearly a great deal to be said here. At present, we affirm that the key to an ethical engagement with volunteer colleagues is not separate from the ways we think about paid labor–and that this means thinking about the specific conditions both of those undertaking the work as well as the nature of the work itself. Are students or junior or precariously-employed colleagues being asked to assume inordinate burdens? Are students or junior scholars being given vague promises of career advancement? Are mentorship, supervision, or other relationships and obligations becoming entangled in the editorial work in potentially negative ways? Are mutual obligations and responsibilities being made clear? Will the work be visible and creditable to the volunteer? Will it result in something more than a line in the "service" section of their CV?

We will have more to say about the details of how *Somatosphere* is run

and how labor is distributed in an upcoming post. However, in the interest of transparency, and because we think that the success or failure of most collaborative projects depends on the concrete ways in which ideals or commitments are translated into working practices, we'd like to make several initial points here. First, the amount and kind of labor being carried out behind the scenes at *Somatosphere* is relatively modest, at least when compared to what is needed in order to publish a peer-reviewed journal, and that has allowed us to function on a relative shoe-string financially (Elfenbein 2018). Second, with the exception of several web developers paid to design and add to the site, the only paid position at *Somatosphere* has been that of Managing Editor, which was held first by Deanna Day and later by Greg Clinton, both of whom did fantastic work for the site. Third, when we have not been able to pay a Managing Editor, the "invisible" day-to-day tasks involved in running the site–scheduling, proofreading, formatting and publishing posts; corresponding with authors and members of the editorial team–have been carried out by the Editor, with the editors of specific sections and series taking on the job of corresponding with authors, copy-editing, and posting for their sections or series. Fourth, while contributions to *Somatosphere* are not peer-reviewed, they do undergo internal reviewing within the Editorial Collaborative to offer authors substantive feedback and guidance. Fifth, we have generally tried to distribute volunteer labor in ways that give junior colleagues visibility (through by-lines, for example) and afford them autonomy over their work. Finally, the debate around *Hau* has pushed us to think even more carefully about these issues, and we anticipate that with potential changes in the technologies we use to circulate knowledge and in the institutional and political economic conditions of the academy the ways in which we address the distribution and exchange of labor will need to change as well.

The current debate has also highlighted for us the relative modesty of *Somatosphere*'s horizon – and what such modesty does and does not make possible. As Jason Baird Jackson has pointed out, *Hau* was in many ways distinguished by the speed and the size of its ambitions–big names, "big" theory, lots of big journal issues, multiple book projects, and so on (2018). At least a few of us invested our own excitement in this grand and highly endorsed enterprise, even if only from the sidelines. There is scope, here, to think more carefully about how, to paraphrase Sara Ahmed, a certain kind of "love" for big, Euro-American, largely white and male theory has come to be the distinguishing mark of "serious" scholarship for so much of the social sciences and humanities (2017). What is actually being engendered in—and what platforms are sustained by—that moment of excitement surrounding big theory, the big concept, the big name? This is not a matter of questioning the *importance* of conceptual and theoretical work per se, but rather a call to recognize that, like everything else, theory has its contexts, histories, politics, and even, as Zoe Todd recently wrote,

its own "musty aroma of authority," (2018a). The story of *Hau* is inseparable from these and other disciplinary specificities, histories, and concerns of anthropology. As Todd (2018b), Proshant Chakraborty (2018), and the Mahi Tahi collective (2018) have all emphasized, the *Hau* affair is a reminder of the role of our narrow disciplinary canon as a tool of exclusivity and exclusion, and of how much remains to be done in realizing a project of a decolonial anthropology. (To be sure, issues of canonicity and power are by no means limited to anthropology, as the recent *Somatosphere* series on "Critical Histories, Activist Futures" argues for the history of medicine and science). Our own relationships to anthropology as a discipline vary widely: some of us were trained in and work in anthropology departments (not all of which define "anthropology" or its disciplinary boundaries in the same way), others in a range of other disciplinary or interdisciplinary departments or units. While many of us have our own conceptual, methodological, and disciplinary priorities, our collective is not unified around any single theory, approach, or intellectual genealogy. Indeed, our editorial and curatorial commitment is to thinking that comes from different disciplinary orientations, positions, institutions, and geographies, and to the conversations which emerge not despite but *because of* these differences.

Finally, as participants in a digital forum and as scholars who often research and think about technologies and infrastructures, we are concerned with how digital technologies might facilitate bad or inappropriate editorial practices—and how they might also be harnessed to refuse or resist such practices. Drawing on her experience with *Hau*, Ilana Gershon points out how the particular design of OJS, the journal publishing software platform used by *Hau*, isolated staff members and associate editors from one another and lent itself to opaque and hierarchical communication (2018). We are, of course, wary of accounts that cast technologies as either dangerously determinative or innocently value-neutral, but we take to heart Gershon's observation that this digital tool, combined with the organization of the journal and associated Society, constituted a very particular work environment. At the same time, this platform is also used in highly democratic publishing collectives in which authority is more diffused. A key lesson is perhaps that the same digital communication technologies that allow a publication to be run by collaborators who are spatially isolated from one another can also create challenges that need to be actively and continuously addressed, not the least of which is the potential for abuse. #Hautalk itself is an obvious counterpart to this concern, with social media serving as the platform that has allowed an urgent discussion to take visible public form. But social media abounds with its own perils and exclusions, including the potential for (and reality of) online harassment or IRL reprisal for those who enter into the discussion and the tremendously valuable (but uncompensated) labor of those whose contributions have helped to drive it.

For us as a collective, then, this has been–as Emilia Sanabria put it in the email conversation which developed into this piece–"a moment to reiterate the importance of creating and strengthening respectful collaborative spaces for scholarship to flourish in a way that is truly concerned with diversity (as defined by the voices of diversity not from a colonial centre blind to its own position) and that is rooted in an ethic of care (as defined by decades of feminist scholarship)." For those of us committed to maintaining and developing *Somatosphere* as just such a "respectful collaborative space… for scholarship to flourish," this is now and will for some time remain an important moment for reflection on our own practices, and on how we might do better.

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