



*postScriptum: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Literary Studies* ISSN: 2456-7507  
<postscriptum.co.in> Online – Open Access – Peer Reviewed – UGC Approved  
Volume III Number i (January 2018)

Williams, Jessica L. "The Funky Monk and the Myth of the Solitary Author: ..." pp. 1-19

## **The Funky Monk and the Myth of the Solitary Author: John Frusciante and the Meaning of Authorship**

**Jessica L. Williams**

SUNY College at Old Westbury, New York

The author teaches in the English Department at SUNY College at Old Westbury in New York. She is the author of *Media, Performative Identity, and the New American Freak Show*. Her research and teaching interests include multicultural American literature, disability studies, and popular culture.

### **Abstract**

John Frusciante, both a solo artist and a member of one of the most successful rock bands of the last few decades, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, has struggled throughout his career with defining himself as a collaborator and a solo artist. The contradictions that arise within these struggles suggest quite a few things about authorship in general. With the concept of the author still fighting its way out of the midst of an engaging academic dispute, and with Frusciante's recent departure from the Red Hot Chili Peppers, this examination addresses prevalent and pressing issues of what it means to be an author and a collaborator, and whether or not the myth of the solitary genius is in fact a myth or an elusive but real possibility.

### **Keywords**

Stillinger, Barthes, Frusciante, authorship, collaboration, co-writing

## Jack Stillinger's Myth of the Solitary Genius

In his landmark text, *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius* (1991), Jack Stillinger turns our attention to the fact that readers tend to think of authorship as a solitary endeavor, what he calls the myth of the solitary genius. However, behind the mirage of single authorship often lie collaborations which vary in terms of contribution, but which force us to question the myth of the solitary author nonetheless. Stillinger's text focuses on "discrepancies between the actual circumstances of production and the imaginary circumstances that critics have depicted—and then sometimes rather desperately clung to—in their interpretations, evaluations, and editorial theorizing" (Stillinger 23).

There are, I would argue, two blanketing reasons why readers hold on to the myth of the solitary genius. The first is that readers become emotionally attached to authors. Stillinger says that "perhaps the single most important aspect of authorship is simply the vaguely apprehended *presence* of human creativity, personality, and (sometimes) voice that nominal authorship seems to provide" (186). When one reads, they imagine that they are in the confidence of one writer; they have entered into a silent bond with whomever it is they are reading.

The second reason is that readers want answers from the texts they read, and not just any answers; they want the authorial, definitive answer, and to whom should readers turn for these answers if not the author? Through an examination of Keats' "Sonnet to Sleep," Stillinger illustrates "two things that do not necessarily sit well together." The first is "the importance of historical authorship to our reading, understanding, and appreciation of a literary text," and the second is "the fact that for many works, when the circumstances of composition are investigated in detail, the identifiable authorship turns out to be a plurality of authors" (22). The latter disrupts the former in that, because readers place so much emphasis on biography, the realization of multiple authorship causes an irremediable conflict. Biography holds such weight for readers—"teachers, students, critics, and other readers"—because of its convenience, for one (Stillinger 187). In other words, when readers struggle with texts, the first place they often turn to is the author, and it is therefore problematic to dispel this myth.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Even in the case of this study, Frusciante's meta-texts make up the majority of my own evidence. I do not turn to his other collaborators, though this is mostly because these meta-texts do not seem to exist.

## Shades of Gray: Questions of Music and Authorship

An analysis of the mythologized solitary writer and its origins leads one very naturally to considering whether such a myth exists among other art forms. Visual art? Certainly. One need only to think of Michelangelo painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, or Jackson Pollock splattering paint all over the canvasses on his floor. When one pictures them, does one envision a crowd looking on? A friend or lover peeking in to lend a hand? Certainly not. Much like the myth of the solitary author, visual artists are often imagined working alone.<sup>2</sup>

But what about music? This arena is a bit trickier. Many musicians collaborate as members of a band, some are solo artists, and many—especially these days—do both. Are solo artists really solo, and do viewers see them that way? Does the myth of the solitary author, this romantic view of the rock star writer, apply to actual rock stars? I believe it makes sense to look to someone like guitarist John Frusciante for answers. He is both a solo artist and has been a member of one of the most successful rock bands of the last few decades, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and he is one who both epitomizes and disrupts ideas of both solo and collaborative work, and provides us with interesting insights into questions of music and authorship.

There are several aspects of Frusciante's career that warrant exploration. In investigating both his solo and collaborative careers, the ways in which he creates music in both, and what he says about both types of work, I find that they are rather different in many regards; there seems, at these times, to be a clear separation between what it means to be a solo artist and what it means to be a collaborator. However, there are surprising crossovers which confuse the matter and make the distinction between solo and collaborator much less stable. Frusciante's solo work is in fact a type of collaboration, and he is never really a "solitary author." He helps us to see—through his practices, his music, and his reflections—that there are shades of gray in all artistic endeavors, that it is never as simplistic as "solo" or "collaborative." Rather, Frusciante is always somewhere in the middle; never really working as a "solo" artist, but rarely embodying the spirit of collaboration either.

