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James Hutson
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L'abbiam Fatta Tutti Noi: Collaboration and Originality in Early Modern Art

James Hutson

Art History Department, Lindenwood University, St. Charles, MO, USA

Email: jhutson@lindenwood.edu

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Abstract

This article seeks a reevaluation of the collaborative efforts and critical valuation of the Carracci in the frescoes of the Palazzo Magnani. While the significance of the cycle for the development of the nascent baroque style is demonstrable, criticism has focused on attributional issues and the works remain understudied. Since their original biographers struggled over identifying which Carracci was responsible for which scene in the frieze, efforts have been made to carefully dissect the contributions of each. Yet, the collaborative working process of the Carracci, which was recently developed to reform the medieval workshop model of artistic education, was at odds with the newly fashioned author function whereby authorship was granted to a sole originary “genius.” As a result, the full significance of the suppression of individual artistic characteristics to the goal of a collective enterprise was overlooked. In order to elucidate the importance of the overlooked frescoes, a reconsideration of modernist notions of “originality” anachronistically applied to the premodern era must be undertaken; in fact, the authorless discourse espoused by the Carracci has much in common with postmodernist creative strategies and criticism, especially with regards to pastiche.

Keywords

Author Function, Carracci, Palazzo Magnani, Collaboration, Art Education

1. Introduction

The Renaissance artistic tradition was predicated on collaboration, inherited from the medieval workshop. Yet, the notion of shared attribution was a novel concept even by the end of the era. Biographers such as Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) would undervalue the contributions of pupils and even other masters who assisted with works and maintain their authorship and originality that

were derived from a single master (Vasari, 1881). While the strategy was central to the elevation of the artist beyond that of a mere craftsman and cementing a new definition of “art,” as the term would be understood in the modernist and postmodernist eras, the rhetorical strategies adopted in the careful curation of an individual *oeuvre* belied the reality that emerging demands on artists required the adoption of an increasingly collaborative model. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, pupils would apprentice with a master and learn to carefully imitate their styles, suppressing their own individuality (Bleek-Bryne, 1984). The time-honored tradition was well-suited for the production of mid-sized panel paintings, portraits, altarpieces, and even larger canvases for ceiling decoration. However, the re-establishment of Rome as the capital of the art world at the end of the sixteenth century would lead to a new market for large-scale frescoes (Posner, 1965; Magnuson, 1982; Haskell, 1980). With the dramatic increase in scale required of these projects, the ability to coordinate many individuals became necessary, as well as a new educational approach for training them (Whitfield, 1986). Unlike the preceding generation of Renaissance artists who suppressed their individual characteristics at the service of one master, a new synergistic style through eclectic appropriation was being developed.

When asked who was responsible for the decorations in the Palazzo Magnani, the artists who worked collaboratively on the project answered together: *ella è de' Carracci. l'abbiamo fatta tutti noi* (“it’s by the Carracci: we all did it”) (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale, 2000). The three Carracci—Annibale (1560-1609), Agostino (1557-1602), and Ludovico (1555-1619) were themselves trained in the previous workshop model and aware of the Vasarian construct of lone authorship (Dempsey, 1986). Such was the misalignment with the established expectations for artists’ education and contribution/collaboration that the three founded their own institution in Bologna in 1582 to prepare artists for the state of the field with a new method for stylistic development in the Accademia degli Incamminati. There artists would work together on projects, demonstrated by the Carracci in their early fresco cycles around the city, such as at the understudied Palazzo Magnani of 1590. Whereas the previous role of the master in a workshop and their artistic identity was contingent upon the successful molding of various styles and approaches to conform to their own, the Carracci would champion an approach that sought commonality and suppression of their own unique characteristics to the service of the goal of the group.

Despite the significant shift demonstrable in the new Carraccesque questioning of the “author function,” few treatments exist that address early modern collaboration in art and the notion of originality in a *bottega* setting. While the rethinking of the function and collaborative creative enterprises has found a ready audience in literary and performing arts studies, the same cannot be said of the visual arts (Foucault, 1977; Barthes, 1977; Frey, 1989; Gude, 1989; Masten, 1997; Hirschfield, 2001; Knapp, 2005). Maria Loh, for instance, discusses the role played by repetition and originality in early baroque theory and practice in gen-

eral. As she relates, most of our ideas of originality, collaboration and the role of the author derive from postmodernist ideas. The premodernist valuation of artistic imitation and emulation, especially in the five related terms of *misto*, *acutezza*, *novità*, *furo*, *pasticcio* (mixture, wit, novelty, theft, and pastiche), make clear that early modern patrons, biographers and other artists had very different expectations for originality as related to collaborative projects (Loh, 2004). Furthermore, Rosalind Krauss argues that the repetition of past motifs, subjects or styles and a modernist notion of originality could not exist without one another, and, as a matter of fact, are self-reflective (Krauss, 1999). In fact, the importance ascribed to “originality” that arose in the eighteenth century could not even be adequately applied to modernist criticism either and remained a “strained fabrication” (Battaglia, 1981; Loh, 2004). In the era under investigation here, full of examples of individual “geniuses” celebrated for their unique *oeuvres*, the term might seem relevant, for how could we discuss an individual artist without their singular contribution to art in a time of its very redefinition? The answer is twofold: the theory and practice of originality and collaboration were not mutually exclusive; and, there developed a new situation requiring new strategies to meet the demands of patrons at the time.

