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## From Free Software to Criticism on the Authorship Notion in Artistic Practices in Argentina

What responses are evoked by the free software model when it enters the scene of contemporary art in Argentina and some other countries of Latin America? The model of production, circulation and “participative” reception promoted and put into practice by the free software movement, has evoked manifold responses among artists – with potential and actual consequences – since they are both creators of “programs” and users of digital tools. These responses take place in a wide socio-cultural context including artistic practices within the art institution, but also those happening in the sphere of daily communication and global exchanges in which local actors take part, thus generating multiple echoes and feedback between the interacting fields.

Some shared key questions revolve around the artistic status of the digital tools and their resulting productions, or the nature of the creative process when digital technologies are involved – considering they were originally intended to serve other purposes; the knowledge and control of the new materials and procedures that artists need in order to use them; the potential of the new media for innovation and departure from tradition, and so on.

For artists, such questions are not new, from the invention of photography in 1839 onward, but they were given diverse and vague answers within the art institution during the 20th century, in contrast to the intense experimentation carried out by the artists in that field. All this has been taking place within countries which are not originators, but only recipients of technologies and, in a sense, also of artistic “trends”

### **Free software and art: local connections**

Apparently, there are two main ways through which digital artists directly connect themselves with free software: on the one hand, by considering free software as a new set of tools for experimentation, with a great potential for artistic use regarding to some capability for creating new and original functions. A new material to be mastered, a container which is no longer opaque, but open and transparent for those who have the required knowledge and skills for “subverting the interior of the black box.”

The open source code of free software used in art, is a strategy that enhances the display of what the artist now conceives as the work of art itself: the code. In many of these cases, more than an option and explicit stance, the use of free software is merely instrumental.

A particular variation of this group is one that “opens the code” of productions done with privative software of common access in Latin America.

Another way of connection, different and later in time, is embodied in those artists who envision the social takeover of information technologies, especially the Internet, as utopian promises of new ways of social organization and power distribution, also known as “first epoch” of artistic practices on the net. The second epoch would be represented by artists having access or migrating to the use of environments web 2.0.

In this case, the approach to free software is politically propelled, as a way of radicalization of ideas and actions which approximate these artistic practices to the deployment of the critical potential of the technical form itself. Thus artists problematize the celebratory acceptance of art-technology convergence from within the art institution, looking for new ways of overcoming the communication gap between artists and public perceived in contemporary artistic practices, or pointing out the colonization of people’s subjectivity by the market prevailing on the scene of the web 2.0.

### **Proto-copyleft culture and performative effects**

Free software as a way of making culture points out a model practised with overwhelming frequency by contemporary artists. This model includes practices such as quotation, appropriation, remix, post-production, etc., as contemporary artistic strategies present in works of art.

In many cases, this ways of production are not explicit, or not executed as a “program” that can be extended to all persons, all media. Even more, usually these creative strategies are proposed as valid only inside the art institution, and for roles assigned within it, without projecting their transforming potential outside, and regarded as publicly acceptable “exceptions”, only as far as they remain politically deactivated. This fact comes into contradiction with a rarified context in which almost every cultural production can be get as an unauthorized copy.

In this sense, maybe the most powerful discussion around this topic is generated by the practice and discourse of the so-called “copyleft attitude” that we can find among contemporary artists. Its main effect is a performative one: an exercise in self-consciousness about one’s own ways of mak-

ing, distributing and winning over others for participating in the dynamics of culture, recognized as a “round trip” with different degrees of implication, interest, competencies, wishes among the actors involved.

From a background we have called “proto-copyleft,” to the concrete interactions of the free software community with artists, this analysis intends to point out some interpretative keys regarding the particular way of being which, in the Argentinian and Latin American context of artistic practices, we can link with the model created and spread by free software and culture.

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