In fact, he is just the type of figure one might *not* turn to if we wanted to consider notions of authorship/composing/writing; he is after all, a man who has been called mentally ill, a drug addict, someone who spent the better part of the early 90s playing funk rock songs

---

<sup>2</sup> Although this is, of course, no more true than the myth of the solitary author. Michelangelo and Pollock, like many artists, both had assistants.

in packed arenas with a sock stuck over his penis. My response to these challenges is that he is an excellent example of just the type of figure one *ought* to turn to in considering questions of authorship. His own struggles with defining himself as a collaborator and a solo artist, and the contradictions that arise within these struggles suggest quite a few things about authorship, both individual and collaborative, and can therefore contribute to our understanding of collaboration and authorship and ultimately help us to conclude that the solo artist/collaborator binary of the music world is, much like its literary counterpart, a false one.

### A Lone Genius

John Frusciante is not famous as a solo artist; it is with the Red hot Chili Peppers that he has found the success that allows him to pursue his solo projects. That his solo career is critically ignored and has a very limited fan base is essential to Frusciante's embodiment of the myth of the solitary author. It enables viewers to further mythologize and romanticize him as a lone genius. Because his solo albums are significantly less popular than his band's, his solo music is seen as his "real" music—the music he is passionate about. He does it because—spiritually and emotionally—he has to do it, not because he is making money from it: "It's something I naturally do, it's like breathing. There's no forethought, it's not there for any purpose except to make me feel good. I love singing and I love writing lyrics. I live, eat and breathe music. All I think about all the time is music" (Frusciante "Interview").

Another way in which Frusciante embodies the myth of the solitary author is highlighted when one examines society's tendency to glamorize authors who have struggled to achieve their success. It is natural for one to look to someone who has led a "rags to riches" life, and to feel like they too can pull themselves up out of a bad situation and achieve success. Frusciante fits into this paradigm exactly. One needs only to look to his biography to see that he is exceptional, a man who beat the odds and rose to fame twice. He was not the original guitarist of the Red Hot Chili Peppers; Hillel Slovak was. Frusciante was a self-proclaimed fan of the band, who, after Slovak died of a heroin overdose, was elated when asked to audition. He rose to stardom upon joining the Red Hot Chili Peppers and then made the choice to plummet back into obscurity when he left the band in 1992. He spent six years out of the public eye, and out of touch with his band, family, and most of his friends. He became immersed in a heroin addiction so severe that he is lucky to be alive. Awed, Red Hot Chili Pepper bassist Flea says, "You just don't do what John did—and *live*" (Sullivan 66).

Upon rejoining the Red Hot Chili Peppers and once again becoming active collaboratively, Frusciante, ironically, wrote and released eight solo albums, one joint effort with Josh Klinghoffer of the Bicycle Thief, and two albums with Ataxia, his side project with Klinghoffer and Joe Lally of Fugazi.

Knowing his story allows one to imagine him in a way that is highly romantic, idealized, and, of course, solitary. Viewers might like to imagine that he has been able to achieve such success on his own, because of his innate talents. This idea of romanticizing rags to riches stories and viewing them as individual, solo successes, is not limited to the music world. In fact, if Frusciante were an author he would never be accepted as a collaborator.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging his collaboration with the Chili Peppers is understandable because in that role he is part of a whole, and is therefore expected to be a mere contributor rather than a lone genius.

### **The Starving Artist**

One of the most interesting ways in which the stereotype of the myth of the solitary artist presents itself in Frusciante's life is through his changing physical appearance. When he first joined the Chili Peppers in 1988, he was a healthy, exuberant eighteen-year old, an attractive, energetic, happy rock star. In 1992, Frusciante made the decision to leave the Red Hot Chili Peppers to pursue solo work and to (consciously) become a heroin addict. He was uncomfortable with the attention that came with being in a famous band and therefore disappeared from the public eye until he resurfaced in a horrifying 1996 *Phoenix New Times* interview.<sup>4</sup>

This interview provided the world with its first impressions of Frusciante as a solo artist, an artist who was drastically different from the young, fit, enthusiastic Chili Pepper he had been when last seen. Deep in the clutches of addiction, Frusciante was physically unrecognizable. This article describes him as a man on the brink of death: his teeth were falling out, his mouth was infected, festering. His hair was “shorn to the skull; his fingernails, or the spaces where they used to be, [were] blackened by blood” (Wilonsky).

---

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Carver is a perfect example of this, and in fact the two have much in common in terms of the way they are perceived as solitary authors. For more, see “Rough Crossings: The Cutting of Raymond Carver.” *The New Yorker*. 24 December 2007.

