

Artist Residencies in the Caribbean: Recuperating the Teleoaffective Structure of Visual Arts Practice in the Anglophone Islands

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A number of artist residencies have been established in the twenty-first century context of the Anglophone Caribbean. This essay considers the role of these residencies in relationship to a normative feeling/mood of immateriality or the relative insignificance of visual arts practice in the English-speaking islands. It deploys Theodore Schatzki's conceptual framework of practice as that which comprises doings and sayings that are linked by a teleoaffective structure, in other words, a structure that aligns doings, purposes, emotions and moods with each other—a structure that includes concerns with teleological end points and affective states. The article suggests that the artist residency is a new doing in the Anglophone Caribbean with a teleological end point of subverting the affective space of immateriality. It posits the artist residency as having recuperative potential for the teleoaffective structure of visual arts practice in the Anglophone islands.

Cette contribution concerne les résidences d'artiste qui se sont multipliées depuis le début du 21^e siècle dans les Caraïbes anglophones. Je mets en relation le rôle de ces résidences avec un « sentiment » ou une « humeur » normative qui tend à privilégier l'immatériel, ou encore avec la place relativement peu significative des pratiques en arts visuels dans les îles anglophones. Je m'appuie sur le cadre conceptuel établi par Theodore Schatzki, pour qui les pratiques se définissent comme des actions et des paroles reliées entre elles par une structure téléo-affective : autrement dit, une structure qui

met sur le même plan actions, fins, émotions et humeurs, et qui s'intéresse aussi bien aux visées téléologiques qu'aux états affectifs. Cet article propose que la résidence d'artiste serait un type d'action nouveau dans les Caraïbes anglophones, et que sa visée téléologique serait de subvertir l'espace affectif lié à l'immatériel. Le statut de la résidence d'artiste se définit donc par son potentiel de récupération appliqué à la structure téléo-affective des pratiques en arts visuels dans les îles anglophones.

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Linking the doings and sayings of a practice is [...] a teleoaffective structure. A “teleoaffective structure” is a range of normativized and hierarchically ordered ends, projects, and tasks, to varying degrees allied with normativized emotions and even moods.

Theodore Schatzki, *Site of the Social* (2002)

In the current context of economies that have become increasingly informational, visual art making as a practice, which facilitates communication and yields knowledge and meanings, may be regarded through a lens of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri describe in *Empire* (2000) as immaterial labour. According to these theorists, we can speak of the “immaterial labour of analytical and symbolic tasks,” which includes “creative and intelligent manipulation.”¹ Invoking this conceptual framework for visual arts practice, however, engenders debate about the negation of the handling and exploitation of materiality as part of art’s communicative currency. Communications scholar Marshall McLuhan reminds us after all, that media—for example: a pencil, computer, paper, paintbrush—are extensions of our corporeal materiality which impact human interpersonal dynamics. He tells us “the medium is the message.”² With the idea of immaterial labour we can also get mired in a discussion about the ontological condition of visual arts practice as being constituted in physical matter or in the realm of concepts. Yet, such discourses—while having broad implications for making sense of and wielding art in socio-economic power matrices—carry comparatively less weight within the specific milieu of the Anglophone Caribbean where the notion of the

¹ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000), 293.

² Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium is the Message,” in *The New Media Reader*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 203-209.

“immaterial,” when considered in relation to visual art, takes on a different tenor and is better understood as being synonymous with insignificance.

Visual Arts Practice and Affective Space

In writing about the birth of the Caribbean Artists Movement (a group formed in London in 1966 by practising writers, visual artists and critics who emigrated from the Anglophone Caribbean for purposes of study and work) Anne Walmsley gives insight to the incidental nature of visual art as a practice during the early to mid-1900s in the colonial, English-speaking islands:

At school in the Caribbean, art was a soft option, a non-academic subject, with none of the status of English, whose language and literature were central to the British colonial heritage. People could leave school knowing a good deal about literature [...] They could be fluent and confident at expressing themselves in English. But they could leave without having looked at or discussed any formal manifestations of the visual arts; [...] even the concept of being an artist, of making a living as an artist, was almost unknown.³

This immateriality or relative unimportance of the visual arts would persist after several Anglophone islands gained independence from Britain in the 1960s and beyond. If, as Schatzki posits, a practice is “a set of doings and sayings”—where sayings “are a subset of doings, in particular, doings that say something”⁴—that are linked by a teleoaffective structure comprising normativized emotions and moods, then I argue here that visual art doings and sayings or visual arts practice in the Anglophone Caribbean is historically

³ Anne Walmsley, *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* (London: New Beacon Books, 1992), 14.