This paper seeks to elucidate the specifics of such an emergence of early modern collaborative authorship in the Carracci Accademia, and especially their collaborative projects in the city of Bologna. Though previously thought to be inconsequential in the creative process, the relationship that the Carracci had with literati and other *amatori* in their academy was crucial to the dynamic process of their “open” educational institution and working processes (Posner, 1971). Collaboration was crucial in the conceptual stages of the work and was instilled in students in a dialogical fashion, where poetic theory intermingled with visual strategies. Inspired by Tassian creative strategies, the Carracci would collaborate on a number of cycles, including those at Palazzo Magnani and Fava in the 1580s and 1590, before Annibale and Agostino left for Rome to work for the Farnese. As Benati points out, “the custom of working together closely in the same surroundings fostered continuous and profitable exchanges of ideas” (Benati, 2000). Like later collaborative efforts by contemporary artists, such as those Olivia Gude discusses, the approach of the Carracci could be described as “art by consensus” (Gude, 1989). Thus the current treatment will further the investigation of Loh of the “fine line between praise and censure and the problematized distinction between originality and repetition” by expanding the discourse to include the role of artists working collaboratively and their authorial function when a uniform product, such as a fresco cycle, requires the suppression of individuality (Loh, 2004). In the poststructuralist binary terms of original/copy, artist/workshop, the limitations and fluidity of the Carracci Academy, the masters, pupils and their resultant creations will be considered in Barthian and Derridean senses with regards to their limitations and fluidity. Though often discussed as an institution of “doing, and not talking,” the conceptual approach of the Car-

racci and dialogical implications of their approach would have lasting impact on the intellectual strategies of the following century in art education and production (Goldstein, 1988). The distinction in pedagogical and intellectual approaches from the workshops of the Renaissance can be seen in the diversity of styles practiced by their pupils, illustrating that the single, authorial voice was transformed into a new synergetic one. The new approach would then form the basis of what would become the new style of the baroque in Rome.

2. Literature Review

In contrast to the treatments of the Carracci as a collective, represented by their biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1616-1693), modern scholarship has focused almost exclusively on Annibale. With that being said, treatments are scant even with regards to the most well-known of the group. The first exhibition showcasing all three Carracci in the twentieth century with their paintings and drawings was held in Bologna in 1956 (Cavalli, et al. 1956; Mahon 1956). The first major monograph on Annibale did not follow until 1971 by Posner to be built on by Cooney and Malafarina in 1976. The latter was heavily dependent upon Posner's study, which did not address the intellectual milieu in which the Carracci were working. Alternatively, Dempsey countered with a monograph in 2000 that contextualized the contributions of the group and their role in the new style that they contributed to in forming. The term "reform" coined by Posner did resonate in scholarship and the new style of the group, however, and led to Keazor's 2007 treatment; Boschloo and Freedberg, as well, attempted an exploration of the stylistic change ushered in by the Carracci in tying the notion of religious reform to the new and burgeoning "baroque" style (Boschloo, 1974; Freedberg, 1983). Yet, the introduction of the Carracci to American audiences was to follow the extensive exhibition *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci* (Smyth 1986). The delay in recognition of the significance of Annibale in particular can be demonstrated through the first monographic exhibition held only in 2006 (Benati & Riccòmini 2006). Since then a number of catalogue raisonnés have been published and articles on individual works to be discussed shortly, and Robertson is responsible for the most recent monograph published in 2008 (Robertson, 2018; republished 2010).

Outlined by De Gazia, Carracci studies in general can be divided into five categories: "questions of the artists' early training, artistic purpose, intellectual capacities, and the truthfulness of their primary biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia; contextual studies of the Carracci and their period, region, and patrons; iconographical interpretations relating to Carracci commissions but mainly to the Farnese Gallery, and the search for the Gallery's programmatic advisor; chronological investigations of both the early and the late work; and finally, questions of attribution." These studies trace four decades of scholarship since the 1956 exhibition (De Grazia, 1998). Questions of authorship and attribution will be the focus of this study and reveal primary preoccupation of scholars as of late. The

area that has received the least attention would be the works produced prior to Annibale and Agostino moving to Rome in 1595, especially the fresco cycles and preparatory works associated with them for the Palazzo Fava and Palazzo Magnani.

The scant scholarship associated with the Palazzo Magnani has focused on the iconography and, above all, attribution of each scene to a particular Carracci. The fascination with attributing authorship in this cycle is a microcosm for Carracci studies and offers the best insight into their goals as artists. Beginning with their primary biographer Malvasia, an attempt to assign the role of each artist to parts of the cycle has continued. Yet, even in his own attributions for the cycle, Malvasia gave up halfway through the fourteen scenes (Malvasia, 1676). Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-1696), the academician and biographer, as well, would have difficulty attributing specific parts of the frieze to any one of the Carracci in his *Lives* (Bellori, 1672). However, even among those original biographers, squabbles over authorship emerge. Malvasia, supporting the supremacy of the Bolognese school, champions Ludovico as the author of the cycle and deserving of the credit; whereas Bellori, arguing for the transcendence of the Tuscan school, points to Annibale as the primary author of the program.

The same interest continues in modern scholarship with attributional concerns remaining a prime focus. The significance of the cycle itself was noted since 1953 with Mahon underscoring the contemporary praise it received. Brown continued investigating the iconography and possible sources in 1967; Boschloo noted the scheme is an elaboration on the Fava source material in 1974; and Gardi would comment on the connection to Rome in the iconography in 1999. The first comprehensive treatment of the frescoes in the palazzo and their patron was published by Rubenstein in 1979 and also attempted to address the muddled state of authorship for the program (Rubenstein, 1979). Scholars have since, as their biographers before them, focused on attributional questions. As Feigenbaum has argued, the palazzo offers a case study for the study of the Carracci in that over a dozen scholars have since attempted to differentiate which member was responsible for what in the frescoes, often using the preparatory drawings as evidence (Feigenbaum, 1990; Sutherland Harris, 2000; Christiansen, 2000; Boesten-Stengel, 2001; Vitali, 2001; Ghelfi, 2002; Pigozzi, 2004; Mastroviti, 2005; Aldrovandi et. al., 2007; Weston-Lewis, 2007; Rodinò, 2008). As with their early modern counterparts, these recent studies have also failed to reach consensus on the authorship of the various elements that constitute the overall program. As will be argued, the reason for such confusion does not lie in the nuanced skills of connoisseurs in identifying and differentiating the unique characteristics of each artist, but instead a misunderstanding of the goals of the group in general. Benati, for instance, notes that in these early Bolognese cycles the Carracci attempted to suppress individuality to ensure a uniform style and viewing experience (Benati, 2000). The very interest in identifying authorship is at odds with the new approach taken by the Carracci.