<sup>4</sup> There has been some debate as to the original printing of this article; many sources cite *LA Weekly*, though as far as I can tell, the *Phoenix New Times* was where it first ran. Some video from this time exists in multiple sources on the internet as well.

This disturbing description fits nicely with one of the paradigms of the solitary writer—that of the tortured artist. Part of the myth of the solitary author is physical appearance, and here Frusciante is, like many solitary geniuses before him—think Sylvia Plath or Kurt Cobain—seen as the physical manifestation of the solitary author. His body is a vessel to be filled with creativity; he is empty, frail, a portal, and, though common sense tells us that his physical decay is the result of severe addiction, he is viewed as a “starving artist,” the result of being so used by his art.

Though this is the most severe example of his changing physical appearance, the changing of his body is a trend which has continued throughout his career. When he rejoined the Chili Peppers in 1998, he had reconstructive surgery on his jaw and had his remaining teeth removed and replaced with dental implants. He gained back the weight he’d lost, let his hair grow out and regained a healthy—though drastically different—physical appearance. His body was severely scarred, mostly on his arms—the result of constantly shooting up and, it is rumored, as the result of a fire he started while freebasing—and his face was slightly changed because of the surgery. The result was an older, more worn, healthier and happier physical appearance. He was no longer a starving artist when he rejoined his band, but this continues to shift throughout his career depending on where his musical energies are focused. When Frusciante is immersed in his solo work, he often appears thinner, in more bizarre clothing, and often wears thick glasses which make him appear fragile and introverted. This changing appearance is a physical cue; he signifies physically as being either an introverted, “starving” soloist, or as a healthy, contributing member of a rock band.

### **“Alone in my house with my sample”**

Frusciante is a musical mastermind; it is all he does, according to him and his bandmates. Lead singer Anthony Keidis says, for example, “The artistic center of his brain is pretty much all of his brain” (Sullivan 66). He presents himself as being capable of recording an entire album in his home studio completely alone, and in the case of his third solo album, *To Record Only Water for Ten Days*, he comes closest to being correct. His Laurel Canyon home is more or less a recording studio, filled with guitars, equipment, and records. It is “a house dedicated to making music” (Baccigaluppi 43). The following interview gives us an insight into his solo writing process at this time:

**Jochen Schliemann:** Where and how did you record that album (*To Record Only Water for Ten Days*, 2001)?

**John Frusciante:** Alone in my house with my sampler.

**JS:** Where do you live?

**JF:** During the recordings I lived in a village named Silverlake, near Hollywood, in a guesthouse. It was a good place. It was the perfect size for me at that time. I had my records, my sampler and my recorder, a small kitchen and a TV set, where I watched Andy-Warhol-movies. It was a simple existence which suited that time. (Schliemann 93)

Much like we imagine authors, here Frusciante is seen as being completely alone during the writing and recording of his album. The liner notes of his early solo albums mirror this solitude. He writes, produces, and records all the songs, plays all of the instruments, even hand writes the liner notes. He is easily seen as the perpetuation of the myth of the solitary writer here.

### **Disrupting the Myth of the Solitary Author**

In many ways, then, Frusciante really does seem to bring to life the archetypal solitary author—he has achieved success despite the odds; his solo music is his passion, rather than his meal ticket; his body literally changes to act as a signifier of either solo or collaborative; he even tells us that he writes alone in his home studio. It is so easy to see him this way, that some of the facts that shatter this image are rather jarring. At times, he appears to have very clear ideas about what it means to be a solo artist and what it means to be a collaborator. However, at other times his ideas about authorship often seem confused and contradictory.

Though we have seen how Frusciante perpetuates the myth of the solitary author in many ways, his solo career is not, in reality, an entirely solitary effort. This statement finds evidence in a few different areas of Frusciante's career: his work with Ryan Hewitt, an engineer with whom Frusciante has had a longstanding relationship; his collaborations with Josh Klinghoffer, a multi-instrumentalist who has collaborated with John on the majority of his solo albums; and finally, Frusciante's communication with spirits and his use of automatic writing. These examples all show that although we tend to see Frusciante, like most solo artists, as working in isolation, the reality is rather different. In many ways he simultaneously perpetuates and disrupts the myth of the solitary author, leaving us with a need to rethink these oversimplified categorizations.