⁴ Theodore Schatzki, *Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 72 and 73.

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constructed on a teleoaffective structure wherein there is, in large measure, a strong feeling or pervading tone/mood of relative inconsequentiality. This affective state has become a norm. Schatzki uses the term “normativized” to mean “oughtness” and “acceptability,” in other words, he suggests that practices are connected to “emotions and moods that participants [of a practice] should or may enjoy.”⁵ However, I deploy the idea of normativity to refer to a feeling or mood that is typical, characteristic or, put another way: an affective state that one can expect. My argument does not imply that visual artworks have not and are not being made. Instead it points to a daunting affective space in which visual arts practice is, for the most part, enacted in the Anglophone Caribbean. Trinidadian artist Kenwyn Crichlow, a visual arts practitioner for over forty years and a senior university art lecturer, describes this space:

It seems all artists throughout the Anglophone Caribbean are locked into the same one-dimensional space [...] Everyone wants to escape its crushing irrelevance. Better do nothing than make art, better emigrate, better anything else.⁶

Crichlow’s use of the words “one-dimensional” and “irrelevance” underscore the space as one characterised by insignificance, while the word “crushing” alludes to the heaviness or overwhelming burden of that insignificance.

One key example of the palpability of that affective space is the state-ordered destruction of a mural in the island of Trinidad. Carlisle Chang’s 50 feet x 15 feet mural *The Inherent Nobility of Man* (1962) was commissioned for Trinidad’s Piarco International Airport. The work was created in the context of Trinidad and Tobago’s move towards independence from Britain. Yet, in 1977, the public artwork was demolished to make way for the airport’s

⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶ Kenwyn Crichlow, interviewed by author, June 29, 2014.

expansion. In his documentation of the destruction of the mural in the 1977/78 issue of *Gayap Art Magazine*, James Lee Wah notes the feeling/mood associated with it. He writes: “The mural has been quietly consigned to oblivion and the general attitude suggests that it is no big thing.”⁷ While this incident foregrounds a kind of affectivity that is related to artworks, other examples demonstrate the way in which a prioritising of infrastructure can create a similar feeling/mood of immateriality. More recently, Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott has lamented over the fact that the island of St Lucia has no art museum. A museum is an institution that is bound up in the doings and sayings of visual art practice. Museums are engaged in, among other actions, collecting, conserving, displaying, documenting, studying, teaching and interpreting art.⁸ New physical facilities are being erected in St Lucia but a museum is yet to be realised. Amid plans for the new Six Senses Freedom Bay Tourist Resort, which is scheduled to open in 2015, in the southwestern region of St Lucia—a site where the island’s two volcanic landforms called the Pitons are located—Walcott gives his views:

How can they find the place to build a hotel at the foot of the Pitons and they can’t find a spot to build a museum? That’s the rage that I have, the anger that I have [...] My brother Roddy died working for the arts in Saint Lucia. He never saw a museum go up [...] I suppose I too will die and not see it happen either—it is shameful.⁹

⁷ Quoted by Zahra Gordon, “SanFest Keeps Growing,” in *The Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* (October 7, 2012) <http://www.guardian.co.tt/arts/2012-10-06/sanfest-keeps-growing> (accessed March 20, 2015).

⁸ A distinction between an art gallery and an art museum can be made. Art galleries do not generally collect and conserve works of art. While they may include lectures and publications as part of their programming, art galleries focus on exhibiting, promoting and selling art.

⁹ Toni Nicholas, “Derek Walcott Comments on New Development Near Pitons,” in *St Lucia Star* (January 14, 2013) <http://stluciarstar.com/derek-walcott-comments-on-new-development-near-pitons/> (accessed March 20, 2015).