3. Issues of Renaissance Authorship

The emphasis on the attribution of works of art to a sole author was only recently reestablished by the time of the Carracci. Throughout most of the Middle Ages, the identification of the artists responsible for sculptures, icons, mosaics, and other sumptuary arts was not a priority, nor even considered important for their understanding and efficacy (Ross, 2003). The same has been noted of literature by Michele Foucault, who famously asserted that our civilization evolved to ensure a stake in the role an “author” played, and that prior to around 1600 texts we would consider “literary” (narratives, stories, epics, tragedies, comedies) were accepted, put into circulation, and valorized without any question about the identity of their author” (Foucault, 1977). It was, he points out, only around the time of the Carracci that texts came to acquire and require attribution to an author; the same time that we have the early efforts to elevate individual creative “genius” and redefine the role of the artist by Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472), Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), Bernardino Pino (ca.1520-1601), Giorgio Vasari, and others finding broader acceptance in the academic community (Alberti, 1966; Ghiberti, 1947; Pino, 1582; Vasari, 1881).

With the growing number of treatments by artist-biographers, critics, and theorists in the late Renaissance, the complexity of attribution vis-à-vis the discursive intellectual and institutional environments complicated constructing a uniform narrative for the works and their authors in question. Knapp argues, for instance, that the single author is easier for an audience to understand and critics to discuss, but does not reflect actual practice. When considering multiple authors/artists, he writes that the dominant model “overlooks the ways in which co-authorship was actually conceived during the period. And what the surviving record shows is that Renaissance writers found single authorship far easier to conceptualize” (Knapp, 2005). As such, the attribution of the painting of the Sistine Chapel to Michelangelo (1475-1564) was both easier to frame for Vasari within his narrative of Florentine artistic hegemony and comprehensible for readers and viewers alike (Vasari, 1881). The rhetorical strategies that Vasari adopted necessarily downplayed the significant contributions of collaboration within the workshop environment, which reveal the investments and stakes of the author function.

3.1. The Poststructuralist Challenge

A full investigation and critique of the mechanisms and motivations behind the author function and conceptualization of single authorship would, however, only be carried out in the late twentieth century through poststructuralist discourse. The “Romantic concept of the isolated, originary author-rather than just to the author’s imputed intentionality” would be enabled through the work of Barthes and Foucault, Hirschfeld notes. Through their criticism and deconstructive methodologies, a “recategorization of the singular, autonomous author as a discursive formation embedded in particular historical conditions and discipli-

nary needs” comes into focus. Consequently, a reconsideration of the “purposes and agencies” of these early modern examples is now possible and will allow us to “clarify investments and stakes in the ‘author function.’” The status of the sole, originary artist is no longer an historical given, but instead is contingent upon the “constructs and institutions whose changing shapes represent responses to particular social, cultural, and economic pressures” (Hirschfeld, 2001).

The early modern author/artist can then be understood as a construct resulting from intellectual and cultural context. In order to better understand the attributional complexities of art in the era, and the dynamic interplay of idea and execution, the motivations and influence of collaboration need be addressed. As Hirschfeld argues, studies need:

... locate influence at the level of practice, looking not so much at intellectual environments as at discursive, ideological, or institutional ones; they locate agency at the level of the group, looking not so much at the personality-driven behavior of single writers as at the sociological, historical, or political basis for the interaction for a number of them (Hirschfeld, 2001).

In the Foucauldian sense, “meaning” thus can be understood not through an investigation of one creative individual, but from the interactions and engagement with others within a specific historical context. An investigation into the nature of this collaborative engagement, both discursive and fabricative, will in turn lead to a more nuanced interpretative schema for art of the period. However, the visual arts have yet to adopt such strategies to address how collaboration is manifested, especially in the conceptual process.

3.2. Collaboration Studies in Literature and Theatre

An area that has received more attention relating to early modern collaboration are treatments of the history of literature and theater. Recent scholarship has witnessed increased interest in the nature of “collaboration,” expanding the manner in which the term might be applied in a range of interactions between writers, patrons, and readers in shaping the meaning of a text. Masten asserts that collaboration was the main product of Renaissance English theater. Orgel reiterates the belief in his commentary on Renaissance authorship, maintaining that “most literature in the period, and virtually all theatrical literature, must be seen as basically collaborative in nature” (Orgel, 2002). As in Italy around the same time, however, the understanding of multiple authors working cooperatively gave way to the single author. The shift from a “paradigm of collaboration” in criticism to “one of singular authorship” was not also seen in practice (Masten, 1997). In his treatment of English theater, Knapp has discussed the polemical understanding of collaborative authorship and argues instead that: “This oscillation between general and restricted senses of authorship- authorship and dramatic authorship, authorship and modern authorship, authorship and published authorship, authorship and prestigious authorship- is characteristic of the dominant modes of interpretation” (Knapp, 2005). In other words, the shift was

not a change in practice of authors, but one of how their work was interpreted. His argument rests on the assumption that authors had less control over how plays were enacted than the theater companies had. The fact that the companies had more control over the interpretation of the original written play than the original author reflects “an anachronistic emphasis on the author” in tracing the authority of playtexts back to authors (Orgel, 2002).

The reason for the shift in attribution in the field of literature and theater studies can be ascribed to the field itself. The recent attention in literary studies paid to collaboration, or the work of several contributors to the same piece of writing or text, coincides with a reconsideration of earlier scholarly practices. Hirschfeld admits that collaborative texts were considered “a critical and editorial embarrassment” in the early twentieth century by New Bibliographers who were primarily interested in identifying who wrote specific sections of literature. As a result, “a commitment to, or a faith in the value of, the procedure of dividing, labeling, and identifying individual contributors as a good in and of itself” resulted in a devaluing of collaborative studies (Hirschfeld, 2001). A recognition of the value of works with multiple contributors, and that their investigation will lead to a more accurate interpretation of their meaning, has driven recent treatments; for as Werstine chides, “[H]ow very tenuous may be methods of attribution that fail to take into account the many layers of managerial, scribal and compositional intermediaries that probably lie between authorial manuscript and [a] Quarto print” (Frey, 1989). Hence, meaning is not found in the intentionality of one author, but in the complex contributions of multiple intermediaries and the historical context. Therefore, the study of collaborative activity can be used as a way in which to critique dominant notions of authorship, while also being applicable to artists who worked collaboratively.