## Ryan Hewitt

Ryan Hewitt, the engineer with whom John has collaborated on most of his solo albums, gives an interview, along with Frusciante, to *Tape Op, The Creative Music Recording Magazine*, in which the two completely begin to collapse the mythologized/romanticized idea of Frusciante as a solo artist. The way in which the relationship between Hewitt and Frusciante is discussed in this interview is rather revealing about the collaborative process. Though their subject matter is the recording process, which is not of particular importance to this conversation, notice the ways in which they speak of their collaboration and the contradictory ways in which Frusciante speaks of his work as both solo and collaborative: “On the solo records, we started contradicting everything that the engineers who Ryan and I had been around were doing...we ended up coming at it from the other side...we made a couple of albums.” He constantly refers to “we” rather than “I” implying that the effort was collaborative. Hewitt notes, “When John and I started with *The Will to Death* he called me up and said, ‘Hey I want to make a record...Are you in?’ And I’m like, ‘Fuck yeah I’m in’” (Baccigaluppi 43). Again, this makes it appear as if Frusciante intended for Hewitt to be a major contributing factor in his vision.

In further discussing his relationship with Hewitt, Frusciante sounds very reminiscent of the case studies that are examined in *(First Person)<sup>2</sup>, A Study of Co-authoring in the Academy* by Kami Day & Michele Eodice. The authors reveal many of the common characteristics of collaborative partnerships: these collaborations are called nurturing and feminine, and are often discussed by the co-authors themselves using romantic imagery, such as ideas about “becoming one” and “revealing yourself to someone.” Frusciante’s language reflects this rather accurately when he says,

Ryan and I are really in sync with each other...It’s really important to have somebody who you’re comfortable around. I think that as a performer in the studio, you’re so naked....*Shadows [Collide with People]* was a really difficult album to make for me and it was painstaking to get good vocal takes...you’ve got somebody who’s putting you under a microscope, somebody who’s seeing every detail of what you’re doing... It can be really humiliating. (Baccigaluppi 44).

This is interesting because Frusciante sounds like he is in a true collaboration with Hewitt. His language reflects the feminine, nurturing, trusting spirit of a collaborative effort, and in doing so completely upends our view of him as a solitary author. Ironically, Frusciante

himself seems to struggle with this idea. Despite his talk of collaboration, he holds strong to the belief that his albums are solo efforts, and seems to believe that because he is the primary songwriter, the other contributors are “helping him” with his music (Fuchs).

### Josh Klinghoffer

Josh Klinghoffer is a musician who has recorded and toured in support of numerous other musicians including Beck, the Butthole Surfers, Gnarl Barkley, PJ Harvey, Red Hot Chili Peppers, The Bicycle Thief, Thelonus Monster and Vincent Gallo. He is John’s junior by ten years, but the two seemed to be close friends and Josh is credited on four of Frusciante’s albums and is listed as co-author on *A Sphere in the Heart of Silence*, the only one of their collaborations on which he is given full billing. This makes for a total of seven appearances out of the twelve solo albums on Frusciante’s discography, ignoring for now the Ataxia collaboration between Frusciante, Klinghoffer, and Fugazi’s Joe Lally.

Frusciante is not really a solo artist on any of these five albums, so why is his name the only one on the album cover? What is the difference between *A Sphere in the Heart of Silence* and the other four albums on which Klinghoffer appears? According to John, “with my music, I write the guitar part, I write the vocal part, I write the words and I know exactly where the song is going...I’m open to Josh making up a bass line or a drum part. I like that collaboration, but everything has to fit into my visual image of the song. I have a certain sort of aesthetic echo in my head” (Berkey). In other words, he lets Klinghoffer “help out” but he has complete creative control over the music. Again, we see Frusciante conceding that he is collaborating, yet denying it all at once. This seems to imply that he sees himself as a solitary author in this case, and in all cases when his name is the one on the album cover. He is the creator, the author, and the one who, despite the input of others, is at the helm and therefore ought to receive solo credit for the end result.

In a telling *Alternative Nation* interview, Frusciante discusses the process of writing *Shadows Collide with People*, the first of his albums on which Klinghoffer appears. The interviewer notes that Frusciante had previously said “that the next album would be released under a band name since Klinghoffer would have his part in it” and asks if *Shadows* was the album he meant. His response details their process and how the album came to be a collaborative effort, yet ultimately still a solo album. He responds, “Yes, it’s this album. But now it is different from what it was back then” and goes on to describe the writing of

“Omission,” the first song they wrote for the album. The process he details cannot be described as anything but co-writing: “[Josh] played keyboard and I played guitar and both of us had the ideas for the vocals. So I said: ‘I’ll go into one corner of the room and do my vocals and you stay here and do yours.’ We sat there and scribbled our parts onto a piece of paper and when we were ready we got back together again and sung our ideas together and they fit perfectly”; it is truly a joint writing effort (Fuchs).

But, according to Frusciante, this process was inevitably *not* the one they would use for the rest of the album. He says that “As time went by, this album became more of a solo album with which he’s helping me...we realized that these were my songs and it therefore had to be a solo album” (Fuchs). His ideas about what is and what isn’t solo work are never explicitly stated; the closest definition we get from him is when he says they’re under his name “just cause I write the songs and I’m, you know, producing and stuff” (“John Frusciante and Josh Klinghoffer”) but the feeling is that Klinghoffer may not be getting the amount of co-writing credit he deserves.

