



**Pedagogy of Co-creative Practices:
A Call for New Models of Media Practice Education¹**

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ABSTRACT: This paper proposes to investigate the affordances of co-creative pedagogy as an alternative approach to *auteur* culture in Media Art Practice education, signifying a shift from single authorship to co-creation as an evolving modality of creative practice in particular localities. At the basis of our inquiry lies a workshop in co-creation modalities conducted as part of a conference on documentary theory and practice (XXVI Visible Evidence Conference on Documentary) and its subsequent attached publications. Situating Media Art Practice education in the context of collective production, we consider the historicity of the discipline, as well as the violence contained in its modes of knowing and doing. While seeking to deconstruct this epistemological trajectory of violent misrepresentation, we simultaneously propose alternative models of co-creative pedagogies.

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the discussion of Media Art Practices (MAP) (understood as creative production of Art and Technology) through a vernacular optic accompanies the not so recent call, in human sciences like anthropology and history, to disarticulate the dominant Universalist paradigms that permeate our understanding of the world.⁴ If we take MAP understood as an interdisciplinary field, then we are only taking the first step to deconstruct the dominant universalist paradigms pertaining to moving image art and shift our understanding of cultural production in the arts. MAP education is still closely tied to the idea of the artist as *auter*, focused on the technical aspects of the discipline and strongly ‘market’ oriented.

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⁴ E.g. Trouillot (1997) for an intellectual history of the Human Sciences’ epistemologies, Spivak,(1988) for a look into postmodernism from the point of view of the subaltern.





Our paper attempts to map-out the epistemic and strategic connections between co-creation, collective practice and community based non-hierarchical models of media arts production in relation to critical pedagogy and the ethics of emancipatory modes of knowing and doing. Moreover, we are initially expanding on some of the questions regarding co-creation, and granularity previously explored in a workshop conducted at the XXVI Visible Evidence Conference at the University of Southern California.⁵

Going further, this research will explore the episteme of co-creation, its underlying principles and its ethical parameters in the context of critical media education in the academy. We argue that the institutional design of the Western university—an institutional framework that is rooted in which epistemologies and knowledge production are grounded in departmental divisions, which in turn reinforces an Aristotelian notion of autonomous disciplines that privileges individuality, private property, specialism, and single authorship in formal education. This organizational structure and its underlying epistemic logic perpetuate the existing relations of complicity between media practitioners who are the products of these institutions and the broader structures of the society in which they operate as artists.

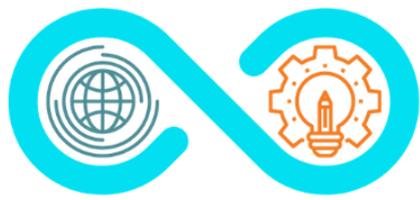
MEDIA ART PRACTICES AND AUTHORSHIP

Historically, the dominant model of creative media practices taught in Western academy, both as a mode of knowing and doing, is single authorship. This central pedagogical form has resulted in modes of creative practices that are no longer congruent with the realities of contemporary production. Single authorship is the fruit of the Vasarian model of art historiography, taken from 16th century Renaissance, where authorship was the most important information contained in the work of art.⁶ The work of art could not be separated from its author's biography and would ever be impregnated by its aura. Enlightenment

⁵ “In September 2018, the MIT Open Doc Lab and the Co-Creation Studio hosted a symposium on co-creation in new media. According to the Co-Creation Studio working definition, In response to this symposium and subsequent publication of the proceedings, our working group mounted a workshop at the XXVI Visible Evidence Conference on Documentary at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles to probe deeper into the possibilities and challenges of co-creation in documentary across platforms. The workshop focused on power dynamics in production, often excised from the ecstasies of co-creation modalities. In analog media, we consider authorial voice, authorship, ownership, ethics, and decision-making processes. On the "community" side, we think about the plurality of participants with varying stakes and levels of involvement.” (*Afterimage*, March 2020, 34+)

⁶ Mundy, Barbara and Aaron M. Hyman, “Out of the Shadow of Vasari: Towards a New Model of the ‘Artist’ in Colonial Latin America.” *Colonial Latin American Review* 24, 3 (2015), p.287





consolidated the romantic perception of the artist as visionary and in the 20th century *auteurism* found its most articulated expression in the writings of Alexandre Astruc and Andre Bazin of the French New Wave cinema movement.⁷ The official institutional canon of art processes and techniques being reproduced in Media Art education draws heavily from this Modern tradition of authorship and a supposed *virtuosi* artist. Film and contemporary art education continue to replicate this model based on “an ideological commitment to an existential position (...), an attitude, a way of being grounded in a rhetorical strategy (...).”⁸