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Anger and shame—as articulated by Walcott, who is not only a poet and playwright but also a visual artist—are part of a teleoaffective structure suffused with a mood of unimportance. They are the kinds of emotions experienced by art practitioners in the English-speaking islands. How might these emotions be channelled into the positive transformation of that teleoaffective structure? How might the affective space of visual arts practice be reordered so that anger and shame are transmuted into an emotion such as satisfaction? In the twenty-first century, infrastructural concerns are a key factor in the shaping of the affective space for visual arts practice. While there is now evidence of art education at early stages, in elementary and high school curricula, steps taken remain “too timid to have had even a practical influence in reality.”¹⁰ A mood of insignificance endures because of a “lack of available time in the school programme, given that the number of language and mathematics classes are multiplying [...] lack of motivation on the part of the teaching body; and lack of parental interest in arts subjects.”¹¹ What initiatives might disrupt this affective norm? I assert that artist residencies can serve as a means of subverting, the affect of immateriality. The rise of the infrastructural phenomenon known as the artist residency, in the twenty-first-century Anglophone Caribbean, holds a particular teleological potency for the region. My discussion so far has underscored the affective element of Schatzki’s notion of the teleoaffective structure of practices. I turn now to the idea of purpose or ends, that is to say, of the teleological component of Schatzki’s portmanteau word.

¹⁰ Tereza Wagner, “General Notes on Arts Education: The Arts and Artistic Creativity,” in *Methods, Contents and Teaching of Arts Education in Latin America and the Caribbean*, eds. Verónica Fajardo and Tereza Wagner (Paris: UNESCO, 2003), 77-94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

Toward Teleological End Points

The teleoaffective structure of a practice consists of normativized ends, though Schatzki is careful to point out that ends “need not be conscious goals, that is to say, states of affairs that people consciously seek to realize.”¹² Caribbean artists have, however, consciously responded to a prevailing affective space with “teleological end points” that have determined what makes sense for them to do: set up artist residencies. Residencies can take different forms but they are generally conducive to creativity and facilitate reflection and interrogation of technical abilities and the sociocultural context in which artworks are produced.

A number of artist-led, artist residencies have been established in the last few years, including Popopstudios (2007) in the Bahamas, Alice Yard (2008) in Trinidad, ROKTOWA (2007) and NLS (2012) in Jamaica, and the Fresh Milk Art Platform Inc (2011) in Barbados. Christopher Cozier, a visual artist and cofounder of Alice Yard, talks about the trigger for the initiative and its motives:

Alice Yard is very much a response to local institutional deficits. There is no interest and support here [in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago] for experimental investigative contemporary work. [Alice Yard has an] interest in initiating, hosting, or simply taking seriously projects at their start-up or development stages...¹³

Similarly, visual artist Annalee Davis pinpoints the stimulus to and goals of the Fresh Milk Art Platform Inc:

I’ve been teaching since the early 90s at Barbados Community College (BCC), off and on, for about 10 years [...] I realised that the attrition rate for our students was almost 100%, meaning that within a year of

¹² Schatzki, *Site of the Social*, 81.

¹³ Christopher Cozier and Claire Tancons, “No More than a Backyard on a Small Island,” in *Fillip* no. 16 (Spring 2012): 42.

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graduating almost none of the graduates were making art. There were no formal spaces for artists and as a result graduates were starting to find other jobs and their practice was dwindling. I felt that a support mechanism was needed to allow them to continue making work [...] The notion of creating a nurturing space was important. Given the traumatic history of the Caribbean, it's not a region that necessarily connotes being nurtured. So I often think of Fresh Milk as both a nurturing environment and an act of resistance. Offering a space that is safe for people to experiment and innovate, and to gather, talk, think and make, is an act of resistance. So that's the impetus out of which it came.¹⁴

Both Cozier and Davis highlight aims to attend to a mood of immateriality and young artists are already feeling the effects of such an intervention. Bahamian artist Veronica Dorsett, who participated in a Popopstudios Junior Residency, expresses how a dedicated place for nurturing art practice can begin to reformulate the affective space of that practice. According to her: “During the residency, the reality of creating my own points of interest and subject matter was the biggest eye-opener. Popop gave me an inkling of hope that I could be a functioning artist.”¹⁵

The work of Barbadian artist Versia Harris has *mattered* through her participation in residency experiences. In 2013, Harris stayed at Alice Yard in Trinidad, where she revisited some of her animated digital videos—among them, a school graduation art project entitled *A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes When You Are Awake* (2012). Harris experimented by pushing her videos beyond their presentation on a small screen. Using projectors, she shared

¹⁴ Mariam Zulfiqar, “Profile: Fresh Milk, Barbados,” *freshmilkbarbados* (April 4, 2014) freshmilkbarbados.com/2014/04/04/profile-fresh-milk-barbados-by-mariam-zulfiqar/ (accessed March 20, 2015).