This is highlighted in the many contradictions that continue to arise. For example, Frusciante concedes elsewhere that Klinghoffer in fact “wrote all the drum parts” rather than simply writing “*a* drum part” as he says above (*italics mine*) (Frusciante, *Mtv2 Gonzo Interview*). The idea of authorship is also problematic in the use of the plural possessive used when discussing these “solo” albums. For example, if we return to the *Alternative Nation* interview, Frusciante is asked about the minor contributions of two of the Chili Peppers on the album to which he responds, “this is mine and Josh’s thing and we just asked [the Chili Peppers] for a little help.” If this were the case then shouldn’t Klinghoffer have received more credit? Frusciante’s contradictions tell us, if nothing else, that ideas of authorship are extremely complicated.

### **Automatic Writing and the Spirits in John Frusciante’s Head**

It can be argued that even if we were to remove John’s frequent collaborators—Hewitt, Klinghoffer, the guests on his albums, the mixers, etc—Frusciante would never truly be a solo artist because he claims to receive his music through spirits in another dimension. This sounds rather bizarre, but Frusciante’s belief in spirits—real or not—is quite a reality for him and therefore must be examined in conjunction with his beliefs about collaboration and authorship.

Automatic writing is the process by which spirits communicate through a living person's pen. This person is a vessel through which the spirit dictates his or her words. According to Bette London, author of *Writing Double*, "some of the most celebrated cases involving automatic writing were those that claimed authorship in perpetuity for a host of famous literary figures—cases that, with few notable exceptions, were disclaimed by authors and mediums alike for giving a bad name to their profession" (London 156). While some mediums used the veil of automatic writing for its shock value or its exotic appeal, many mediums took it quite seriously: much of the automatic writing from the early 1900s "consisted in personal communications from departed friends and relatives—often of a quite trivial nature. Much of it, however...consisted in extended esoteric and metaphysical meditations, ranging uncertainly between scholarly tract and private journal entries" (London 156). Women in these years were, of course, limited to what they could and could not publish. What better way to write about men's topics than to claim to be writing through the voice of a man? Automatic writing was a way for these women to claim some freedom over their own words, ironically, by removing their names from the manuscripts.

Many of the women mediums from this time spoke of automatic writing as if it were, as London puts it, "a typical rainy-day occupation" (London 161). She quotes Geraldine Cummins, scribe of *The Scripts of Cleophas*, as saying: "One afternoon a thunderstorm broke over Paris; so, unable to go sight-seeing, we retired to a bedroom, and while thunder pealed and the room darkened I was suitably thrilled by Mrs. Dowden's demonstration of her psychic powers" (161). There is also an interesting sense of detachment from the writings these mediums have produced: "*I have not written any of this book at all; I have only taken down faithfully as I have been able what I have heard*" (164). London continues that many witnesses to automatic writing have described not what the writer was doing but what the pen was doing: "the pencil is held,' 'the pencil writes,' and so on" (164). The pencil is a tool through which the spirit communicates; it bridges the gap between our world and the spirit world.

The medium is then an "interpreter" and hence 'coauthor' of her productions"; the medium/spirit relationship is one of co-authorship and collaboration. As London points out, when we come to these conclusions we have to recognize the problems that come along with them, notably that they imply that ideas of authorship are problematic:

Automatic writing, by breaking down the distinctions of literary and nonliterary, the original and the copied, the spoken and the written, the product and the process, the spontaneous and the crafted, might be seen to

testify to the continued existence of those writing practices, often communal or collaborative in nature, that could not be subsumed under the rubric of the proprietary author. (171)

Automatic writing teeters between ideas of solo and collaborative work, and ultimately falls on the side of the latter. Whether we truly believe that a medium is communicating with a spirit, and whether or not the medium herself believes it, is irrelevant. The concept and the spirit behind the collaboration (no pun intended) are what is important; it is the idea of ownership that is significant. A medium gives up ownership of the text and hands it to something we cannot see. In doing this, the author completely breaks apart the myth of the solitary author—even when the writer is alone in a room with nothing but a pen and paper, she can be collaborating with forces unseen. This applies to Frusciante and his beliefs in a few ways. Frusciante speaks often of “spirits” or “energies” which guide him and his music, and it appears that he is using these terms in very much the same way as the mediums. Secondly, his premiere album with Ataxia is called *Automatic Writing*, a fact that cannot be ignored.

Frusciante talks about his spirits in most of the interviews he gives, and it is a theme in his lyrics as well. In her Chili Peppers feature for *SPIN*, Kate Sullivan writes that “he speaks often of a guardian spirit and says that when he was closest to death during his heroin addiction, he was visited regularly by figures from the other side” (Sullivan 66). But his connection to the spirit world is not just a result of his drug use. He claims that he first decided to become a musician when his “guardian spirit” suggested it to him at the age of four—this connection has been a lifelong one (66).