3.3. Collaboration Studies and Art

As noted, investigations into the emergence of the author function as applied to sole artists in the early modern era are a contemporary phenomenon. Questioning the contributions of artists whose works are labeled as “workshop,” the nature of their valuation, and related efforts can be seen to parallel the efforts of literary scholars, who also sought to overturn the assumptions of the New Bibliographers. At the same time, a reconsideration of premodernist and postmodernist practices is occurring. For instance, Gude outlines the postmodernist and poststructuralist understanding of “An Aesthetics of Collaboration,” the process adopted to create truly “collaborative” artworks, and the description bears an uncanny resemblance to the Carracci defense of anonymity. She explains that in working by “consensus”:

... an idea or image is not accepted unless everyone in the group agrees. When differences occur, the aim is to avoid creating fixed, opposing positions and to look for ways to harmonize and reconcile oppositions. It is our belief that this way of working creates high-quality decisions. One often hears that ‘art by

committee' will result in bland, impoverished work. This may be true of art by committee, but it is certainly not true of 'art by consensus,' which in our experience promotes work that is rich and varied and accessible at many levels (Gude, 1989).

The process outlined by Gude, and the working method of this late twentieth-century collective, is presented as challenging the modernist construct of the singular, often male, “genius” toiling alone in the studio and creating singular works imbued with intentional meaning. Yet, the same challenge was taken up by the Carracci in questioning the medieval workshop tradition of suppressing individual characteristics to adopt that of a singular master. In a further elaboration of their working method, Gude outlines the very theory and practice of the Carracci four centuries earlier: “One of the most prominent characteristics of an aesthetic of collaboration is the weaving of diverse images into a unified whole. The goal is not the subordination of the individual, but the harmonizing of alternative visions” (Gude, 1989). The approach can be differentiated from the Renaissance apprenticeship model and illustrates how Foucault’s “authorless discourse” can be applied to art of the early modern era. In a poststructuralist reconsideration of the Carracci program in the Palazzo Magani, a more accurate evaluation of the meaning and function of the emerging style that would become the baroque is possible.

4. Production and Originality in Renaissance Art

The previous section outlined the recent challenge to the notion that there is a distinct premodern and postmodern interpretative schema when considering multiple authors. The difficulties past scholars have encountered in applying such poststructuralist methodologies to early modern artists will now be elucidated with a discussion of the notion of “originality” in the tradition that the Carracci inherited. Modern art brought with it the assumption and expectation on the part of the viewing public that artworks were the product of a single mind and produced by a single hand from start to finish. In Renaissance tradition, though, of which the Carracci were inheritors, a slew of hands would work in collaboration in a workshop (*bottegha*) to complete a project, whether that be a panel painting, bronze sculpture or expansive fresco cycle. Such artistic cooperation demanded a stringent uniformity of style to thwart the appearance of incongruity in a work, and ensure the appearance of seamless, and not a dissonance of disparate elements. As a result, art education of the Renaissance was dedicated to supporting uniformity as an end goal, Cole relates (Cole, 1983). In such a way, the apprentice was compelled to make his own style conform to that of the master of a shop; experimentation was not encouraged beyond the approved style and idiom of a master. Cennino Cennini (1360-1440) in his *Libro dell'arte* extolls artists entering apprenticeship to “submit yourself to the direction of a master for instruction as early as you can; and do not leave the master until you have to” (Cennini, 1960).

The acquisition of style through repetitive imitation in the Renaissance was

the manner in which artists learned their skill sets. Techniques fundamental to daily production were learned from other artworks and forms. Learning by way of copying was only logical, Cole claims, for “It was the way one learned, and it kept the artist in touch with the wellsprings of the past” (Cole, 1983). Therefore, originality was not paramount to the Renaissance artist, nor was it the arbiter of quality in a work; indebtedness to the past was not shunned, but proudly showcased. In fact, generations of artists pursued similar stylistic and iconographic goals. Each generation of artist did gradually change their style to adopt the expectations and norms of the day, but given the structure of apprenticeship, the modulation was slow and measured. The model persisted well into the sixteenth century when Vasari would espouse the idea that the social standing of an artist should be elevated to that of a gentleman (Vasari, 1881). While the idea was not immediately adopted outside of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, it was the colonel that would grow into a new conception of art and the artist and challenge the supremacy of the workshop tradition.

With the reevaluation of the role of the artist at the end of the Renaissance as not merely continuing the tradition of a master came a nuanced understanding of originality. At the time, Loh relates, the eclectic model of Raphael (1483-1520) became dominant and the realization that “no one master could provide the artist with a complete model of perfection” necessitated a *misto* of various masters (Loh, 2004). Gian Paolo Lomazzo (1538-1592), Marco Boschini (1613-1678), Francesco Scannelli (1616-1663), and many other theorists and critics of the period found eclecticism to be necessary for an ideal art (Lomazzo, 1590; Boschini, 1966; Scannelli, 1657). Lomazzo found the combination of the best styles was necessary to provide a solid foundation for good painting in his *Tempio* and described the perfect painting as an Adam and Eve that would see Adam drawn by Michelangelo and painted by Titian, while Eve would be designed by Raphael and colored by Correggio. Scannelli, on the other hand, explains that it is necessary to actually absorb the essence of different artists in his *Il microcosm*; and Boschini in his *Carta del navegar* assembles the great masters in the metaphor of a ship. Pellegrino Antonio Orlandi (1660-1727) would also use the term *misto* repeatedly to “explain stylistic polyphony,” as in the case of Giulio Procaccini (1574-1625) who discovered his “own, true, and natural style” through a “Raphaellesque, Correggesque, Titianesque, and Carracesque *misto*.” The same polyphony Orlandi finds in the case of the Carracci: Annibale’s style was a *misto* of “Correggesque, Parmigianesque, and Titianesque” characteristics; Ludovico would also append to his knowledge of the old masters (Renaissance artists) his own “Lombard *misto*” (Orlandi, 1704).