The ontology of the media artist constituted as *auteur* emerges together with pre-Modern literary figures like Dante Alighieri, with his work that still defines the visual symbols of Christian cosmology today, and Renaissance visual artists like Michelangelo and Leonardo Da Vinci, historicized by Vasari. Later, this ontology found great receptivity in colonial Latina America.⁹

In tandem with this scholastic movement, emerged this model European imperialism in its settler colonial capitalist form, creating a perennial ontological and representational tension between the European explorer and the Other. European, and by extension Western identity was formulated through the lens of Modernity based on pictorial and discursive accounts of difference.¹⁰ Being religious, racial, cultural, or social, visual and literary (mis)representations of expropriated colonized populations still reverberate today in diverse creative expressions, which serves to further consolidate the economic and educational gaps entrenched in global capitalism, as well as hegemonic racialized practices.

Media Art Practices are a recipient of this tradition, be it in its visual, sonic, or literary form, constituting the contemporary expression of a convention that privilege and celebrates authorship as a supposed exceptionality and sacred vocation to represent reality. The fact that this modality of practice has been framed predominantly by Europeans and their settler descendants in colonial spaces is viewed as a mere detail by disciplines in which aesthetic

⁷ Astruc, Alexandre. (1948) *The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Camera Stylo, Le Ecran Francaise*.

⁸ Auguiste, Reece(2020) "Visible Things Unseen Co-creation and Its Philosophical Turn." *Afterimage*, March 2020. p.36

⁹ Mundy and Hyman, op.cit., p.288

¹⁰ E.g. Quijano (2000), for the simultaneity of the ideas of Europe and America, and Coronil (1996) for a critical approach to ‘Otherness’ and representation, the author discusses three occidentalist representational modalities: a) dissolution of the Other by the Self, b) incorporation of the other into the Self, c) destabilization of the Other by the Self.





expression is central to their stated epistemologies. We argue that a pedagogy of co-creation that is rooted in the historical specificity of geographical region supported by critical theory and interpretive hermeneutics, combined with empathy and cultural solidarity would contribute to radical shifts in the epistemes of Media Practices in institutions of formal education.¹¹

CO-CREATION AND LOCALITY

In *Pedagogy of Solidarity*, Freire writes about the importance of critical thinking and political context in education:

I see as dangerous the possibility of education collapsing into technique, of being transformed into mere technique, into a practice that loses sight of the question of dreaming, the question of beauty, the question of being, the question of ethics. That would be an education just for production, just for marketing. Education cannot be just technique because education has as a characteristic, another quality, that I call politicity. The politicity of education is the quality that education has of being political. And one principle related to this quality is that education never was and never will be neutral. (Freire, 2014, p.25)

Media production (film, video, sound) in its multiple forms presents itself as a consolidated discipline in the US academy, functioning at the undergraduate and graduate levels in which autonomous departments are in the business of producing professional artists and media makers ready for the ‘market’, trained for entrepreneurship or to assume the already consolidated positions crafted by the mainstream monopoly capital driven media industry. On the other hand, in Europe and the historically colonized academic spaces in African and Latin American universities invariably exist to mimic the early Modern European universities. As a result, it is more common to have any practice as an exclusive discipline of the curriculum of Fine Arts or Film Production departments, relegating interdisciplinarity and co-creation to a marginalized status, at best a support discipline that is not central to the curriculum or

¹¹ Freire, Paulo, Ana Maria Araújo Freire, and Walter Ferreira de Oliveira. 2014. *Pedagogy of Solidarity: Paulo Freire Patron of Brazilian Education*. Vol. 4. Walnut Creek, California: Left Coast Press, Inc.,





pedagogy and is presumably not deserving to be an object of critical inquiry in media production.

Simultaneously, in contemporaneity every person is an agent of multiple media, being constantly exposed to not only the making and reading of it, but also to its distribution and reception. Making and reading new media are two fundamental aspects of being in the world today, and yet, our current pedagogical paradigms are deficient to deal with the scope of the discipline and fail to form critical media practitioners. This is reflected by the fact that problems such as impoverishment, state violence, expropriation of natural resources, etc., are often framed by Media production Practices although without any further critical analysis of the structures that constitute it. Therefore, a considerable number of new media arts productions reflect a lack of interpretive skills and a detachment from committed research, still privileging technique over critical thinking.