Elsewhere he talks about how the spirits began to help him with his music: “It started when I played the guitar one day and I said to myself “Step aside!” and as I did it when I didn’t concentrate on my playing, the most beautiful music came to me. At this point I knew that there’s another power which is responsible for the music and that it wasn’t me who created it” (Frusciante, *Deutschlandfunk Radio*). Much like the way in which a medium uses her pen as a tool to transmit words from a spirit to the page, Frusciante uses his guitar: “That’s what takes place when a song is written: You see something that doesn’t exist yet. Then you use your instrument to find it” (Sullivan 66). This “automatic writing” is not only present on Frusciante’s solo work; from the way he describes it, it is how he creates all of his music and nothing he creates, therefore, is truly a solo effort. He is always in collaboration with the spirits.

Oddly enough, Frusciante puts an emphasis on this type of collaboration in his side group, Ataxia. He compares what he and his collaborators were doing with the Surrealists who claimed to use automatic writing. The Surrealists would “just write as quickly as possible without any thought to the literal meaning of whatever they were writing. Not only did I write the lyrics that way, but we wrote the music that way, too” (Frusciante, “A Conversation with John Frusciante 5-6). He downplays the role of the spirits here—maybe because it is implicit in the use of the term automatic writing—but more likely because his collaboration with spirits seems to be something deeply personal, not something he would share with others, yet he holds onto the idea of the spirit collaboration by referring to what he does with this group “automatic writing.”

### **“What do you like more, breathing in or breathing out?”**

We’ve seen how Frusciante, as a solo artist, both embodies and contradicts the myth of the solitary author. Interestingly enough, Frusciante also perpetuates and disrupts common ideas about collaboration as well, both in the Red Hot Chili Peppers and in his side projects. When asked which he prefers—working alone or with his band—Frusciante replied, ““There's no preference. They are both natural functions for me. It's like asking what do you like more, breathing in or breathing out?” (Frusciante, “Interview”). As we will see, despite his frequent claims to the contrary, it is not always quite this simple.

*(First Person)*<sup>2</sup> shows us how most collaborations are thought of as partnerships; the authors are collaborators in the truest sense—working together in the spirit of partnership, teamwork, equality, and respect to achieve a common goal. Frusciante, likewise, describes the work he does with the Chili Peppers as a group collaboration:

If you don't have any friends, you might as well just make electronic music by yourself... But if you're gonna be in a band, be in a band with people who you believe in their opinion as much as you believe in your own. And you'll find that you can create music that's way bigger and way better than anything any of you could have done on your own... You can all help each other. Everyone has to be honest about what they like and what they don't like. But like in my band, you know, if everybody doesn't like something, we don't do it. (Frusciante, *30 Tons*)

From what he says here, we can gather that he puts a lot of stock in working as a member of a band, a collaborator. Ironically, his actions have contradicted this. His 2001 solo release, *To Record Only Water for Ten Days*, is a heavily electronic album, which he claims was written and recorded entirely by himself. He has also expressed that being a solo artist gives him the freedom to do things he can't do as part of a whole. He doesn't seem to be making a comment on his solo work here, and is simply saying that "if you're gonna be in a band" you should be in a band with people whom you care about and trust, an attitude representative of a collaborative spirit.

The Chili Peppers have always been thought of as a group effort. In many bands, the lead singer is the only recognizable member, and is almost always the most often quoted, photographed, and referenced. Not so in the Chili Peppers. All four members are represented in the media fairly evenly. When Frusciante first returned to the band in 1998, however, much of the attention was on his return and how he seemed to breathe new life into the band. A *NY Rock* interview ironically titled "Interview with the Red Hot Chili Peppers: the Californication of John Frusciante," prompts the band with the following: "In a way, John made and broke the Red Hot Chili Peppers, his guitar work influenced your sound in a major way and was partial reason for the band's success. When he dropped out, the spirit of the Peppers seemed to fade." Flea responds saying, "I still think that [Frusciante] was the missing link, only with him were we able to create an album like *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* ("Interview with the Red Hot Chili Peppers").

So despite the insistence that the band is an equal partnership, here it appears that Frusciante is a dominating factor in the band's sound and success. He confirms this elsewhere when he says that "around 50- 60% of the music is created by me and I must have a clear idea in which musical direction the band is going to move...My job is it to define the direction of the band in a particular situation. It gets changed by the other members in a certain way, so that it becomes something different in the end than I thought it [would] be at the beginning. But that I even had a vision at the beginning, leads us to the songs you know from the Red Hot Chili Peppers" (Frusciante, *Deutschlandfunk Radio*). He concedes that the band has veto power, but that ultimately it is due to his vision that the band's songs get created in the first place. Perhaps it is only because he is inspired by his bandmates that he is able to be so productive in the band's song writing. He says that "The way I play guitar, it only works when Flea is the bassist, and Flea can only write songs the way he does when Anthony sings. In a way, we're all co-dependent and we know it" ("Interview with the Red Hot Chili

Peppers”). In the context of the group, this seems to be true. When creating music as part of a band, Frusciante needs the other three members as much as they clearly need him.