The literary precedent, which provided the model for the visual arts, was well-traveled by the end of the Renaissance and was repeated as a matter of course when expounding on best practices. Giambattista Giraldo Cinzio (1504-1573) writing in 1554, for instance, points to Virgil’s “rule of judgment” as a way to combine disparate elements and create something superior (Cinzio, 1554). Virgil provided a model as he would gather together the best examples of

poetry, so should artists gather together the greatest beauties in nature. The Zeuxinian metaphor had been related through Pliny and Cicero, and Vasari would again pick it up when discussing Raphael (Pliny the Elder, 1991; Cicero, 1952; Vasari, 1881). Furthermore, premodernist discourse was surprisingly sensitive to issues of authorial responsibilities, including that of the author/reader, artist/viewer, master/apprentice, originator/copyist. There was a clear understanding of the nuanced response to the nature of the intended message of an artwork's creator. In describing Padovanino's (1588-1649) Bacchanals, for instance, that make clear reference to earlier Venetian painters like Tintoretto (1518-1594) and Titian (1490-1576), Boschini did state outright that they were copies: "There are the copies in Venice of an admirable style and of elevated and celebrated virtue." The Venetian theorist does not denigrate the author of these works, copyist though he might be, nor does he use the term "copyist" for the artist. Instead he states they are "by the perfect and dignified hand of the Vice-Author (as he is called)" (Boschini, 1966). Loh notes that the admittance of the artist's role in the process as an "identifiable stylistic masquerading" demonstrates a more nuanced of the role of the author in the creative process and the evaluation of said output (Loh, 2004).

Furthermore, critics could distinguish multiple referenced hands in one work as selective imitation was expected in the creative process. The approach of referencing multiple artists was especially prevalent in the works of Carracci pupils. Malvasia, in writing on Guido Reni's (1575-1642) style, related that he painted a girl in "the taste of Raphael," an older woman in the "taste of Correggio," a shepherd in the "taste of Titian," and a nude in the "taste of Michelangelo" in the same fresco at S. Michele al Bosco (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale 2000). Although taste (*gusto*) could relate to personal style, often mixture (*misto*) was used to refer to a combination of different elements from various painters. Francesco Albani (1578-1660) wrote in a letter to the biographer Bellori of his master Annibale Carracci that he had successfully "combined into one style" the art of Titian, Correggio, Raphael, and Michelangelo, producing a perfect *misto* that accommodated the best quality of each artist (Bellori, 2005). This was, of course, referencing Annibale's mature style retrospectively. How was he able to arrive at such a seemingly balanced "mixture"? Important for the discussion here, Annibale began his career, as the other Carracci, repressing his individual stylistic characteristics, then developed his own eclectic *misto* and, in turn, trained students in the same manner. Through this development, we see so much diversity springing from a school that sought balance in the selection of ideal models to achieve harmony. This is only possible by repressing one's authorial role in the creative process, hence the seminal role played by the early Bolognese cycles as necessary for baroque art to be born.

5. *Il Tutto d'Invenzione: The Carracci Process*

It is appropriate that studies of the so-called "baroque" era begin with the new

eclectic approach of the Carracci. Bringing together artistic, literary, and poetic theory, the approach adopted by the Carracci was a product of the intellectual milieu of the late sixteenth century. Speaking of originality of the period, theorist Secondo Lancellotti (1583-1643) related how: “There are many books in one book, and many authors speak through the mouth of one author.” The pleasure derived from this realization, Lancellotti tells us, according to Aristotle, is felt with “great delight when we see two equal forces (or two forces between whom we are unable to detect too much difference) come together” (Lancellotti, 1627). Along with theories of early modern intertextuality, these well-traveled notions of weaving different sources together would provide a framework for the Carracci’s viewers, but later authors could not reconcile the approach with new expectations in the emerging “baroque” style. As Benati notes, “The reevaluation in a naturalistic ‘key’ of the Carracci and their beginnings dates substantially from our century and supports the previous interpretations of their art in the classical, eclectic, or academic ‘key’” (Benati, 2000). The place of the Carracci in relation to one another in recent studies, Dempsey and Cropper argue, is a reflection of the importance of engaging in the struggle for their place in early modern art history (Cropper & Dempsey, 1987). Lack of an understanding of their collaborative approach to art has resulted in much attention paid to the attributional problems relating to the Carracci.

Issues relating to attribution have long since eclipsed the novelty of the Carraccesque model and have devolved into questions of connoisseurship. Outlined by De Gazia, Carracci studies in general can be divided into five categories: “questions of the artists’ early training, artistic purpose, intellectual capacities, and the truthfulness of their primary biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia; contextual studies of the Carracci and their period, region, and patrons; iconographical interpretations relating to Carracci commissions but mainly to the Farnese Gallery, and the search for the Gallery’s programmatic advisor; chronological investigations of both the early and the late work; and finally, questions of attribution.” These studies trace four decades of scholarship since the 1956 exhibition of the Carracci in Bologna. This “attributional havoc” has its roots in the author function and attempting to divine authentic works by individual members (De Grazia, 1998). Upon reviewing several thousand drawings attributed to the Carracci and their School, Feigenbaum would note of the process: “Like most people who have studied these drawings, I approached them with certain expectations of how I would behave: how I would separate the authentic from the copy; how I would distinguish one Carracci’s draftsmanship from another’s ...” (Feigenbaum, 1990). As so often happens with attributions, Feigenbaum and other scholars have scoured the extensive production of these artists looking for those that are “autograph” instead of questioning why such difficulty exists in attributions to begin with. In point of fact, the Carracci espoused a method of eclectic appropriation that would frustrate individual attribution to any one of them, which was the point.

Still the process of combining disparate beauty has often been misinterpreted by the term “eclecticism” (Mahon, 1953). Where Tasso had extolled the virtuous approach “by considering the good in various particular goodnesses, we form the idea of the good,” Agucchi also relates the necessity of selecting from particulars and examples that exist in nature (though they be only the best examples) (Tasso, 1973; Agucchi, 1646). However, the process discussed by Tasso and Agucchi, and practiced by the Carracci, was not merely a formal appropriation of certain qualities inherent in individual works that were taken as exemplars. As Agucchi makes quite clear, it is also the theoretical combination of different approaches taken from varying sources and disciplines. It was with such an understanding that he had noted Annibale’s intent: “upon first arriving in Rome he proposed to join together the exquisiteness of *Disegno* of the Roman School with the charm of color of the Lombard” (Agucchi, 1646). The division of the schools into Roman, Venetian and Lombard by Agucchi relates to their assumed stylistic characteristics and theoretical approaches: the *Scuola Romana* was represented by Raphael and Michelangelo, who “followed the beauty of statues” and antiquity in their works and favored *disegno*; *i Pittori Vinitiani* was headed by Titian and were known for their imitation of *la bellezza della natura*; and finally, *il primo de’ Lombardi* was Correggio, who was known for his sweet and facile manner. Throughout the Preface the author relates that the Bolognese works of Annibale and the other Carracci had absorbed the approaches of the Venetian and Lombard schools, and especially the work of Correggio and Titian (Agucchi, 1646). The Roman sojourn completed the theoretical models required to create a perfect, universal style by introducing the central Italian notion of *disegno*.