¹⁵ Quoted by Sonia Farmer, “The Popop Spirit: Nassau’s Popopstudios International Centre for the Visual Arts,” in *Caribbean Beat* 124, <http://caribbean-beat.com/issue-124/popop-spirit-nassaus-popopstudios-international-centre-visual-arts#axzz3BWnFEMbQ> (accessed March 20, 2015).

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moving images on multiple panels that were 10 and 15 feet large (see figures 1 and 2). Her images also occupied the walls of nearby buildings in Trinidad's capital city. The effect was an immersive environment in which the significance or materiality of her work was literally felt in the grand scale of the pieces. The main character in her animation "was never so big before" and Harris admits that the experience left her feeling "really satisfied."¹⁶

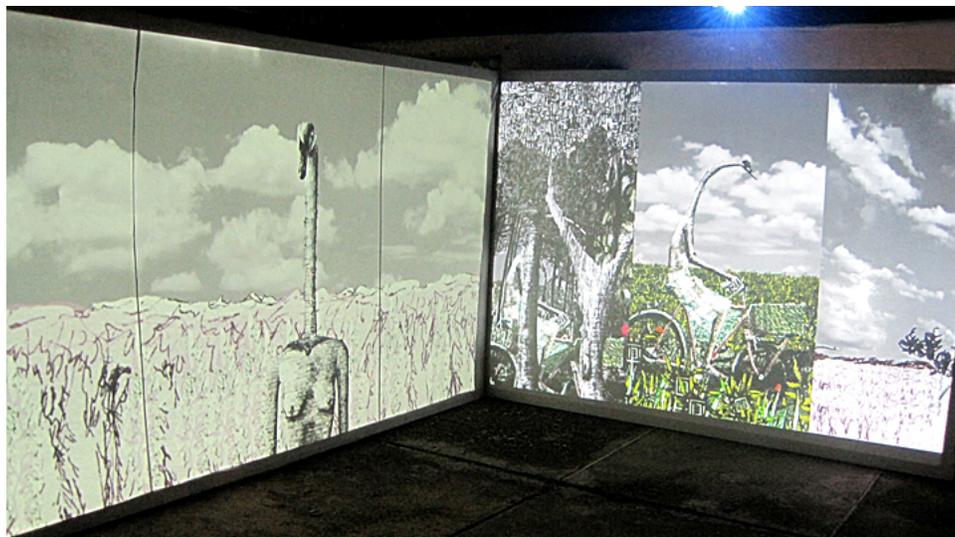


Fig. 1 Projected images of Versia Harris' video animations at Alice Yard, Trinidad. Photograph by author.

¹⁶ Quoted by Allison Thompson, "Versia Harris Conversation with Allison Thompson," in *Aica Caraïbe du Sud* (May 2, 2014) <http://aica-sc.net/2014/05/02/versia-harris-conversation-with-allison-thompson/> (accessed March 20, 2015).