It often appears as though Frusciante feels an obligation to the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and understandably so. He has, of course, seen the most success as a member of a group, and it is only being in this group that allows him the freedom to pursue side projects at all. When asked by *Magnet Magazine* if he found the Chili Peppers’ schedule—“spending six to eight months making a record, then touring it for 18 months”—to be stifling, he responded in the negative, “because I consider Flea and Anthony’s belief in me to be responsible for the fact that I make music at all. When they wanted me to be in the band again, I was totally out of practice as a musician... Their confidence in me and my ability to make music is what got me writing songs again.” He credits them for allowing him the time to get his playing back up to par after his drug addiction and for having faith in his ability to do it. Were it not for them he likely wouldn’t be writing any music at all. However, “As far as our schedule goes,” he continues, “there are definitely things I don’t like about being on tour for a year and a half. At a certain point, it’s really hard to think of something new to do that you haven’t done before. You start to feel like you’re scraping the bottom of the barrel” (Berkery). So, while he is beholden to them for giving him the opportunity and the means to play music again, the sense is that were it not for the obligation he felt, he wouldn’t spend quite so much time doing things their way.

This interview—given in the midst of his solo outpouring of 2004 when he recorded and released six albums in six months—is rather revealing of Frusciante’s feelings about his solo work and the commitment he feels to his band. When Berkery asks him, “Is [the RHCP’s] schedule the impetus for making all this [solo] music in such a concentrated period?” Frusciante says that he’d released so much music because “the last five years have been the most creative period of my life... So when the Chili Peppers were done with the *By The Way* tour (in November 2003), I said, ‘This is my chance.’ I asked to have a six-month break... And I managed to record about six albums.” The excitement and relief in his words is undeniable—“This is my chance.” He seems to feel confined by his band, and only seems to be truly in his element when focusing on his own music.

He continues in the *Magnet* interview, discussing how he determines which songs he keeps for his own albums, and which he saves for the band, and indicates that it depends on the time period and which project he’s focusing on at the time. Ironically, his music and his band’s music are so incredibly different that this is difficult to fathom. In his solo work, he says, he enjoys having complete creative control, whereas in the Chili Peppers, he is “more

interested in seeing it go in directions I didn't expect." He says that when he goes from his solo work back to the band he must "compromise and remember that it's a band and not my solo record. I can't be rushing people. At the same time, I can't let these people senselessly waste [time and] money" (Berkery).

### **John Frusciante Has Quit the Band**

The news was confirmed on December 16, 2009, after weeks of internet rumors and speculation, that Frusciante had once again quit the Red Hot Chili Peppers. In a blog on his official website, he wrote an open letter to his fans saying, "To put it simply, my musical interests have led me in a different direction. Upon rejoining, and throughout my time in the band, I was very excited about exploring the musical possibilities inherent in a rock band, and doing so with those people in particular. A couple of years ago, I began to feel that same excitement again, but this time it was about making a different kind of music, alone, and being my own engineer" ([www.johnfrusciante.com](http://www.johnfrusciante.com)). Frusciante's decision to leave the Chili Peppers for a second time seemed almost inevitable, especially after his 2004 comments in *Magnet Magazine*. His letter expresses the value he finds in the notion of being master of his own musical vision, and that the "sense of duty" he felt to his band was no longer enough to make him "go against his nature" and continue to work collaboratively. He writes, "Over the last 12 years, I have changed, as a person and artist, to such a degree that to do further work along the lines I did with the band would be to go against my own nature. There was no choice involved in this decision. I simply have to be what I am, and have to do what I must do."

It would seem then that Frusciante's vote is for the life of the solitary writer, a life where he works alone, doing what he "must do" in fulfilling his creative vision. As much as he desperately seems to want to embody this myth, however, his choices continue to contradict it. Since leaving the Red Hot Chili Peppers, he has collaborated with other groups of musicians, such as Swahili Blonde and Speed Dealer Moms, collaborations which indicate that perhaps there is more to the Chili Peppers split than meets the eye ([www.invisiblemovement.net](http://www.invisiblemovement.net)). In an odd twist, Frusciante's rumored replacement in the Chili Peppers is none other than his longtime collaborator, Josh Klinghoffer, a decision that would seem to give Klinghoffer some of the recognition he deserves while allowing Frusciante to bow out without a lot of fuss. More questions and complications arise when all things are

considered: will Frusciante continue to collaborate with Klinghoffer? If not, is it fair to say that he really is making a move closer to a true solo career? If so, can it be argued that he is still in collaboration with the Chili Peppers, in a sense?