The integration of multiple models relates to the belief in art, as in rhetoric and poetry, that the imitation of only one will result in an imperfect style. Vasari had noted the failure of artists of his own generation to copy the art of Michelangelo, and set forth the importance of imitating more than a single model (Vasari, 1881). As well, Lucio Faberio noted that artists such as Giulio Romano had “fell short of the goal they had set themselves” in their imitation of Raphael (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale 2000). The criticism can be understood as ironic for Vasari had discussed Raphael’s method of taking from many artists to create a new personal style: “and mixing this style with some other details chosen from the best works of other masters, he created a single style out of many that was later always considered his own, for which he was and always will be endlessly admired by artisans” (Vasari, 1881). Therefore, in copying from an artist who arrived at his style through eclectic appropriation, Romano was illustrating his ignorance and denial of that very process. On the other hand, Faberio wrote that in the case of the Carracci, the group aimed to select from the “perfections” found in several artists, which would subsequently be harmonized. Specifically, Annibale would combine the “boldness” of Michelangelo, “softness and delicacy” of titian, “grace” of Raphael, and, finally, the “loveliness” of Correggio. (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale 2000).

The reductive process that Faberio notes of the Carracci does not merely attempt to take the overt characteristics of style from other great masters, but instead “digests” the models; and in the process of breaking them down and recombining them in a new fashion, a truer understanding of the process of capturing beauty is arrived at. Malvasia continues that the Carracci were the progenitors of this process and technique in the era following the Renaissance. As Ludovico explains to Annibale in his biography: “to imitate a single master is to make oneself his follower and his inferior, while to draw from all of them and also select things from other painters is to make oneself their judge and leader” (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale 2000). The Bolognese artists would even be praised by those outside of their city later in the century by both Bellori and de Piles, who found in Annibale a harmonious combination of the “virtues of previous masters” (Bellori, 1672; de Piles, 1673).

While the Tassian model applied to the arts was widely accepted, it was not without its detractors. The question remained with regards to eclectic imitation as to its efficacy and valuation of the product. Not all critics espoused or accepted the eclectic model of appropriation. Scannelli, though admitting artists must internalize the great masters, questions the effectiveness of Lomazzo’s *Adam and Eve* construct. In his recasting of the process, Scannelli believes Titian would attempt to correct Michelangelo’s drawing, and Michelangelo, being as obstreperous as he was, would not allow it (Scannelli, 1657). The dangers were clear: if improperly handled, Zeuxinian combinations of disparate elements could turn out monstrous, such as the grotesque Horatian monstrosities like a human with a horse head or woman with a fish’s body. So why do we not find such an evaluation of the early Carracci collaborative works- with so many hands engaged in the same project that were equal in stature, and not mere assistants or journeymen, how did conflict not create such grotesqueries? Although not addressing the specific question of multiple hands collaborating, Loh provides some insight as there was in the period “an acute consciousness of a copresence of different identities within one entity” (Loh, 2004). It is, in other words, understood that many styles, ideas, egos, and considerations would coexist in any project, especially the most complex variety- fresco programs. Such poststructuralist notions of intertextuality/interpictoriality, though known to the premodernist audience, would not have been framed as such. In terms of the era, Matteo Peregrini (1595-1652) discusses the same notion in an interpretative optic that is able to identify successfully a “certain shadow” as *Amfibolia*: the ability to see a *senso doppio* (“double sense”) (Peregrini, 1639). As Loh relates of early modern viewer’s abilities: “Baroque spectators were open to the type of aesthetic experiences based on sharp, associative, lateral thinking, which looked for shadows of the father in the son, which engaged with the ‘double sense,’ which embraced the metaphor and the double entendre, and which looked for the intertext and engaged with intentional play” (Loh, 2004). Hence the audience for works such as those to be discussed was aware of the dangers inherent with imbalanced and unselective appropriation from disparate sources and able to care-

fully distinguish how those were applied to create new meaning through inter-pictoriality. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on eclecticism and the audience's own preexisting knowledge of pictorial prototypes as a prerequisite for viewing highly complicate the traditional model of the author. Instead, the poststructuralist questioning of stable, imbued meaning by a singular author is a given. The crucible of such a departure can be found in the frescoes carried out by the group in the 1580s and 1590s, especially that of the Palazzo Magnani. The planning and execution of the works offer a case study for the critical attributional confusion that resulted from the new approach and will offer support for a poststructuralist reading.

6. Discussion: Palazzo Magnani

The fresco cycle in the Palazzo Magnani stands as one of the most significant formative works leading to the creation of the new baroque style and working process. Mahon referred to the frieze commissioned by Lorenzo Magnani upon his nomination as member of the Bolognese Senate by Pope Sixtus V in May 1590 as “the Adam and Eve of Baroque decoration” (Mahon, 1953). As a crucible for this new authorless model, the question of who was responsible for the design of the program (*il tutto d'invenzione*) plagued even proponents of the Carracci and their eclectic-collaborative processes. Though not as well-known today, Malvasia notes that the frieze became so famous that there was “not a foreigner or dilettante who passed through Bologna who did not beg the favor of visiting the room in the Magnani palace.” To illustrate his point, Malvasia reprints a letter from Rinaldi to Magnani himself: “Among the most remarkable things in our city, the palace of Your Lordship deserves to be noted for many reasons, especially for the paintings of the three famous Carracci” (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale 2000). The fourteen *quadri riportati* panels illustrating the Founding of Rome are separated by caryatids painted in grisaille as marble statues as part of a multi-layered decorative system. More commonly the *History of Rome* by Livy is cited as the source for the Foundation scenes here; however, Brown pointed out that Plutarch's *Life of Romulus* more closely aligns with the iconography chosen by the Carracci (Brown, 1967).