Traditionally, art practice in general is often recognized as an elitist craft, a field controlled by white hegemonic groups of critics and dealers, even in black and brown majority countries. The cost of equipment and production of films historically excluded racialized, subaltern and gender-vulnerable professionals from the making of it. Consequently, fragile populations have been chronically marginalized and, in many cases denied access to the tools of media production. Departments of Media Production (broadly defined) reproduce the logic of misrepresentation in across a range of media platforms, from film to artificial intelligence, from performance arts to virtual reality. This situation is in tandem with a lack of critical readings of media practices which are further consolidated by pedagogical frameworks that are not grounded in an emancipatory epistemology but, instead, a vehicle for “the logos of individual agency and their operations within the social”.¹²

Analysing alternative sides of the spectrum and drawing from our own creative documentary practice and art collective experiences, our research considers the effects of precariousness, lack of access to high end media technologies and the difficulty that many young people have in acquiring a formal education in media production practices, especially in geo-cultural spaces in Africa and Latin America. We argue that the pedagogy of co-creation in contemporary Media Arts departments must collaborate and co-create with the community

¹² Auguiste (2020), op.cit., p.38





within which they exist, taking into consideration the local technological capabilities as well as the socio-economic conditions of these communities.

From the place of the educator, as Freire states in his chapter, the situation must be complicated by locality, since it is not the same to teach Media Art Practices in Brazil or in France, for example.¹³ Besides the obvious historical, political and ontological differences, the experiences of youth in Brazil and France occupy different spaces. In Brazil the phantoms of imperialism is still a determining factor not only in its economic and body politics but also in its systems of symbolic representation. The political nature of Media Arts Practices education is often overlooked in favor of a supposed passive reflexivity of the world around it.

In academic spaces situated in Latin America and Africa, the lived everyday experience of dispossession, brutalization, violence and Otherness, transforms black and brown researchers' understandings and levels of involvement with traditional methodologies.¹⁴ The underlying question not asked in Media Art Practices education is one dealing with power. Who has the power to represent the world other than those who possess the technological means of production?

In the Brazilian case, the academic model that was transplanted and crystalized in the country is a vestigial transposition of the medieval university to a pre-modern one. Historically, the ways of knowing and doing produced by various Brazilian cultural formations, like *quilombolas* and indigenous communities, are not included in this Western model of pedagogical practice. Art and Media departments in Brazilian public universities suffer from colonial syndrome functioning unglued from the communities living around it. This detachment brings to light the necessity to work with the idea of granularity and co-creation in art practice education.¹⁵ Each department will have its own peculiarities, demanding the development of strategies against the grain of each community. On the other hand, the post-Covid remote life combined with ideas of alternative licensing like creative commons, where the idea of authorship is challenged to assume new grounds and copyleft, where the rebellious derivative nature of the material implodes authorship, produce a different perspective on what

¹³ Freire, (2014), op.cit.p.17-18

¹⁴ Smith, L. T. (2013). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 1st edition. Moorpark, CA: Cram101.

¹⁵ Auguiste et al.2020





we could call ‘community’ in the future. The pedagogic capacity of these tools in creative media, together with practices of appropriation and remixing cannot be dismissed in a study about co-creation.

CONCLUSION

These are initial calls for constructive debates that were not exhausted in this short paper. Being crippled by a capitalist logic or detached from its social reality, the pedagogic models applied to creative practices across localized academic spaces, do not yet consider that our epistemological models of research, in form of theory or practice, cannot be separated from its intrinsic symbolic violence.¹⁶

We propose that media art practice education in countries like Brazil and South Africa must develop pedagogical models, and philosophies of art rooted in the discourses, methodologies and theories of co-creation. This would necessitate pedagogical models that driven by the epistemological exigencies of collective practice and community based non-hierarchical models of media arts production. Moreover, it must not only engage in the specificity of locally rooted cultural forms but must endeavor the inscribe in the curriculum the materiality of the historical experiences of these communities and their modalities of visual and sonic expressions as an integral part of a formal education in media arts. Furthermore, faculty members must actively work with community groups through dedicated outreach to promote and strengthen the inclusion of these marginalized voices in formal education pedagogy. A process in which co-creation as an epistemic framework anchored in an interdisciplinary epistemology drives research and creative practice.

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¹⁶ Smith, L. T. (2013). op.cit.





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