This latest career shift highlights the many ways in which we struggle to define authorship, and to see that even for the authors themselves, it is an amorphous concept. For Frusciante, there is, at times, a world of difference between creating music as a solo artist and creating music as a member of a four-piece band; at other times, they seem to be one and the same. Ultimately, he seems to recognize that there is no difference at all, because in both, he is doing what he lives for—creating music.

Frusciante blurs the lines between common definitions of authorship, both solo and collaborative, and reinforces that we must question what it is we mean when we refer to the “author” of a work. Can Frusciante really be considered the sole author of his solo albums when he has the assistance of Ryan Hewitt and Josh Klinghoffer? If Frusciante is constantly in collaboration with spirits, can he ever really be considered a solo artist? As a member of a successful band, Frusciante was seen as 25% of a whole, but he both confirmed and denied this in his conversations about the band and the large share of work he did with the Chili Peppers. While he often praised and seemed passionate about the collaborative experience, he has now left the group twice, each time to focus on his solo music. How do we reconcile these contradictions without losing the common notions of solitary authorship and collaboration? The answer is, I think, to be found in Frusciante’s words:

I believe everything anyone's ever felt is part of any record that they've made - anything that's even ever happened to somebody, even when they were a baby, is a major part of any record they record. If they're really showing you a part of themselves, if they're really going to make themselves vulnerable as artists, the more they'll show you about who they really are and what they've lived through. All that stuff is on there in one way or another. (Frusciante, “A Conversation with John Frusciante” 5-6)

And so we bring every piece of who we are to the things we create—every collaboration, every influence, every jam session, every conversation about whatever it is you’re trying to create—it is all in there and so we are never really working alone. We carry our memories and our influences around with us wherever we go—they’re unavoidable. And so it seems that the myth of the solitary author is—in the music world as well as in its literary counterpart—just that: a myth.

## Works Cited

- Baccigaluppi, John. "Mr. Frusciante." *Tape Op*. Sept/Oct 2007. Vol 61. 43+. Print.
- Berkery, Patrick. "John Frusciante: Perfect From Now On." *Magnet Magazine*. 1 October 2004. Web.
- Brannigan, Paul. "Killing Yourself to Live: The Trials of John Frusciante." *Kerrang (UK)*. RHCP Collector's Issue. Jan. 2004. <http://www.invisiblemovement.net/articles/2004-press/01-kerranglegends>. Web.
- Day, Kami and Michele Eodice. (*First Person*)<sup>2</sup>, *A Study of co-authoring in the Academy*. Salt Lake City: Utah UP, 2001.
- Frusciante, John. *30 Tons*. 26 March 2001. Television. "30 Tons Transcript." *Invisible-Movement.net*. Web. <http://www.invisible-movement.net/articles/transcripts/20010326-30tons>
- , "A Conversation with John Frusciante." Interview by David Cotner. *Los Angeles-Underground*. August 2004, 5-6. Web.
- , *Deutschlandfunk Radio*. Interview Transcript. February 2004. Web. <http://www.invisible-movement.net/articles/transcripts/200402-deutschlandfunk>
- , "Interview." Dotmusic. 19 February 2001. Web. <http://www.invisible-movement.net/articles/2001-press/0219-dotmusic>
- , [www.johnfrusciante.com](http://www.johnfrusciante.com). December 16th, 2009.
- , *MTV2 Gonzo Interview* by Zane Lowe. February 2004. Web.
- Fuchs, Benjamin. "Chad beats the hell out of his drums, ya know?" *Alternative Nation*. 20 February 2004. Web. <http://invisible-movement.net/press/2004-alternativenation>
- "Interview with the Red Hot Chili Peppers: the Californication of John Frusciante." *NY Rock*. July 1999. Web. [http://www.nyrock.com/interviews/rhcp\\_int.htm](http://www.nyrock.com/interviews/rhcp_int.htm)
- "John Frusciante and Josh Klinghoffer." 25th January 2009. *The Watt from Pedro Show*. Podcast. <http://twfps.com/pages/show.php?sid=184>
- London, Bette. *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999. Print.
- "Rough Crossings: The Cutting of Raymond Carver." *The New Yorker*. 24 December 2007. Web. [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/12/24/071224fa\\_fact?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/12/24/071224fa_fact?currentPage=all)
- Schliemann, Jochen. "The Spirits That I've Summoned." *Visions (Germany)* March 2001. 90-93. Print.

Stillinger, Jack. *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of the Solitary Genius*. NY: Oxford UP, 1991. Print.

Sullivan, Kate. "Red Hot Chili Peppers." *Spin Magazine*. August 2002: 62-66. Print.

Wilonsky, Robert. "Blood on the Tracks." *Phoenix New Times*. 12 Dec. 1996. 7 November 2009. <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/1996-12-12/music/blood-on-the-tracks/>