While both themes have been argued, the imagery would be closely tied to the patron himself. Rubenstein was the first to write a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship between the works in the Palazzo and their patron. The decoration, she argues, can be described as an *impresa*, defined by Paolo Giovio, and refer to the idealized history and status of Lorenzo Magnani (Rubenstein, 1979; Giovio, 1557). In addition, Rubenstein argues that the Carracci would have been influenced by the ideas of Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597) when adopting profane subject matter for the decoration. The influence of Paleotti has been underestimated even though his treatment of profane images is highlighted in the very title of his treatise, while the sources cited by the author throughout are both classical and Christian. Subject matter that is considered profane,

moreover, must conform to general principles Paleotti set forth of *necessità, utilità, dilettazone*, or *virtù*. In retelling ancient history, Paleotti delineates the appropriate subjects in distinguishing between transient events and those whose impact was more permanent in nature. Consequently, only *le cose permanenti* are to be used as subjects for artistic representation. The very example Paleotti cites is that of the She-Wolf licking Romulus and Remus, quoting from Aeneas (Paleotti, 1961). Furthermore palatial decoration that is profane in subject matter must, for Paleotti, be didactic and understood as “factual and historical rather than mythological” (Rubenstein, 1979). If the characters of Hercules and Romulus could be presented as historical personalities, then they would offer appropriate parallels in the family history of the Magnani family and in accordance with propriety established by Paleotti.

The historical nature of the cycle also represents the new goals of the Carracci and confirm the role of the patron. Boschloo notes that the entire decorative scheme is an elaboration on the scheme used in the *Jason* program in the Palazzo Fava earlier in the 1580s, though more complex and larger. The ratio of height to width, Rubenstein points out, grew from 2:3 to 5:6 in the Palazzo Magnani (Rubenstein, 1979). Boschloo suggests that this shift in size related to the goals of the programs, moving from *pittore poeta* to *pittore storioco*. The new size and goal of the cycle would allow the history painters more scope to develop credible narrative sequences, in this case the founding of Rome. Boschloo suggests that it was Lorenzo Magnani himself who took the initiative following the ideas of Paleotti, who stated mythological scenes (such as those in the Palazzo Fava) should be replaced by historical certainty or probability (Boschloo, 1974). Given that the commission itself relates to the nomination by the Pope, who was an heir to Romulus, the “Roman” subject matter seems natural (Gardi, 1994).

In these early Bolognese cycles the Carracci attempted to suppress individuality to ensure a uniform style and viewing experience, Benati argues (Benati, 2000). The Palazzo Magnani in particular, Feigenbaum points out, offers a case study for Carracci in that over a dozen scholars have since attempted to differentiate which member was responsible for what in the frescoes. Yet, no two have come to the same conclusions, and none have agreed with Malvasia, who in his own attributions for the cycle gave up halfway through the fourteen scenes (Feigenbaum, 1990; Malvasia, 1676). The confusion derives from the uniformity of style demanded by the patron himself, but also the new Carracci approach. Benati relates that the frescoes attest to the “corporate mentality” of the group that sought to eliminate their competition in Bologna. The new working process both rejected the workshop practices at the time where one artist took credit for the work of others and allowed them to articulate a common stylistic approach (Benati, 2000). The rejection of past workshop practices and emphasis now placed on cooperative or joint ventures instead of one member forcing the others to conform to his style left even the artists own biographers at a loss when at-

tempting to distinguish their various contributions.

The most extensive treatment of the Carracci comes by way of their Bolognese biographer Malvasia, who compiled his information based on letters, documents, and firsthand accounts of their pupils. Difficulty in distinguishing the three from one another was readily acknowledged by Malvasia, especially in their early collaborative efforts. The Carracci themselves enjoyed the confusion: “Besides, it is well known how much the Carracci themselves sometimes deliberately fostered this confusion, and how much they relished the uncertainty it caused, agreeing to confound any attempts to identify their pictures, in order to maintain their solidarity, which, despite the nobility and harmoniousness the Carracci displayed in their rivalry, the varied and divided loyalties within their school tried to break and divide.” And when asked who was responsible for what in the Magnani program, “nothing could be got out of them but the words, ‘It’s by the Carracci: we all of us made it’” (Malvasia, 1676).

The contemporary biographers initially agreed on equal attribution in their treatments. Bellori, for instance, would have difficulty attributing specific parts of the frieze to any one of the Carracci. As in his descriptions of other fresco cycles, Bellori walks the reader through an ekphrastic description of each one of the scenes, but, unlike Malvasia who attempted attribution of half of the cycle, does not identify the author of each. Instead he follows the stories with praise, and states that all members were equally admired, “with *no preeminence recognized among them* [my italics]; for their style and their studies were so compatible that, there being no variance, each of them presented the very same image and the same traits of talent” (Bellori, 2005). The sentiment that there was no one artist who stood out above the rest in their style would be echoed in Malvasia’s recounting of the group and their egalitarian pronouncement that all three were responsible for the work. However, the author function resists this evaluation since for Bellori, Annibale was the inheritor of Raphael and the hero of his Lives. Thus Bellori follows the statement with a clear elevation of Annibale above the rest in the role he played within the group. Annibale is considered the “originator and example to his brothers, who depended upon his guidance and teachings” (Bellori, 2005).

Malvasia quickly countered in his biographies of the Carracci that Ludovico, the only one to remain in Bologna, had, in fact, the greatest influence on the designs and academy as the eldest. Following a discussion of attribution where “all three painters had an equal hand,” Malvasia writes that the collaborative working method was, in fact, the result of Ludovico’s guidance: “for they all delighted in crossing over and intruding into one another’s spaces in the frieze, with one entering a section started by another, and another in turn passing on to yet another one’s half-completed section, and in working together on the additional ornaments of little putti, satyrs, and terms, their chief concern being to leave everyone else confused, so that the prize of excellence would not be divided and praise instead directed at the whole work as one body, not aimed at recognizing

the particular painter” (Malvasia, 1676; Summerscale, 2000). The understanding of the unhierarchical aim of the Carracci is clearly expressed by Malvasia for both their academy and seen clearly in the suppression of individual stylistic characteristics in the Magnani frescoes. Nevertheless, the biographer then bows to tradition and identifies the authors of the first eight in the cycle of fourteen, and recounts the reactions to each by different critics.