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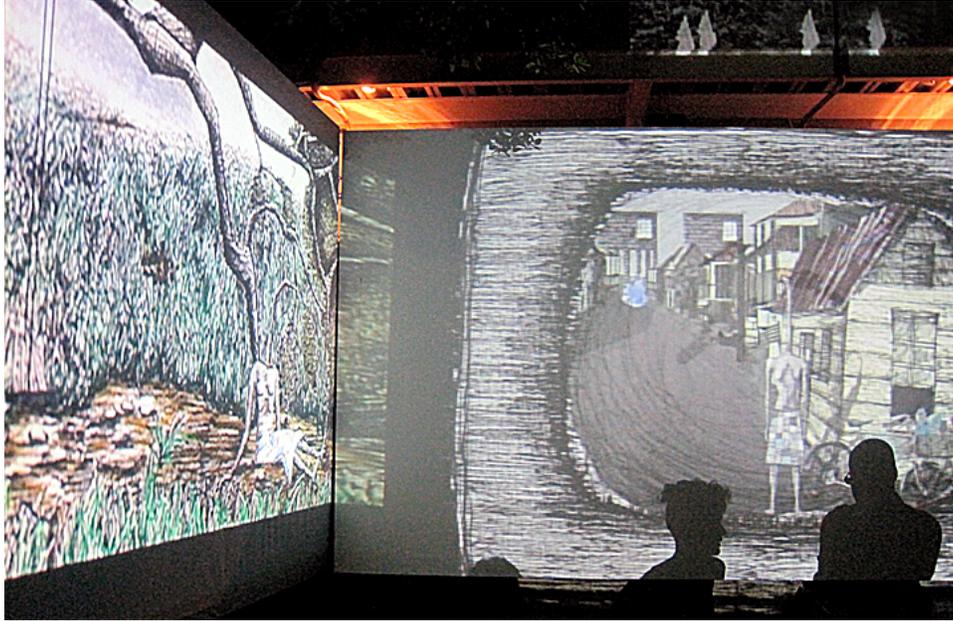


Fig. 2 Versia Harris' video installation at Alice Yard, Trinidad. Photograph by author.

This feeling of satisfaction signals, even if in a small way, the capacity of the artist residency to recuperate the teleoaffective structure of visual arts practice in the Anglophone islands. The residency has become a new normative doing that has quickly ascended to the top of a hierarchy of all of the various tasks and projects involved in the practice of visual arts in the Anglophone Caribbean. Yet, the potentiality of the artist residency to positively impact a teleoaffective structure of practice is not so simplistic. An examination must go beyond a feel-good conversation. Many of the residencies host and facilitate visiting artists from Western countries—a move that exposes local art communities to doings and sayings in visual arts practice in other parts of the world, with the possibility of idea exchanges and

long-term connections, but if left unmonitored or unanalysed, it is the kind of support that can create an asymmetrical relationship with implications for both the teleological and affective aspects of practice for artists from the islands.

In opposition to Thomas Friedman’s thesis that the world is flat,¹⁷ artist residencies—and the attendant art market that involves art’s production, dissemination, exhibition and sale—function in a world where the process of globalisation creates uneven terrain for participation in economic activity. Gray makes the point that: “A universal state of equal integration in world-wide economic activity is precisely what globalisation is *not*. On the contrary, the increased interconnection of economic activity throughout the world accentuates uneven development.”¹⁸ This understanding raises the question of how the Caribbean might become a strong player in a context of power inequalities. One answer is a promotion of place. Competitive advantage is still dependent on place:

In a global economy—which boasts rapid transportation, high speed communications and accessible markets—one would expect location to diminish in importance. But the opposite is true. The enduring competitive advantages in a global economy are often heavily local [...].¹⁹

Residencies are a means for artists to engage with a new place; to think about how that place might inform their work; to explore and develop their practice within that new location. Through the accommodation of foreign artists, residencies in the Anglophone islands can also serve a teleological end that

¹⁷ Thomas Friedman, *The World is Flat* (London: Penguin Books, 2006).

¹⁸ John Gray, *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (London: Granta Publications, 1998), 56.

¹⁹ Michael E. Porter, “Clusters and the New Economics of Competition,” in *Harvard Business Review* (November-December 1998): 90.

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gestures toward a shaping of the Caribbean as a site of important places for nurturing creativity in the global art system; a location to consider among a constellation of international art centres that include New York and London. A focus on giving space and place to foreign artists may put the Caribbean on an artworld map but it also comes with a risk—if it is an unbalanced focus—of foregrounding and promoting the residency organisation itself and its local artist-administrators as *doers* and *sayers* within the global art practice arena, with the effect of eclipsing other local artists in need of support.

Recuperation of the teleoaffective structure of visual arts practice in the Anglophone Caribbean, by way of the artist residency, is a possibility but in reclaiming and mending that structure, the gaze cannot be so far outside the Caribbean region that local concerns become a blind spot—where visions of practicing in the global art market carry materiality and local conditions for that practice remain immaterial.

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