The critical resistance to an authorless discourse still evades Carracci scholars as attributional concerns dominate, especially in their preparatory studies for these fresco cycles. Most of the preparatory studies that survive before 1590, Sutherland Harris notes, are connected to the Magnani and Fava projects (Sutherland Harris, 2000). As these were collaborative efforts, distinguishing even their preparatory studies in the 1580s and 1590s is difficult. Given that their process followed the traditional steps of preparation for *buon fresco*, and Malvasia confirms that they would exchange drawings at various stages, their efforts at attributional obfuscation were successful. The process would begin with a rapid sketch of the whole composition and then move onto individual figures. These would be incorporated into a small cartoon (*modello*) that would be presented for the patron’s approval. Only then would the group move on to the full-scale cartoon to be transferred to the wall. As Benati relates, “They all usually worked in a spirit of true collaboration and with a striking convergence of styles ... it cannot be excluded that the Carracci all worked on the same panels and exchanged drawings” (Benati, 2000). Not surprisingly, the criteria used by connoisseurs to arrive at distinctions between the Carracci seem arbitrary.

Only a few drawings actually survive from the Magnani project in Bologna. Among them are two preliminary sketches for the scene of the *She-Wolf Nursing Romulus and Remus*, variously attributed to Annibale and Ludovico. Summarizing the conclusions drawn from these sheets in attributing the hands involved in the fresco, Feigenbaum questions their relevance. Being able to identify that Annibale painted the landscape of a fresco and Ludovico the wolf, and so on, does not take into account that the whole program is seamless in design and execution and thus irrelevant (Feigenbaum, 1990). In other words, the whole process of applying the author function is counterproductive in this instance. One cannot attribute authorship to one and gain a greater understanding of the work without destroying the assumptions that are drawn from a previous attribution to another of the Carracci. Postmodernist criticism is ill-equipped to accommodate an interpretation that involves multiple authors.

Further complicating the issue is the fact that the collaborative processes of the group likely extended beyond these large-scale projects, requiring the participation of many assistants and hands over a many months. Feigenbaum argues that even in their individual works the Carracci collaborated. While recent scholarship finds the notion “unfashionable,” many critics from Malvasia to Longhi were convinced that the Carracci worked together on easel paintings (Malvasia, 1676). Feigenbaum gives as an example the *St. Sebastian* by Ludovico

and points to a drawing in the Uffizi of a preparatory study related to the composition. She admits that the drawing could have been a modified style used by Ludovico for his own work, but the possibility must also be entertained that given the stylistic associations with Annibale that the group made studies for each other's easel paintings, as well. She writes, "I have cataloged thirteen collaborative projects undertaken before Annibale and Agostino left for Rome. And there is other evidence to suggest that the collaborative attitude may have extended to individual works as well." To illustrate this point, Feigenbaum points to a series of compositional sketches made by Ludovico for works he did not paint, but were painted by his cousins, around the same time the drawings were made. "According to Malvasia, Annibale and Agostino often turned to Lodovico for inspiration, 'il più copioso e ferace in invenzione,' for he was able to find twenty ways to vary one idea" (Feigenbaum, 1990). Therefore, the cycle of the Carracci was the starting point for the challenging of the notion of originality and authorship in the early modern era. Collaboration was central to their working process, and was also necessitated by their working process that would be passed to their pupils.

The efforts and frustrations of scholars to differentiate the work of the Carracci speak to the indivisible nature of their enterprise and the challenging of traditional workshop processes. The intimacy of their collaboration speaks to the goal of the group to have an authorless collaboration. Working in tandem, the Carracci subordinated their individual stylistic characteristics to a unified goal, while their method of production and working by consensus at every stage ensured that the collective would subsume the personal. In these formative cycles the three artists developed in response to one another's work, and to the changing goals of the programs relating to collective undertaking. Their individual talents were seen to be complementary by their biographers, and through the lively interaction of the three that would produce a new approach and process for painting that would be carried into the next century by their pupils. If we can imagine the artists working in isolation, the works that they produced would not have been possible, nor the collaborative engagement that provided a model. As the artists themselves noted, their work was intended to be received and praised as a collaboration. Not surprisingly, we are no closer to a consensus on attribution of these fresco cycles than were Bellori and Malvasia, and that is by design. But even if we were able to separate out each artist's hand, would that actually lead to a more meaningfully interpretation of the series? According to the Carracci, no; individual attribution is contrary to the goal toward which they worked.

7. Conclusion

The previous methodologies applied to early modern art do not take into account the contemporary creative strategies employed by artists. The authorial role given to a workshop master overseeing pupils is at odds with the realities of

collaborative engagement on projects in the era. In the case of the Carracci, the poststructuralist approach in questioning the stable meaning imbued by one individual is more relevant than the modernist construct of the lone “genius.” The disagreement among scholars regarding the attribution and meaning of the fresco cycle in the Palazzo Magnani reveals the limits of the Author Function applied to the era as a case study. In order to better understand this work, and those of the Carracci pupils who would dominate the Roman art world in the following century, the poststructuralist discourse on collaboration must be embraced. While common in the literary and performing arts studies, where an “authorless” discourse is more readily adopted given the perceived working method of each medium, such an approach has not found broad acceptance in premodern studies of the visual arts. In using a more appropriate methodology for the field, the distinction between pre- and postmodern interpretative scheme can be eliminated.

Moreover, the same period that valued originality as it relates to repetition would provide the aesthetic framework for artists to work collaboratively and morph their own style to collect the beauty of another. In other words, the same early baroque theory and resultant practice that demanded the eclectic assembly of diverse beauties would consequently provide the environment for the Carracci to repress their individuality to allow their collective talents to form a new mixture or *misto*. The very understanding of pastiche in postmodernist discourse is not so distant from the early modern era, nor the process of the Carracci. The same elements employed by postmodern artists, including seriality, repetition, appropriation, and intertextuality were already understood in a different framework by premodernist artists, critics, and their viewing audiences. Furthermore, the distinction in pedagogical and intellectual approaches from the workshops of the Renaissance can be seen in the diversity of styles practiced by their pupils, illustrating that the single, authorial voice was transformed into a new synergetic one. Difficulties in attribution arose at the same time as the author function began to be employed in early modern discourse on art and literature. The new collaborative processes were at odds with the hegemonic role of the “author” and thus continued to frustrate critical treatments of these artists. The early modern author/artist can then be understood as a construct resulting from intellectual and cultural context. In order to better understand the attributional complexities of art in the era, and the dynamic interplay of idea and execution, the motivations and influence of collaboration need be addressed.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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